Highly qualified middle school teachers are so much more than certified degree holders who know quite a bit about the subjects they teach. Understanding the unique developmental stage of early adolescence, being able to motivate students, respecting their backgrounds, and being inquisitive about the subject matter one teaches are several of the characteristics that define highly qualified middle school teachers. Excellence in teaching represents a step beyond high qualification. To maintain high qualification and reach for excellence is a never-ending journey.

This issue of the Middle School Journal describes the vision; fundamental knowledge; discipline; passion; spirit of inquiry; personal drive to be the best; and caring for, yea even love of, young adolescents that characterize the journey from being a raw recruit contemplating a career in teaching to being revered by your students and their parents to being publicly recognized for excellence.

Each of the articles in this issue demonstrates how a teacher or a group of teachers has perceived a problematic situation, studied how it could be addressed, and proceeded to make a change that mattered for themselves and for their students.

The first step in the process of creating a cadre of excellent middle school teachers is recruiting the next generation to middle grades teaching. Kristine Reed (pp. 25–33) provides insight into addressing the critical shortage of Native American teachers—a variation on the broader issue of minority representation in the teaching profession.

The virtues and limits of preservice teacher education programs attempting to provide adequate initial training for becoming a teacher are documented by Terry de Jong and Rod Chadbourne (pp. 10–18). In this era of shortages—shortages of teachers with ethnically diverse backgrounds, shortages of teachers in specialty areas, shortages of teachers in some geographic regions, shortages of teachers who seek urban middle grades assignments—alternative paths to becoming teachers are being tried to varying degrees of success. Bobby Jeanpierre and Nancy Lewis (pp. 19–24) document a successful transition into urban middle grades science and math teaching.

Being recruited, being educated, and obtaining that first teaching assignment are just the beginning of becoming highly qualified, let alone excellent. The professional growth and development of middle school teachers continues for the life of a career. In these pages are four stories of individual teachers and communities of teachers encountering dilemmas in their teaching and inquiring into those dilemmas to seek solutions that made a difference. After Denise Muth, Nicholas Polizzi, and Shawn Glynn (pp. 4–9), and later Deborah Yost and Robert Vogel (pp. 34–40), detail school-wide efforts to involve teachers in professional improvement, Connie Monroe (pp. 41–43) and Lesley Roessing (pp. 44–51) discuss their personal uses of professional development to improve their teaching. The theme of this issue is complemented by Pamela Angelle’s “What Research Says” article, “Teachers as Leaders: Collaborative Leadership for Learning Communities” (pp. 54–61).

As we were preparing this issue of the Journal to celebrate middle school teaching, the entire middle school community was drawn into this celebration when a classroom teacher of 30 years received the John H. Lounsbury Award presented at the National Middle School Association Annual Conference. Allow me to quote the master teacher himself, John Lounsbury:

Barbara Brodhagen is first and foremost a teacher. Her special talents come to the forefront when she is in direct contact with learners, whether they are children, young adolescents, or adults. There is something about Barb that makes her so special, so influential. ... What sets her apart is her deep and abiding respect for the dignity of others, especially young people. Students sense this and are drawn to her. She is genuine, real, and open—no airs or pretensions. She listens, really listens, to the voices of those she invites to think with her, engaging them deeply and setting in motion real thinking.

Congratulations, Barbara, and to all of you who are striving daily to aspire to the high standards for middle grades teaching excellence set by Barb Brodhagen.
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Using Real Middle School Dilemmas for Case-Based Professional Development

This We Believe Characteristics

• Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
• Courageous, collaborative leadership
• A shared vision that guides decisions
• An inviting, supportive, and safe environment
• High expectations for all members of the learning community
• Students and teachers engaged in active learning

By K. Denise Muth, Nicholas C. Polizzi, & Shawn M. Glynn

Jen just read to the class a short essay she had written for homework, but as she was reading, I realized that the words that were coming out of her mouth were not her own. I’d been teaching middle grades social studies for five years in an affluent county just outside of Washington, D.C.; the school system is one of the largest in the nation with more than 150,000 students, 234 schools, 20,000 employees, and an annual operating budget of more than $1.5 billion dollars. This affluence provides each classroom with the latest in teaching resources and technology; each classroom in the entire county, from kindergarten through grade 12, has computers with Internet access. The students love learning about everything from ancient history to current events; however, using information on the Internet properly requires a good sense of ethics. The case I’m going to share with you is about an incident involving plagiarism by Jen, one of my students.

The preceding paragraph is the beginning of a sample professional development case that we present later in this article. The names are pseudonyms, but the case is based on an actual incident experienced by the second author. The case begs the question: How do middle school teachers, particularly new ones, learn to cope with the dilemmas that routinely arise throughout the day? What type of professional development will best help them?

The National Middle School Association (2003) has provided a vision for reform in the area of professional development in This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents. Successful schools for young adolescents are characterized by teachers who are continually engaged in

Teachers examine a document related to the case they are studying as part of their personalized professional development.

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professional development and a culture that includes students who are engaged in active learning. Middle school teachers have been encouraged to view themselves as lifelong learners engaged in a collaborative process of improving their teaching practices and content knowledge. In response to the vision in This We Believe, we have explored a number of activities for professional growth and have found those activities associated with case discussions to be particularly useful. Our goal in this article is to describe how to use actual events, or dilemmas, for case-based discussions to facilitate the professional development of middle school teachers. We begin by describing cases and the important role they can play in the professional development of middle school teachers. Next, we discuss guidelines for using dilemmas to write cases and share them with colleagues. We end by presenting the dilemma involving plagiarism by Jen and describing how it can be used to promote professional development.

**Professional Development Cases**

A professional development case is a narrative about a significant event (e.g., a student bullying another) that leads to a dilemma and may involve teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Although relatively new to the field of education, the use of cases as a teaching strategy actually began in 1870 at Harvard Law School and, by the 1920s, became the prevailing method of legal education. The case method eventually spread to other fields such as business, medicine, engineering, and education, with each field tailoring it to its special needs. The popular television show *House* exemplifies the use of cases in the medical profession. Cases may be open-ended, describing an event that leads to an unresolved dilemma, or closed, describing an event and how the dilemma was resolved. Open-ended and closed cases can be equally effective, as long as they lead to a productive discussion.

Professional development cases usually involve dilemmas designed to stimulate shared inquiry, reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving. An extensive body of research supports the use of case discussions when learning how to solve complex problems in education (Lundeberg, Levin, & Harrington, 1999). This process of discussing cases can provide new middle school teachers with instructional, emotional, and managerial support (Scarpaci, 2007; Silverman, Welty, & Lyon, 1992; Siskind, 2000). Case discussions can benefit seasoned teachers and administrators as well, providing a means for addressing professional development.

Ideally, a case should be based on an actual event. At the same time, confidentiality and ethical considerations are paramount when considering a case. Pseudonyms should be substituted for real names, unless the names and events are public knowledge. Sample dilemmas that could be developed into excellent cases are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

**Sample Case Topics for Middle School Teachers**

1. Rachel is teaching a sixth grade science lesson when one of her students, Jimmy, screams a swear word at another student who threw some terrarium gravel at him.
2. A middle school teacher walks into an otherwise empty classroom to find an eighth grade boy and girl holding each other and kissing.
3. Martin is reviewing a mathematics test that many of his eighth-grade students did poorly on. One of the students says, “But this was unfair because you didn’t teach us some of these problems. How many people think this was unfair?” Most of the students in the class raise their hands in agreement.
4. Elena, who is teaching a seventh grade social studies lesson, doesn’t know how to respond when one of her students asks her if she thinks it’s ok for two men to be married to each other.
5. A mother whose seventh grader is having real difficulties with mathematics homework calls the teacher two or more evenings a week for advice on how to help her child. When the teacher tells the mother that several calls a week are too many, the mother then calls the principal to complain about the teacher.
6. A popular sixth grade girl accuses an unpopular girl of stealing her bracelet during a gym class. The other students tell the physical education teacher and demand that something be done about it.
7. During a team planning session, two middle school teachers argue about whether effort should be taken into account in grading students or whether the grades should be based solely on performance.
8. Recurrent bruises on a sixth grade boy leads a middle school teacher to suspect that the student may be being bullied by other students or abused at home.
9. On an Internet blog, an eighth grade student compares his social studies teacher to Adolph Hitler.
10. A Spanish language teacher’s insistence that her eighth grade students speak only Spanish during language class frustrates many of her less fluent students and leads to complaints from their parents.
11. A middle school principal receives several complaints from parents about a teacher who they believed was celebrating “Christmas” because the teacher decorated her classroom with holly wreaths and colored lights during December.
12. A middle school teacher enters the school auditorium to find two boys fighting viciously on the ground and a circle of boys around them shouting encouragement.
13. A middle school teacher tells her seventh grade students they should to be kinder to each other.
14. A middle school teacher’s coaching responsibilities make it difficult for him to spend time with a struggling student teacher who was assigned to him.
15. Darlene, a middle school student who receives special education services, often calls herself “dumb” when talking to other students. Darlene’s teacher wants to say something to Darlene about it, but isn’t sure what to say and how to say it.
Role of Cases in Middle School Professional Development

A traditional approach to middle school professional development has been to bring in outside experts to lecture and answer questions during inservice workshops. But what about the inside experts? Case discussions capitalize on the expertise of the teachers within a middle school. After all, they are the ones who know their school best and know the conditions that prevail there. Case discussions exemplify the type of work-embedded professional development that Hirsch (2004) recommended because they “make professional learning a part of every teacher’s workday” (p. 207).

Case discussions also facilitate the sharing of strategies and the middle school philosophy. In addition, case discussions are ideally suited to help teachers grapple with the complex issues that confront them daily. Middle school teachers can use case discussions to effectively prepare themselves for challenging issues related to teaching methods, curriculum design, assessment, evaluation, student motivation, student safety, and legal responsibilities. They also can use case discussions to help prepare for their students’ questions about highly controversial topics such as the origin of the universe, evolution of life, the best form of government, and constitutional rights.

The interdisciplinary team organizational structure of the middle school makes an ideal setting for sharing and discussing cases. Additionally, cases are an excellent example of the type of professional development that Brown (2001) advocated for “eliminating team isolation, loss of objectivity, and competition” among middle school teachers (p. 65).

Posing Dilemmas: Writing and Sharing Cases

Middle school teachers and administrators who wish to pose a dilemma as a case usually begin by writing it up in the form of a narrative, with dialogue similar to that in a screenplay or film script. Incorporating dialogue makes the case more realistic and engaging than a simple summary of facts. Perhaps the easiest way to write a professional development case is to think of it as telling a story about a teaching dilemma that you experienced and that still puzzles you. The descriptive information you provide should include thoughts and feelings as well as actions. Figure 2 provides detailed guidelines for writing successful cases.

The cases are then presented by dramatically reading them to a small group of teachers and administrators; we have found four to eight to be a good group size. Smaller groups tend not to generate enough meaningful discussion and larger groups are often too impersonal, making some group members reluctant to speak up.

Teachers can use case discussions to help prepare for their students’ questions about highly controversial topics such as the origin of the universe, evolution of life, the best form of government, and constitutional rights.
In our experience, the presenter typically assumes the role of case facilitator—that is, he or she is responsible for ensuring that the case discussion is a valuable professional development experience for all participants. Figure 3 highlights the key responsibilities of the facilitator. Cases can be presented by other means as well, such as having different people read different dialogue parts and by acting and role-playing. Cases also can be presented by means of video and interactive software.

In summary, a good case provides a bridge between theory and practice in middle school teaching. It helps teachers to build upon their experience, to better understand important issues, and to view the issues from the perspective of each other, fostering mutual respect. A good case poses a specific dilemma that is credible, engaging, and challenging. Usually, there is more than one way to respond effectively. That is because many of the situations in which middle school teachers find themselves are ambiguous, unpredictable, and downright confusing. These situations are not unique to middle school teachers—elementary and high school teachers experience them, too, and that is why case discussions are useful for all teachers. In such situations, there may be multiple responses that are effective, and the best ones often depend upon a thorough understanding of the local conditions. The following open case exemplifies such a situation and illustrates how it can be turned into a professional development case.

A Case of Intellectual Dishonesty: Jen Plagiarizes from the Internet

My class of sixth grade social studies students was studying the Civil War and was in the middle of a unit on primary sources. The previous day, I gave the students a homework assignment to write a one-page letter from the perspective of either a Union or Confederate nurse, cook, musician, infantryman, general, or cavalryman to someone in their home state on the eve of the Battle of Antietem. The students were free to choose the letter content and recipient, so long as it was appropriate for the time and place.

That morning, I called on various students to share what they had written. While sitting at their desks, the students sequentially read aloud their short letters to their imaginary husbands, wives, and siblings. One boy even wrote to his dog, which got a lot of laughs! When it was time for Jen to share her letter, I anticipated something creative based on her past work. Jen liked to share her writing, and the class enjoyed her expressiveness.

“It’s your turn, Jen; let’s hear your letter, please.”

I noticed that Jen moved a bit in her seat, her eyes shifted away, and she looked uncomfortable.

“Do you have the assignment, Jen?” I asked. Jen usually does her homework, unless there is a good reason, like illness.

Jen lifted from her lap a spiral notebook on which a sheet of notebook paper rested. She waved the notebook and paper at me. “Yeah, it’s right here, Mr. Adams.”

“OK, great. Go ahead when you’re ready,” I replied, eager to hear her letter.

Jen paused for a moment, and let out a deep breath. “Dear Mother,” she began, “I am forever thinking of you this cloudy night, the eve of what may be the bloodiest battle yet in this horrid Civil War.” Jen continued to read her letter for the next few minutes.

The other students and I were awed by the letter that Jen had written from the point of view of a Union nurse. “My heart aches when I see those boys, poor mangled boys who have suffered so at the hands of evildoers,” she continued.

This was an outstanding letter, I thought. Vivid and heartfelt, it seemed as if Jen was actually channeling a real Union nurse’s lament to her mother back in Vermont. Even the nurse’s vocabulary and expressions were authentic to the period. But then, wait a minute, I thought. Jen was channeling a real nurse because this was a real nurse’s letter; I remembered reading an almost identical letter a few weeks before when I was preparing the primary source unit. It was on a Web site that popped up when I Googled Civil War primary sources. As Jen continued reading, I walked nonchalantly from the front of the room to my bookshelves in the back and casually sifted...
through the small mountain of papers I had collected for the primary sources unit. There it was. I pulled out the letter I had printed off of the Internet from a Smithsonian Web site on primary sources. On the printout, I saw the words, “Mother, my strength comes from the Lord, as you always taught Martha and me as children growing up by the lake...” at the same time as Jen was reading them aloud from “her” letter.

I thought of several ways to address Jen’s plagiarism, including stopping her right in the middle of her reading and questioning her in front of the entire class. However, I knew that if this was going to be a learning experience for Jen, embarrassing her in front of her peers was not the best way for me to respond. As the bell rang and the students began to file out of the room, I approached Jen and said softly, “Jen, can you wait around a moment after class, I’d like to ask you about something?”

“But, Mr. Adams, I’ll be late to P.E.,” she said. “I’ll write you a note,” I promised.

After the room had cleared out, I sat on a desk opposite Jen and asked, “Jen, where did you get the letter you wrote?”

“I wrote it last night,” she stammered. “Well, it’s almost identical to one on the Smithsonian archives Web site.” I paused, while Jen stared at me open mouthed and wide eyed.

“No I didn’t, really,” she whispered.

I felt then I had to be more direct and said, “Jen, the letters are virtually identical. You copied the letter off the Internet and then presented it as your own. That’s plagiarism.”

“But I was so busy yesterday!” Jen blurted. “We had softball tryouts, and then I had to go to my brother’s violin recital, and then I worked on my science fair project,” her voice growing louder and more panicked as she recited the litany of activities that kept her from her social studies homework. “And besides, my mom knows I got it from the Internet.”

Wow, I thought. Not only do I have to deal with Jen, but now Jen’s mom is involved. How should I proceed?

Promoting Professional Development

To promote professional development, the preceding case about Mr. Adams, Jen, Jen’s mom, and intellectual dishonesty should be presented by the facilitator following the guidelines in Figure 3. Especially critical are the key questions that the facilitator develops: They should stimulate inquiry, reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving. Examples of such questions include the following:

- What exactly was Jen at fault for here?
- What was the best time and context for Mr. Adams to talk to Jen?
- What should Mr. Adams have said to Jen?
- What should Jen have responded to Mr. Adams?
- What, if anything, should Mr. Adams say to Jen’s mother?
- What can Mr. Adams do to prevent the situation from happening again?

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**Figure 3**

**Guidelines for Case Discussion Facilitator**

1. Before presenting the case, plan several key questions to get the discussion started. Key questions should be open-ended and encourage teachers to look at the case from multiple perspectives.
2. Remind participants that a case discussion is a form of shared learning and they should be respectful of different opinions.
3. Remind participants that cases do not always have one perfect solution.
4. Ask participants to hold questions until the entire case has been read.
5. Read the case dramatically to stimulate interest but avoid passing judgment on anyone in the case.
6. Strive to build common understandings among the participants and place the case in a larger context, helping all to see the big picture.
7. Begin the discussion by asking the planned key questions and then let the discussion evolve as the participants ask their own questions and answer those posed by other participants. The participants, not the facilitator, should do most of the talking.
8. Ensure that the discussion remains positive and on-track, and that no one dominates it; if the discussion gets heated, remind participants of Guideline #2.
9. At the end of the discussion, summarize the key points emphasizing any guiding principles that participants can incorporate into their teaching.
10. Informally evaluate the case and the discussion by having participants anonymously answer a few short questions, such as “What aspects of the case and the discussion were most helpful to you?” and “How could I improve the discussion process?”
The preceding case was “open” because it did not include an account of how the dilemma was actually resolved, particularly with respect to Jen’s mother. But the same case could easily have been “closed,” if that were desirable, by including the resolution of the dilemma. Figure 4 identifies several resources for using case-based learning.

In conclusion, case discussions promote professional relationships and provide instructional, emotional, and managerial support in middle school teaching. Case discussions can help teachers take charge of their own professional development and create a community of shared inquiry within their schools. Case discussions also help overcome the sense of isolation that many middle school teachers, particularly new ones, experience. By emphasizing the sharing of mutual expertise, case discussions forge strong bonds of professional membership.

References
A Challenge for Middle Grades Teacher Education Programs to Practice What They Preach: An Australian Experience

While “Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so” is the main theme of this article, all 12 This We Believe principles are addressed in one way or another in the following piece.

By Terry de Jong & Rod Chadbourne

Over the past 15 years, Australia has seen the growth of separate middle schools for lower secondary (high) school students and, in some cases, upper primary (elementary) school students (Barratt, 1998, Luke, 2003). Western Australia (WA), in particular, is experiencing considerable expansion. For example, every new government ‘high’ school built in the state since 1995 has taken the form of a middle school for young adolescents (e.g., year 8–10 students) and a separate senior campus for young adults (e.g., year 11–12 students). District high schools (K–10) are increasingly substituting their high school section (years 8–10) with a middle school. Catholic and non-Catholic private schools are implementing similar innovations, too. On a national level, many other states are following a corresponding trend. While not yet dominant, middle schooling in Australia has become prominent. The rate and extent of its growth since 1990 has taken it beyond the status of a “passing fad.”

In response to this trend, Edith Cowan University (ECU), located in Perth, WA, introduced a one-year Graduate Diploma of Education in Middle Schooling in 2002. The vision of this diploma is to prepare employable graduates with the knowledge, skills, and values required to teach in classrooms at the frontier of middle schooling reform in Australia. Consequently, the course is fundamentally innovative and progressive. In keeping with middle schooling reforms in Australia, it embraces an outcomes-based, authentic, constructivist, student-centered, and developmentally appropriate pedagogy. Seminal works have influenced the design of the diploma course, most notably Turning Points 2000 (Jackson & Davis, 2000), the principles of best practice learning (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998), and numerous major Australian reports such as

Preservice teachers stimulate each other intellectually as they prepare to enter middle grades classrooms.

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**Teachers Working with Young Adolescents** (Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1996), *Shaping Middle Schooling in Australia: A Report of the National Middle Schooling Project* (Barratt, 1998), and *Planning for Middle Schooling in Western Australia* (Jackson, 1999).

We at Edith Cowan University are proponents of middle schooling reform in Australia and play a key role in the design, development, and delivery of ECU’s new middle grades diploma. We believe that good teaching for young adolescents demands the provision of developmentally appropriate learning experiences. The principles and practices underpinning our course include cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, authentic assessment, mixed ability student grouping, using information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool, the integration of theory and practice, higher order thinking, success for all students, participative decision making, and shared leadership (Anfara & Stacki, 2002; Doda & Thompson, 2002; Manning, 2002). Our diploma aims to achieve 12 core outcomes (Figure 1).

From the outset, we teacher educators set ourselves a challenge to model our teaching toward these 12 outcomes. This meant striving to practice what we preach by modeling middle schooling principles and practices in our teaching. It meant not only *telling* graduates about the principles of best practice associated with middle schooling, but also *showing* them what it looks like in classrooms and learning communities, as a whole. It meant establishing congruence between what our students *see us doing* in our teaching and the principles espoused by the course. It meant creating enriched and equitable learning experiences for our students in much the same way as middle grades teachers would be expected to do in their classrooms. Based on course reviews, it is evident that our endeavor over the past three years to meet this challenge has been positively received by most of our students. In the words of one of our 2004 graduates:

> It’s the approach of lecturers practicing what they are preaching, producing interesting lessons and lectures with varied approaches to tackling tasks and collaborating information, use of rubrics, introducing passionate and interesting guest speakers. ... The actual philosophy is a major strength of the course.

Our attempt to model middle schooling principles and practices in our teaching was recently recognized by the university. We received the Vice Chancellor’s 2004 Award for Excellence in Teaching in the team category. Applying for this award gave us the impetus to pursue questions we had been asking ourselves since the middle grades graduate diploma began:

- Which principles and recommended practices of middle schooling do we claim to model successfully?
- On what basis do we make these claims?
- Which middle schooling principles and practices have we not modeled and why?

We attempt to answer the above questions in this article. In doing so, we have clustered the 12 intended outcomes of our diploma into three broad categories: relationships, curriculum, and pedagogy. Data for our analysis come from substantial course reviews and informal feedback that we have collected over the past three years. These sources include university-mandated course evaluations completed by our students, individual and focus group interviews with students, written responses by students to questionnaires, and student comments made at our monthly “town

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**Figure 1**

Core Outcomes of Edith Cowan University’s Middle Years Diploma Program

| 1. Relate positively to young adolescents. |
| 2. Work collaboratively with colleagues in interdisciplinary teams. |
| 3. Establish a sense and the substance of community within and across the classroom. |
| 4. Design assessment that is authentic, outcomes-based, developmental. |
| 5. Construct tasks that promote cooperative, active, inquiry-based learning, and help students take charge of their own learning. |
| 6. Teach discipline-based and integrated curricula. |
| 7. Use information and communication technology as an educational tool. |
| 8. Teach mixed-ability classes using effective management practices. |
| 9. Promote positive interpersonal and inter-group relations in the classroom. |
| 10. Cater for the diversity of student needs and help students at risk. |
| 11. Think like a middle grades teacher. |
| 12. Engage with parents and community members to support students and the school. |
meetings." At times, the “modeling” we talk about below refers to what we do to practice what we preach. At other times, it refers to how our diploma program models middle schooling principles and practices.

Relationships
This section focuses on intended outcomes of the diploma that relate to the development and maintenance of healthy relationships in a middle school: relationships between teachers, teachers and students, students themselves, and the community at large, particularly parents and caregivers. More specifically, our discussion covers whether we practice what we preach with reference to working collaboratively with colleagues in teams and establishing a sense of community, relating positively to young adolescents, and engaging with parents and community members.

Modeling teamwork
An important component to improving student learning in the middle grades is teamwork among teachers and students (Jackson & Davis, 2000). However, our long experience in teacher education has taught us that establishing a culture of collaboration among colleagues in a principally competitive, disciplined-based, and individualistic work environment is a difficult and complex task. Given that the identity and integrity of our middle grades graduate diploma was, from its inception, dependent on teamwork, collaboration, and collegiality, this task took on added weight. We addressed this situation by designing the course to model quite explicitly the principles and practices of small middle school communities in the following ways:

• We limit the intake for the course to 90 students.
• Four core staff members teach the foundation units, which cover the needs of the young adolescent learner, youth studies, and the philosophy, curriculum, and pedagogy of middle schooling. They assist curriculum experts, who teach the curriculum units in English, mathematics, science, and society and environment.
• Led by a specialist in the area, a team of three staff members is responsible for each unit. To ensure course coherence and collaboration, most unit teams include at least one core staff member.
• Our purpose-built facilities are designed to encourage a feeling of community. The main teaching space consists of a large, flat-floor room with a flexible divider that can accommodate whole cohort activities. Adjacent to this room is a fully equipped kitchen for staff and students.
• We conduct a weekly one-hour forum for town meetings and guest speakers. Our program also includes advisories, exhibitions of students’ work, group-building activities, and social events.
• An electronic discussion board provides a further means for students to post messages, debate issues, ask questions, and generally support each other.

In addition to showing our students what a small middle school community looks like, we include discussion of the theoretical base and operational processes of a small middle school community as a formal component within our units.

Other ways in which we endeavor to model good practices, such as collaboration and teamwork, include team teaching and observing each other. In conjunction with the students, we give each other feedback and engage in a discourse of constructive critique. Although an indirect form of modeling, we tell our students that we share and discuss teaching resources and strategies among ourselves, such as Web sites, books, conference papers, journal articles, student work samples, assessment, motivation, and programming strategies. Our thinking here was influenced by Fullan and Hargreaves’s (1998) concepts of shared leadership and interactive professionalism.

We do not assume that our students will simply embrace the principles and practices associated with teamwork, collaboration, and collegiality by
being a de facto member of a small learning community. We believe they need more than this. We believe they need to be active participants in authentic learning experiences that challenge them to work in teams. Thus, during orientation week, our students are introduced to the importance of building effective teams and working collaboratively. They engage in a problem-solving activity that requires strategic use of resources and challenges them under time pressure to accomplish certain tasks. We parallel their team experience and skill development by introducing them to some theory, such as Johnson and Johnson’s (2003) role position approach to leadership, as a basis on which to conceptualize effective groups.

During the year, they participate in many team-based exercises and assignments and are constantly challenged to examine their experiences in relation to middle grades classrooms. For example, the unit on youth studies includes an assignment requiring our students to work in small teams to investigate a community agency that supports the needs of, and challenges faced by, young adolescents.

Modeling positive relationships with young adolescents

Practicing what we preach by relating positively to young adolescents is a more complex process than modeling teamwork. We certainly tell our students about the need for middle grades teachers to value adolescence and see it “as a rich pathway to maturity rather than a problem period to be survived” (Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1996, p. 31). For example, two of the units focus specifically on early adolescent development and youth studies. Both of these units have learning outcomes directly associated with relating positively to young adolescents.

But, to what extent are we able to model this critical aspect of middle grades teacher preparation? One constraint we face here is that our students are adults, not young adolescents, and expect to be related to by their professors as such. Nevertheless, from day one of the course we strive to model key principles and practices of relationship skills that we advocate in our teaching as being essential to all healthy relationships, regardless of age. For example, we spend time getting to know our students as individuals by giving them the opportunity to tell us and their colleagues about themselves, their interests, passions, likes and dislikes, and expectations of the course. We make a concerted effort to learn their names, which, in a cohort of 90 students, is no mean feat, but no different to the challenge of doing likewise with a similar size community of middle graders. We make name tags compulsory for the first three weeks of the course. We take group photographs of the cohort and display them with names attached. We model numerous other relationship-building practices and invite students to critique them from the perspective of what they might look like in a middle grades classroom. Above all, though, we give our students a voice through regular and often impromptu “catch-up” chats in class, advisory group sessions, monthly town meetings, electronic discussion boards, an open door policy, and a student representative system. We endeavor to listen to our students and be responsive to their needs, as we would expect them to do when trying to relate positively to young adolescents. Qualitative feedback suggests that we are experiencing a measure of success in practicing what we preach in this area:

[The staff] are very supportive, helpful and understanding, sense of humor, ability to practice middle schooling philosophy during lecture presentations.

They have a strong philosophy that they practice with the best of intentions—[they are] open and responsive to feedback.

One restraint we face in modeling positive relationships with young adolescents is that our students are adults, not young adolescents, and expect to be related to by their professors as such.

Modeling engagement with parents and community members

We have not been able to model good practice with respect to middle grades teachers engaging with parents and community members to support students and the school. This may not be surprising. After all, our students are adults, voluntarily attending the course, rather than young adolescents complying with compulsory schooling legislation. Most of our students have had some exposure to home-school partnerships
while completing their practicum in school. However, there is no assurance that this will happen, and more often than not, they are passive observers rather than active participants in parent conferences on ‘prac’.

**Curriculum**
Are we able to model in our teaching an adolescent-relevant curriculum that is discipline-based and integrated; caters to the diversity of student needs; and includes assessment that is authentic, outcomes-based, and developmental? Yes, but with mixed success, due to many complex and often anomalous influences at play within and outside the university.

**Modeling outcomes-based curriculum**
Most Australian education systems have state-wide curriculum frameworks, which identify early adolescence as a distinct phase of student development and set learning area outcomes specifically for students at this stage. For instance, the WA Kindergarten to Year 12 Curriculum Framework consists of four overlapping phases of student growth, namely, early childhood (years K–3), middle childhood (years 3–7), early adolescence (years 7–10), and late adolescence/young adulthood (years 10–12). Being outcomes based, this curriculum does not mandate specific content that must be covered, as is the case with most other Australian curricula. Instead, it acknowledges the importance of relevance, adolescent-centeredness, collaboration, and participatory decision making during early adolescence.

Our diploma program attempts to thoroughly familiarize our students with the philosophy, aims, and structure of the WA Curriculum Framework. In addition to telling students, we are, to some extent, able to model outcomes-based education (OBE) by ensuring that our course structure, unit plans, lectures, workshops, and tutorials reflect the concept. This means using OBE discourse in our conversations with the students and being particularly vigilant to remain true to this paradigm in the implementation of our own planning. Historically, the majority of our students, ourselves as teacher educators included, have been educated in an input-driven and teacher-centered system, so practicing the OBE we preach presents us a tough but heady challenge.

Modeling the WA Curriculum’s principles of relevance, adolescent-centeredness, collaboration, and participatory decision making is no less challenging. Our diploma’s curriculum mirrors some of these principles to a limited degree—by nature, it is relevant to the needs of our students in preparing them as middle grades teachers; and it explicitly adopts a constructivist, learner-centered pedagogy that, although adult focused, visibly demonstrates the importance of applying the adolescent-centered principle.

**Modeling a discipline and integrated approach to curriculum**
Our diploma models both a discipline and integrated approach to curriculum in two ways. First, although the four curriculum units are discipline directed, the four foundation units, as previously described, are delivered by teams that include core staff with expertise in a range of education studies and curriculum disciplines, most notably psychology, sociology, philosophy, curriculum design, pedagogy, English, society and environment, and science. Core staff members teach across the curriculum and foundation units, which enables them to make connections and ensure integration. A consequence of this is that through our team teaching our students experience the rich and complex “fabric” of education where they are encouraged to think holistically and understand the interconnected and interdependent nature of teaching, learning, and schooling. Second, as part of the middle schooling curriculum and pedagogy unit, students complete an integrated studies project that requires them to work in inter-disciplinary teams and design and present an integrated curriculum based on a particular model of integration.

**Modeling curriculum flexibility and participatory decision making**
Unlike the United States, where 44 states have some type of middle level certification (Ference & McDowell, 2005), Australia does not have an accreditation system for the licensure of middle grades teachers at all. Nevertheless, the content, structure, and outcomes of ECU’s Graduate Diploma in the Middle Years have been rigorously scrutinized by a wide range of stakeholders and ultimately approved by the university’s teaching and learning committee. Unit plans, which are legally binding, are required to be available for public scrutiny well in advance of the
commencement of the course. Any major changes to the latter require a strict amendments process managed by a quality assurance team at the university. This process can take a full academic year before any changes are implemented.

The predetermined nature of our diploma's curriculum and university course rules reduce the opportunity for us to be responsive to our students' needs. Our capacity to be flexible and negotiate with students our diploma's content and structure à la Beane (1993) is considerably constrained. Along with other models of curriculum, we preach about the exemplary middle schooling qualities of his approach but are unable to practice them in any meaningful way. This is understandable, given that the teaching profession largely determines the requirements of our diploma because it effectively gives our graduates a license to practice as middle grades teachers. Middle schools do not bestow on adolescents a license to practice, and although the middle school curriculum is shaped to some extent by having to be grounded in rigorous public standards, it is expected to be flexible and tied to adolescents' concerns (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The challenge of modeling these middle schooling principles in our diploma has raised the question for us as to what a teacher education program would look like if we based it upon Beane's negotiated curriculum model.

As previously pointed out, we do encourage our students to give us honest and constructive feedback, and we take their comments very seriously in reviewing and revising the diploma. In this way, we endeavor to practice what we preach when trying to model participatory decision making. Although the improvements to the course are of no immediate benefit to the incumbent cohort of students, there is some recognition of the long-term benefits, as one 2003 student observed:

I understand that this is only the second year of this course. From what I have heard, the changes from last year have been substantial. Keep improving like this and you will have more satisfied people next year and in years to come.

Modeling catering for student diversity
Do we model catering for the diversity of student needs? Our diploma is underpinned by principles of social justice. It teaches students about equity in education and uses a wide range of strategies to achieve equity in access, treatment, and outcomes for our own students. Each year, the intake for our course is comprised of a number of students with some level of learning difficulty or from some situation of educational disadvantage: for example, dyslexia, ADHD, NESB (non-English-speaking background), and single parents who have to juggle family, study, and often the need to earn an income. We assist these students to participate and successfully complete the course in a range of ways and encourage the celebration of diversity through the inclusion of international students in the course. Examples of our commitment to practicing what we preach in this area include:

- Being flexible with students who have specific learning difficulties: for example, allowing them the use of computers for in-class assessments and granting some leniency with assignment submission dates
- Having an open-door policy and counseling arrangements to assist students in need of extra support
- Offering the course on a part-time basis for students who are not in a position to complete it on a full-time basis.

“I can honestly say that every piece of assessment I have done in this course has enhanced my knowledge of teaching.” — diploma student

Modeling assessment that is authentic, outcomes-based, and developmental
We have experienced an anomalous mix of successful and contradictory practice in this area. We tell our students that assessment tasks are significant drivers of learning. We tell them about the need to plan these tasks carefully as a team to ensure they are educative and developmental in nature. We tell them that, as teachers, they need to provide assessment tasks that are intellectually challenging, authentic, fair, and valid, and provide extensive feedback (including peer and self-assessment) to further students’ understanding. Our attempt to model these principles involves the use of the following:
- Open-ended rich tasks
- Negotiated assessment rubrics
- Assessment tasks that require integration of theory and practice (e.g., lesson plans, programming, situational analysis of ‘prac school’)
- A wide range of assessment tasks: in-class and take-home, individual and group, text and electronic, conceptual and practical, essay and journal
- Tutor and peer assessments
- Verbal and written feedback to individual students and whole class
- Checklists: assignment evaluation feedback forms
- Feed-forward: lots of scaffolding including models of assignments and assessment rubrics prior to the commencement of tasks
- Student ‘prac’ assessments that are formative and summative and that include school-based professional evaluation of students’ professional skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Evidence that we do model good practice in assessment is reflected in positive student feedback. For example, a 2003 graduate had this to say: “I can honestly say that every piece of assessment I have done in this course has enhanced my knowledge of teaching.” Such encouraging feedback is tempered, though, by student and staff frustration at the university’s norm-referenced system of assessment. We are required by this system to award no more than 45% of the student cohort a grade of high distinction/distinction (>70%). This restriction is the antithesis of criterion-referenced, mastery learning, outcomes-based assessment we advocate in our course. The contradiction here becomes accentuated, much to our students’ protestations, when we have to “scale” their grades to ensure that they fit the university’s pre-determined distribution curve. The argument for this regulated differentiation is that it permits employers to make a comparative judgement about students’ competencies within and across tertiary institutions.

**Pedagogy**

Do we model in our own teaching principles of best pedagogical practice (e.g., learning that is student centered, experiential, holistic, authentic, expressive, reflective, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging) (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998)? Do we practice what we preach with regard to constructing tasks that promote cooperative, active, inquiry-based learning, and using information and communication technology as an educational tool?

**Modeling cooperative learning strategies**

Our course delivery breaks the mold of the routine traditional lecture/tutorial format. As pointed out previously, we have designed the course to mirror small middle school communities that encourage a culture of teamwork and collaboration. More specifically, we adopt in our own teaching a range of cooperative learning strategies, such as small-group projects and assignments, case-based workshops, “think/pair/share,” “jig-sawing,” “card cluster,” and “envoy” (Education Department of Western Australia, 2001). Our teaching space is flexible (two rooms with a flexible divider—a room we designed) where we have organized the tables in small groups, as the default setting.

Perhaps the most prominent aspect of our pedagogy has been our ability to arouse curiosity and to stimulate critical thought and independent learning.

**Modeling the promotion of intellectual development**

Perhaps the most prominent aspect of our pedagogy has been our ability to arouse curiosity, and to stimulate critical thought and independent learning. This is congruent with middle schooling philosophy that emphasizes the need to promote young adolescents’ intellectual development (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Student feedback suggests that we do practice what we preach here:

The main strength of this course is its ability to make people think: deep analysis of subject content, pedagogical practices, and the theoretical backup of these allowed for integration and, in turn, understanding to occur. — 2003 graduate
In addition to the cooperative learning strategies mentioned above, we employ a wide range of pedagogies that incorporate most of the principles of best practice learning and aim specifically to arouse curiosity and stimulate critical thought and independent learning. For example, to arouse curiosity we incorporate many first-hand experiences through field trips and authentic practical tasks, such as the small group-based project in the youth studies unit, which asked students to investigate and present their findings on the services offered to adolescents by youth-focused agencies. We use diverse learning activities that actively engage our students such as electronic debates. Our activities and assignments generally concentrate on “conjecturing, inventing, and problem-solving” rather than focusing on “mechanistic answer-finding” (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1991). We set open-ended, challenging tasks that fall within our students’ “zones of proximal development” and generate a productive level of disequilibrium or cognitive dissonance (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002).

To stimulate critical thinking we regularly set tasks that ask students to consider alternative solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view in addressing a concept, problem, or issue. We induct students into a strong culture of peer review and critique of work practices as well as the avoidance of group think. We foster a safe environment for questioning—one that allows for dissent, critique, challenge. Sometimes we use role-play as a method of engagement. For example, on a weekly basis in the society and environment unit the team of three staff members role-play middle grades teachers in a staff room scene where they demonstrate a range of complex issues and challenges associated with integrated curriculum and interdisciplinary teams. We ask students to reflect on these issues and challenges by participating in a parallel process of collaborative problem solving.

To stimulate independent learning, we counsel students to take responsibility for their own learning. We engage students in a peer review process and in the development of assessment. We model the constructivist principle of scaffolding, but we do not promote an over-reliance on it or allow students to expect to be spoon-fed and become victims of learned dependency. We use open debates to role model alternative positions and the use of logical and valid argument.

Our attempts to practice the pedagogy that we champion in middle schools have, we believe, encouraged powerful scholarship in our students through observation, interaction, and reflection on their shared experiences of recommended approaches to learning. As one student observed:

The hands-on approach to presentations and group work was a credit to the staffs’ attitude towards pedagogy and integration. ... Real life application—a real course for real schools. — 2003 graduate

Conclusion

For more than a decade now, educational reforms in Australia have placed school teachers under pressure to embrace an outcomes-based, authentic, constructivist, student-centered, and developmentally appropriate pedagogy. They have also placed teacher education programs under pressure to make changes that will ensure graduates are prepared to implement the new pedagogy. Arguably, this means not only telling graduates about the latest reforms, but also showing them what it means in the classroom; that is, expecting teacher educators to practice what they preach.

To what extent is this possible? We have attempted to answer this question by examining the efficacy with which we model the principles and practices of middle schooling philosophy in our preparation of middle grades teachers. Based on substantial course evaluation data over the past three years, it is evident that our quest to practice what we preach has contributed significantly to our students’ learning. However, there are aspects of middle schooling philosophy that we have had limited, or in some cases, no success in modeling, namely: adolescent-centeredness; engaging with parents and community members; curriculum flexibility; participatory decision making, and outcomes-based assessment. A number of factors have mitigated against our successful modeling in these areas, most notably: (a) our students are not young adolescents, (b) university assessment regulations, (c) the pre-determined nature of our
diploma curriculum as a professional preparation course that effectively bestows a license to teach, and (d) the different foci between our diploma and middle grades curricula. What are the experiences of other teacher educators preparing middle grades teachers elsewhere? How did middle grades teachers experience their preparation in relation to their lecturers and professors’ practicing what they preached? We are still reflecting on the opportunities and constraints that affect our success on these matters and are curious to know how other middle grades teacher education programs have modeled middle schooling philosophy.

Editor’s Note
Some Australian spellings and usages have been changed to standard American English.

Since completing this article, the Middle Years Diploma team has been recognized for excellence in teaching at the national level. The team was honored with a Carrick Award for Australian University Teaching for their innovative team-teaching approach. Only 22 Carrick Awards are awarded Australia-wide.

References
I

n 2003, the University of Central Florida began a Transition to Mathematics and Science Teaching (T-MAST) program, a one-year, fast-track program that prepares and certifies bachelor’s degree holders who will work as teachers in a job-sharing paid internship, while completing a Master of Arts degree in middle grades (5–9) mathematics education or science education. The program was grounded in a large body of research that has identified extensive mentoring, induction support, and reflective practice to be components of a high-quality program (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fullan, 1999). T-MAST is a program designed to help address the shortage of highly qualified and certified teachers of middle school science and mathematics in the local public schools and provide career change teachers education course work and internship experience. This article describes the journey of one person through an alternative certification program in middle grades mathematics.

Nationally and locally there have been large numbers of teachers who enter the profession with no teacher education preparation or are asked to teach in subject areas they are not certified in. Jerald (2002), referring to an Educational Trust data analysis conducted by Richard Ingersoll, reported that out-of-field teaching is too pervasive and the impact on middle schools is especially detrimental. Nationwide, nearly one-third of mathematics teachers are out of field, and that number rises to almost one-half for high poverty or high minority schools. Even more alarming, middle schools that serve high poverty and high minority student populations have 70% of mathematics teachers who are out of field. Out-of-field teaching may help explain Smith, Banilower, and others...

This We Believe

Characteristics

- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
- An inviting, supportive, and safe environment
- High expectations for all members of the learning community
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning

By Bobby Jeanpierre & Nancy Lewis

Data analysis conducted by Richard Ingersoll, reported that out-of-field teaching is too pervasive and the impact on middle schools is especially detrimental. Nationwide, nearly one-third of mathematics teachers are out of field, and that number rises to almost one-half for high poverty or high minority schools. Even more alarming, middle schools that serve high poverty and high minority student populations have 70% of mathematics teachers who are out of field. Out-of-field teaching may help explain Smith, Banilower, and others...

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McMahon & Weiss's (2002) conclusion that nationally, mathematics and science education content preparation for teachers of grades 5–8 had been declining over the previous seven years. Jerald (2002) also had pointed out that little progress had been made from 1993–1994 to 1999–2000 in reducing out-of-field teaching. Education Week (Olson, 2003) rated states on improving teacher quality; their ratings indicated minimum progress in this area. In the Education Week report, only nine states were rated a “B,” and no state was given an “A”. The vast majority of states earned a “C” rating on improving teacher quality.

More than 40 states have alternate paths into education for people who hold a bachelor’s degree, and a wide variation of requirements and experiences for the participants in alternative certification programs exists. Consistency regarding alternative certification programs is lacking (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). The programs can be as short as a two-week institute or as long as two years of post-baccalaureate coursework.

Research conducted in New York City (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002) found that recruits who had taken alternate pathways into teaching felt less well prepared than teachers who came from teacher education programs. The sense of preparedness was the strongest predictor of teaching efficacy. Citing Stronge's synthesis of research on professional training, O'Neil (2003) argued that credentials matter. Stronge has found that the proportion of well-qualified teachers within a state is a consistent predictor of student test scores in mathematics, and that teachers who have traditional education preparation are better able to deal with numerous teaching tasks.

Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) argued: “Measures to improve teacher education programs will do little to improve teacher quality if states allow schools to hire teachers without preparation” (p. 297). For the most part, teachers without teacher preparation courses feel inadequate to teach and are not sufficiently prepared to handle the details and intricacies of diverse student populations, classroom management, and student assessments (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). As Fullan (1996) contended, “you cannot improve student learning for all or most students without improving teacher learning for all or most teachers” (p. 41). Teacher and student learning are closely linked.

Novice teachers need substantial support. The September 1998 issue of “AFT Educational Issues Policy Brief” stated: “Beginning teachers face a range of difficulties that hinder their effectiveness and cut short their careers” (American Federation of Teachers, 1998, p. 1). Increased mentoring can decrease teacher attrition while promoting teacher success (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). Mentoring was a central focus of this Central Florida alternative teacher certification program.

Teachers who participated in T-MAST completed the same teacher education coursework requirements as did those teachers in a regular middle level master's program, but they completed their degree requirements in one academic year (4 semesters), were provided financial assistance, job-shared a teaching position, and were members of a supportive cohort group. This alternative certification program accepted novice teachers into a one-year (36 semester hour) Master of Arts in Science or Master’s of Arts in Mathematics program with a paid internship. Ideally, in the job-sharing position two teachers shared one full-time teaching assignment. One of the two T-MAST teachers generally taught during the first half of the school day, and the other taught the later half of the school day. This article describes one inductee’s journey to becoming a teacher.

**Documenting the T-MAST Route to Teaching**

This is the story, told as a case study, of one person’s journey of becoming a teacher through the alternative T-MAST route. A case study, as defined by Yin (1989), is an empirical inquiry into real-life context in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Multiple sources of information were collected for nine months. The authors and teacher-candidate kept journals throughout the program. In addition, the case study participant, her cohort group, her mentor, and her administrator at the school where she participated in a paid internship teaching ninth grade pre-algebra were all interviewed. The case study
resulted in a thick file of field notes that described the participant’s experiences. The various sources of information were triangulated and then analyzed for recurrent themes and patterns.

Setting
Mary, a novice teacher in her mid-30s, held an internship in ninth grade mathematics at a local high school with a student population of 3,700, in the twelfth largest school district in the nation—Orange County Florida. Mary had the support of both a University of Central Florida faculty member and a school-based mentor, as she learned how to teach through university coursework and an on-the-job internship. During the paid internship, Mary job-shared a ninth grade mathematics teaching position with another T-MAST student. The job-sharing component of the program was designed so that T-MAST students could support and learn from each other. Although many program support structures such as faculty mentoring, tuition fellowship, paid internship, coursework, and monthly group meetings were in place to ensure a successful transition from the business world into teaching, this new teacher was put in a context that would be challenging for most experienced teachers.

Mary referred to one class as her “ecstasy class.” She suspected that some of the students’ behaviors were consistent with behaviors of persons using drugs. Mary described the kind of students in her pre-algebra classes, “I started out not knowing what kind of kids I was going to be able to get, and I got the kids that are almost throw-aways and had always failed in school. They had failed algebra four, five, or six times and this was their last chance.” The challenges these students in this particular school presented for Mary were definitely such that even most seasoned, veteran teachers would find them quite difficult to manage.

In addition to students’ personal problems, they were not succeeding academically. To address the low achievement of this population, the school had a common curriculum prepared for those teachers who taught the mastery pre-algebra class. Mary explained: “They gave me pre-algebra, and these kids ranged from 15 to 18 years old.” The pre-algebra mastery program left little room for a creative or a constructivist approach to teaching.

Mary was provided with a three-ring binder of prepared worksheets and tests to use with her high-risk students. The goal of this mastery pre-algebra program was for students to complete eight out of ten homework assignments or “qualifiers” so they could take a unit test. If they did not pass the test, students were cycled back through more worksheets and an alternate version of the test. The high school administrators did not expect Mary to design lesson plans because everything she needed to teach was provided through the prescribed pre-algebra curriculum. Every teacher in the school who taught mastery pre-algebra was expected to be on the same lesson the same day all semester. Given the challenges of teaching a highly prescribed curriculum with an expected level of mastery for all students, Mary was determined to do her best. She was extremely self-confident, but admitted that she had room to grow.

Mary stated, “I have, by no means, solid teaching practices yet, but I try my best. But I don’t know. I love teaching. Mathematics especially, because of all the I-got-it looks I see on students’ faces.”

Mary before T-MAST
Mary had unique professional and life experiences before entering T-MAST and the teaching profession. Her undergraduate work focused on mathematics until she joined the United States Marine Corps. Part of her motivation for joining the armed services was tuition assistance, but she had to switch her major to journalism. She explained, “I was in the Marine Corps and then worked for a global telecommunications company running technology systems in more than 55 countries around the world.” In her work with the telecommunications company, Mary earned a six-figure salary, traveled worldwide, and even addressed the British House of Parliament in 1999.

For Mary, all of the travel, prestige, and money took on a different level of importance after September 11, 2001. She described her experience: “September 11 changed my life. I was always traveling and missed my husband and two small children. Once September 11th happened, I realized how important life was and decided to change careers and go into teaching to make a difference for as many children as I could.” Mary reevaluated her priorities and decided that having a career that would allow both time to be at home with her family and to make a difference in the lives of young people was what she most wanted to do.
Mary successfully applied her knowledge and skills from journalism and her work in global telecommunications for 12 years to pre-algebra teaching.

Mary's story
Mary successfully transitioned to teaching and got involved in activities both inside and outside of the regular school day. As she became involved in the after-school tutoring program, her duties at the high school quickly expanded beyond teaching two classes of math. Shortly after beginning her paid internship, Mary began to substitute for the pre-algebra tutor, free of charge. By November, Mary was teaching Saturday school, which targeted ninth grade students who scored in the bottom quartile of the norm-referenced national mathematics test that students take in eighth grade. The Saturday school students were, for the most part, the students Mary taught Monday through Friday. During an interview Mary remarked, “Most of the time I have all of these kids six days a week." By January, Mary was offered a full-time teaching position, which she accepted. In February, she was asked to informally mentor another new math teacher, which she also agreed to do. Mary's initial responsibilities of teaching half-time have now expanded to a full-time paid teaching position, tutoring students, and mentoring colleagues.

Several themes emerged from analyzing the data pertaining to Mary's case. These themes revealed why this teacher succeeded in the alternative context. The students’ academic success confirmed her accomplishments. First, since Mary believed that the students could learn, she demonstrated to them that she believed in their ability to succeed. Second, Mary believed that she was competent to teach mathematics. Mary was not yet a polished teacher, but she was improving. Third, she possessed an enthusiasm for teaching. When asked how she would describe her first year teaching, Mary said, “Incredible!” That she loved to teach was evident in her enthusiasm, her boundless energy, and her dedication to her own professional development. She greeted her students at the door every day, and although she now teaches more than 100 students, she knew them by name. Mary made substantial progress in learning to teach and now felt comfortable with her students. She stated, “I have moved from being afraid of turning my back on the kids to having them all want to spend lunch time in my room.”

Surprisingly, Mary guarded against her students getting to know her in too personal a way, and they knew very little about her personal life. She maintained a distanced professional relationship with her students, just as she did with her former employees in the tele-communications company. In her words:

“I don’t get chummy with my kids. I don’t talk too much, at all, about my home life, my family; they don’t know diddly-squat about me except that I have some kids and am married. And they shouldn’t know. I think there is a clear distinction. ... It’s somewhat like being a professional in the business world. The minute you start sharing information, that line of professionalism diminishes, and you shouldn’t get too casual—even in the business environment it isn’t good.”

However, she purposefully tried to develop a rapport with her students by sending them clear messages that she believed that they could succeed. She worked hard to create a safe environment where her class of low-achievers could risk showing they did not know some very basic mathematics without feeling they would be ridiculed. During an interview, Mary explained:

If I get one student who tells me “I don’t know how to divide,” you have to gain a rapport with those kids. ... What I find is that I can teach them by whispering loud enough that the other ones can hear who also don’t know how to divide or multiply. Then, the other kids slowly open up. Taking the time to remind them how to divide changes my instructional approach. I have a lot of kids that have just turned the corner because they realize I’m not going to laugh or take points off.

Mary believed that breaking pre-algebra concepts and skills into small, understandable “chunks” for the students helped them learn the material. She was determined to show them that they could succeed even though they may have failed this particular subject several times. In fact, Mary’s average class passing rate on end-of-unit tests was approximately 89% for the first semester.

Her classroom was safe for students to acknowledge that they needed help in pre-algebra, and it was also physically safe. She taught students that there were consequences for their actions, both good and bad. As previously stated, Mary was a former Marine, and her military training and leadership abilities helped her establish routine with firm boundaries and clear behavioral expectations, which, for the most part, her students respected. The formal observations and assessments of her teaching by both school administrators and university faculty mentors documented that in
Mary’s classroom, students demonstrated on-task behaviors, followed class management expectations, and adhered established routines.

Mary also created a caring environment for students. She emulated her favorite university professor by writing a great deal of positive comments and drawing happy faces on students’ papers. While she initially questioned if this practice seemed a bit elementary for those students who portrayed a rough, gang-banger demeanor, she found this practice of giving students positive feedback was appreciated by most students. Mary commented, “I write on my student papers when they turn them in; I write good job and add smiley faces; I put stars on them. So there were good consequences for doing your work. And I have kids who argue, what’s the difference between a good and a great and a well done.” The positive feedback she gave them through her actions, nonverbal cues, and written comments appeared to lift students’ self-esteem by sending a clear message that she cared about them. While the caring was evident, Mary was firm, and the students earned the grades they received. She respected her students, and in turn they respected her.

In addition to Mary’s belief in her students’ ability to learn pre-algebra, she also had a strong belief in herself and her ability to accomplish her new professional goals. She set high performance expectations for herself in planning, following up with students, and succeeding in teaching. She was also highly energetic. After job-sharing in the fall, during spring semester of 2004 Mary began to work full-time, completed 12 hours of coursework, and mothered two small children. During this time, she also began to write two books. When this article was written, Mary was considering pursuing a doctoral degree.

Not surprisingly, Mary emerged as a leader in the T-MAST cohort. She sought out answers to situations before they became problems, and she was more than happy to share resources, information, strategies, and lesson plans with her cohort members. For Mary, the most surprising aspect of learning to become a teacher was the amount of paperwork involved. Mary sought out the help of others to understand the protocols, as well as the practical nuts and bolts of things, like turning in grades. Mary willingly shared what she learned about district, university, and program protocols with other members of her cohort group.

Her communication with T-MAST program colleagues had evolved from mostly asking questions to offering tips that could help her cohort members navigate their way through the paperwork required by the school district. To conclude Mary’s story, by spring she was mentoring another new teacher who was also transitioning from a business workplace to teaching; she was actively recruiting him into the T-MAST program and shared her perspectives on how to improve the communication component of the alternative certification program from the perspective of a new inductee. The picture emerged of a novice teacher who had been quite successful during her first year teaching in an extremely difficult school context.

“I have moved from being afraid of turning my back on the kids to having them all want to spend lunch time in my room.”
—Mary

Other program teachers
In addition to Mary, there were other graduates of the program who successfully completed the program and were teaching in grades 5–9, as middle school certification in Florida included grades 5–9. Teachers in the T-MAST program were teaching the entire span of these grades. Figure 1 provides employment data on other graduates of the T-MAST program.

Figure 1 shows that 17 mathematics and science teachers have been successfully placed into high-needs middle grades positions. Although not a substantial number of teachers, they have had an impact at their respective schools. That is, they have filled voids in mathematics and science teaching in several of the local urban, high-risk, low-SES, largely minority schools.

Conclusion
The T-MAST participants and the program continue to evolve and grow as we learn from participants like Mary. Observing and documenting her successful transition to the teaching profession has informed our practice on many levels. She possessed strong personal and leadership characteristics, had a commitment to doing the best job she could, sought out her own answers, and enjoyed teaching. All of
these characteristics, we believed, contributed to Mary’s successful transition to teaching. As facilitators of the T-MAST program, we have provided an intensive, structured alternative teacher transition program that included the entire college of education master’s of education coursework requirements for middle school mathematics and science with teacher certification. Participants were offered a fellowship, a paid internship, and completed the coursework requirements for middle school science or mathematics certification in a fast-tracked alternative certification program.

We have faced many challenges negotiating district and state certification requirements and teacher placements. Many of these challenges were met, and we continued to learn and grow from our successes and challenges. Our journey assisting students as they transition from business workplaces to teaching has been worth the challenges we have faced. Mary’s success story is a testament to her hard work and the project faculty’s responses to the challenges they faced in managing this alternative certification program.

In the 21st century, we will need to fill a number of middle school mathematics and science teaching positions in diverse, urban, low SES schools. Where will these qualified teachers come from? Teacher educators will have to become a bit more creative in recruitment, preparation, and retention of highly qualified, certified mathematics and science teachers. We can learn from Mary’s story of becoming a middle level teacher. We may identify important teacher characteristics needed for novice teachers to succeed in urban, low SES middle level teaching. In addition, case studies such as Mary’s may also provide guidance to teacher educators searching for better ways to design preparation programs for career-changing novice teachers desiring to enter the field of education.

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References
Mentoring American Indian Middle School Students to Consider Teaching as a Career

This We Believe Characteristics

- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
- High expectations for all members of the learning community
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning
- School-initiated family and community partnerships
- Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity

By Kristine Reed

He remained quiet, head down, slouched in a straight-backed chair with his thin arms folded over his chest. The boy was among peers—28 American Indian middle school students seated around tables in a large, brightly decorated library. He caught my attention almost immediately. He did not appear the type of student to be cooperative, engaged, or open to new opportunities. And, as the afternoon activities proceeded, he did little to change my first impression. The slouched boy did not appear to have any interest in the opening activities and, outside of eating the final product from the peanut butter and jelly sandwich practice lesson, seemed removed from sharing in his group’s efforts to plan a lesson.

If this had been a special Middle School Survivor series with a variation of voting out of the library the student least likely to benefit from the experience, this young man would have received the majority of the votes. The middle school student, as one might suspect, seemed to be here simply to avoid his afternoon classes rather than to eagerly and willingly participate. But this was not the newest Survivor series, and he was not the student who did not succeed. Rather, this was an opportunity for interested American Indian middle school students to explore teaching as a profession.

For university preservice teachers, it was an opportunity to experience the benefits of mentoring others about the teaching profession while learning more about working with middle school students.

The purpose of this article is to describe this mentoring/exploratory project, which took place during the fall of 2004. The intent of the project was to encourage American Indian middle school students to consider a career in teaching. While there continues to be a high number of teacher candidates persisting in their efforts to become teachers, the numbers tell a different story for...
American Indian teachers. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that less than one percent of the teaching force in the United States was American Indian during the 2002 academic year (Freeman & Fox, 2005). According to this report, the American Indian/Alaska Native population represented one and a half percent of the total United States population in 2000. While the one percent is fairly representative of the American Indian population nationwide, it is not for states like South Dakota. South Dakota has a much higher population of American Indians at nine percent of the state's population, making the one percent a considerable shortfall. According to the South Dakota Department of Education (n.d.), of the 8,750 certified teachers in pre-K through 12th grade classrooms for the 2004–2005 school year, 107 teachers, or one hundredth of one percent of all certified teachers, were American Indian. The American Indian teacher shortage is also prevalent on reservations where the majority of certified teachers are non-Native (Manuelito, 2003).

This article is intended to explore ways to increase the number of American Indian teachers and to describe the challenges facing American Indian students. While the focus of the article is on American Indian students, the information can be applied to other under-represented groups in the teaching profession.

**Why Recruit American Indian Students to the Teaching Profession?**

Many educators in school districts and teacher education programs recognize the reality of the limited pool of candidates as well as the importance of increasing the diversity among their teaching staffs and their teacher candidates, respectively. According to a report presented by the National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force (2004), teachers have higher expectations for students from their own ethnic backgrounds; and, in turn, students tend to achieve higher academically when taught by teachers from their own ethnic groups. In addition, research has shown that teachers base expectations for student performance on factors such as socio-economic status, race, and gender, and consequently, promote or impede student achievement (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006).

The absence of diversity in mainstream schools has also been cited as impeding success for American Indian students. The cultural understanding that American Indian teachers bring to the classroom is critical to the educational success of the American Indian students (Locke, 2004). Non-Native teachers who remain limited in their understanding about Native culture, learning styles, and family situations contribute to the alienation of American Indian students in middle class, Anglo classrooms (Grant & Gillespie, 1993).

The shortage of American Indian teachers reduces the probability of cross-cultural educational experiences for non-Native children. Not only do American Indian children need to see themselves in the classroom, non-Native children also need to see individuals from other ethnic groups in professional positions as teachers and administrators in their schools (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Gollnick and Chinn (2006) described the importance of schools paying attention to staffing composition and patterns to “reflect the diversity of the country. At a minimum, they should reflect the diversity of the geographic area” (p. 376). In keeping with a nation growing in its diverse composition, a diverse teaching staff contributes to students’ understanding of difference and their ability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Michael-Bandele, 1993).

The shortage of American Indian teachers also limits the number of role models for students. Students need role models, need to see people like themselves in teaching and leadership positions. According to Dilworth (as cited in Michael-Bandele, 1993) teachers of color are essential role models serving “as primary examples of achievement that can positively influence the self-perceptions and academic achievement of children of color” (p. 2). Mack, Smith, and Jackson (1996) explained that the lack of role models in teaching is “further enlarging the already inadequate ratio” of teachers of color in the schools (p. 6).
Why Are There Low Numbers of American Indian Teachers?

The shortage of American Indian teachers is often visible first in the low number of American Indian students enrolled in teacher education programs at colleges and universities. Low salary base and diminished respect from the public for the teaching profession contributes to the low enrollment of American Indian students in teacher education programs (Mack, Smith, & Jackson, 1996; Shirley, 2004). American Indian students select career paths that lead to more respected and higher paying positions. In 2000, 17% of American Indian bachelor's degrees were earned in business, followed by social sciences and history at 11% (Shirley, 2004). The lack of diversity in the teacher workforce, according to Mack, Smith, and Jackson (1996), is, in part, to the limited recruitment efforts by teacher education programs. Increased testing and extended preparation programs have also been blamed for the low number of American Indian students entering teacher education programs.

Nearly 10 years later little has changed, especially in the number of American Indian students pursuing teaching careers. However, there has been an increase in college attendance for Native people. According to a report by Freeman and Fox (2005), the number of American Indian/Alaska Native students earning bachelor’s degrees doubled from 4,246 in 1984 to 8,711 in 2000. The increase is largely attributed to the growth and success of tribally controlled colleges and universities across the United States and to the efforts of mainstream colleges and universities addressing the concerns of students from under-represented populations (Shirley, 2004). Despite the growing enrollment of students in higher education, American Indians are “the least likely ethnic group to enroll in public four-year colleges and universities” and remain among the “least educated of all ethnic groups in the United States” (Locke, 2004, p. 15).

In addition, the American Indian and Alaska Native population has the highest dropout rate among all ethnic or racial groups in the country (Locke, 2004; Shirley, 2004; Sorkin, 2001). The high school dropout rate is nearly twice the national average, which represents about three out of every ten students leaving school before graduation. Nationally, the high school dropout rate for American Indian and Alaska Native students is 25% (Freeman & Fox, 2005). However, a study of 19 reservations in six states by Sorkin (2001) revealed that rates varied across the country with substantially higher dropout rates found on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota at 61.7% compared to the Umatilla Reservation in Washington at 25%.

The high dropout rate is problematic to increasing the number of American Indian teachers. American Indian students drop out of school either because their needs are not being met or because the action of others forces them out of the school house doors (Heimbecker, Minner, & Prater, 2000; Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, American Indian Education (2005). This is a problem for promoting the teaching profession because, regardless of ethnicity or race, students who do not have positive and supportive school experiences themselves are typically not the young adults who may consider teaching as a profession. Santrock (1998) described the “powerful influence” of schools, teachers, and counselors on career development because, for many, school is the place that many students “first encounter the world of work” (p. 450). Yet, the influence may negatively affect students who might be considering teaching as a career. Mack, Smith, and Jackson (1996) have pointed to teachers discouraging talented students from the teaching profession because of the frustrations experienced in their own teaching careers.

The high dropout rate also limits the experiences that high school American Indian students may have to explore professional career options such as teaching. This makes middle school a critical time to reach American Indian students. Schools and teacher education programs concerned about a shortage of future teachers, especially American Indian teachers, should talk with middle school students about teaching. According to Mack, Smith, and Jackson (1996), students often do not consider teaching because no one ever discusses the career option with them.
Middle school offers an ideal place to begin working with students who are interested in teaching or who show aptitude toward teaching. At the middle school level, students have time to build knowledge, develop skills, and establish self-efficacy to prepare academically for entrance into teacher preparation programs. Middle school students are more inclined to “explore alternatives and experiment with choices as part of developing an identity” (Santrock, 1998, p.17) and when provided, explore career options to begin uncovering possible interests, strengths, and preferences (Brazee, 2000; Santrock, 1998; Schwartz, 1996).

Addressing the Shortage and the High Dropout Rate

Middle schools have seen the benefits of providing students with opportunities to try out and test new ground. Whether that ground involves a new hobby, a different language, a new skill, or a chance to find out more about a career path, exploratory learning provides middle school students “meaningful learning that directly relates to their need for a wide variety of experiences” (Brazee, 2000, p. 5). In the same line of thinking, offering middle school students opportunities to explore the teaching profession and what it requires to become a teacher is beneficial in terms of helping students plan for a career. Students do not need in-depth training to benefit from career exploration (Schwartz, 1996). At the very least, students benefit from hearing about teaching as a possible career choice (Mack, Smith, & Jackson, 1996) and may begin planning for the courses they will need for their careers (Schwartz, 1996).

Responding to the need for increasing the number of American Indian teachers, and recognizing the high dropout rates of American Indian students, The University of South Dakota’s School of Education joined with a reservation

### Figure 1

**University Programs Addressing the Shortage of American Indian Teachers**

A number of teacher education programs across the United States have established programs to encourage and support Native American students in their pursuit of a teaching degree. The following is a list of some of the universities with programs designed to better meet the needs of Native American students.

1. **Haskell Indian Nations University** in Lawrence, Kansas, prepares highly qualified American Indian and Alaska Native teachers through their fully accredited elementary teacher program. [http://www.haskell.edu/soe](http://www.haskell.edu/soe)

2. **Sinte Gleska University** in Mission, South Dakota, on the Rosebud Indian Reservation provides students the required coursework and field experiences to earn a teaching degree and apply for teacher certification. [http://www.sinte.edu](http://www.sinte.edu)

3. **The University of North Dakota** has outreach programs focused on meeting the needs of American Indian students. Under a grant, 20 students recruited from the Fort Berthold Community College and the Turtle Mountain Community College completed degrees in teacher education. The program combined coursework on site at the Tribal College and at the University of North Dakota campus in Grand Forks. [http://www.und.edu](http://www.und.edu)

4. **The University of Nebraska at Omaha’s College of Education** has programs in place to encourage students from under-represented populations including African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic students to enroll in their teacher education program. [http://firstsearch.oce.org/image/WSP1/wpsoo/HTML/03595/02V11/OSM.HTM](http://firstsearch.oce.org/image/WSP1/wpsoo/HTML/03595/02V11/OSM.HTM)

5. **Montana State University** in Bozeman has the Systemic Teacher Excellence Preparation Project to help Native American students in the areas of math and science. The university serves the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Nations. [http://www.montana.edu](http://www.montana.edu)

6. **The University of Idaho** in Moscow established a Native American Recruitment Program in 2004. The program seeks to target, recruit, and retain Native American students at the University of Idaho. [http://www.uihome.uidaho.edu/uihome/](http://www.uihome.uidaho.edu/uihome/)

7. **The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s School of Education** established a recruitment program in partnership with the Indian Community School, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and Spotted Eagle School. The program seeks to increase the number of certified American Indian teachers. Retrieved May 21, 2006 from [http://www.uwm.edu/Dapt/elecfaq/aittp/partners.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dapt/elecfaq/aittp/partners.htm) [http://www.uwm.edu/](http://www.uwm.edu/)

8. **Northern Arizona University** in Flagstaff created a school-based program to recruit American Indian students into the teaching profession. The program provides opportunities for prospective American Indian teacher candidates to remain in their home communities receiving social support while working to complete their degree. The program also promotes and supports American Indian and non-Native candidates working together and learning from one another. Retrieved May 21, 2006 from [http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/LIB/LIB4.html](http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/LIB/LIB4.html) [http://home.nau.edu/](http://home.nau.edu/)

9. **North Carolina Central University** in Durham established a new recruiter and liaison position to specifically recruit American Indian and Hispanic students into the teaching profession. In addition, North Carolina Central also created scholarships for full-time undergraduate American Indian and Hispanic students enrolled in their teacher education program. Retrieved May 28, 2006 from [http://www.ncc.edu/soe/TMOC/hispanic.htm](http://www.ncc.edu/soe/TMOC/hispanic.htm) [http://nccu.edu](http://nccu.edu)

10. **Central Washington University** in Ellensburg, Washington serves a large Yakima Indian population and has established professional development centers to prepare teachers and school administrators from under-represented populations. [http://www.cwu.edu/](http://www.cwu.edu/)
school in the state to provide a teaching career exploration for American Indian middle school students. Grant funding provided for the purchase of curriculum materials and cultural resources. Funding by the grant also supported the expenses incurred for transportation, food, and housing for university teacher education students and faculty.

The teaching exploration project provided opportunities for university teacher education majors to mentor American Indian middle school students about the teaching profession. Middle school students, in turn, learned about the teaching profession through active involvement in lesson planning and participation in classroom instruction. They also learned about the profession by listening to university students share their reasons for choosing a teaching career, and the education requirements they were in the process of fulfilling to become teachers.

**The Teaching Exploration Experience**

The actual teaching exploration experience was preceded by much planning and deliberation. Yet, the experience really did not begin to take shape until interested middle school students were identified. The American Indian middle school students were selected based on the completion of individually written essays describing their interests in the teaching profession. Eighth grade students who completed the essay requirement were given first consideration followed by students in seventh grade, and as a result, 28 middle school students participated.

The 28 students were assigned to small groups. Each small group was made up of two to three middle school students partnered with two university teacher education majors. The groups were kept small because, according to Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994), a limited number in a group is more effective when the amount of time to work together is brief. “The basic rule of thumb about group size is, ‘the smaller the better’” (p. 38). Pairing the 18 university students to work together promoted collaboration and an increased level of confidence in knowing that together they shared a knowledge base that could be used to problem solve.

**Mentoring American Indian Middle School Students**

The assigned teaching teams made up of the selected middle school students and the university teacher education students met for the first time in the library at the middle school. The university students, 10 females and 8 males, all self-identified as Caucasian, non-Hispanic, began mentoring the group of middle school students by modeling a mock lesson to show the importance of preparing detailed lesson plans before teaching a lesson. The mock lesson was the familiar making of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, which provided middle school students with practice in thinking sequentially, planning details, and communicating effectively. In other words, it combined a taste of lesson planning with a tasty learning outcome. A break strategically placed after the mock lesson provided an opportunity for students to eat the sandwiches while hearing from the university students about the teaching profession. University students shared their own stories about pursuing a teaching career, how they became interested in teaching, their experiences on campus, and the requirements for becoming a teacher.

Following the break, the middle school students and their university mentors remained in their assigned teams. They spent the next hour planning and practicing the details of the short lesson that they would be leading the following day in their assigned elementary classrooms. Teams worked with a structured lesson plan outline to prepare their lessons while curriculum ideas were taken from *Character Counts: We Are All Relatives* curriculum (South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service, (SDSU-CES), 2003).

The *Character Counts* curriculum combines the American Indian values of generosity, fortitude, bravery, and wisdom with the Six Pillars of Character.

As a means of making the experience more responsive to the American Indian middle school students, *Character Counts* (SDSU-CES, 2003) was selected as the resource that provided the ideas for the short lessons that were presented to the elementary classrooms. The curriculum combines the American Indian values of generosity, fortitude, bravery, and wisdom with the Six Pillars of Character (Amiotte as cited in SDSU-CES, 2003). The “Six Pillars of Character identified by the Josephson Institute of Ethics” (SDSU-CES, 2003, p. 3) are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility,
fairness, caring, and citizenship. In combination, the lessons are intended to guide individuals to become a person of character.

The Circle of Chainlinks lesson from Character Counts (SDSU-CES, 2003) was the lesson selected by the university students for the teaching exploration experience. The lesson focused on the concept of honesty. The intent of the lesson was for elementary students to develop a working understanding of honesty while practicing addition and subtraction. Elementary students constructed an honesty chain by linking individual student's honesty links—student's own examples of honesty—together to form a chain. As links were added to the chain, the elementary students practiced their addition skills.

Early exposure to the curriculum and knowledge of the time restraints for the practice session and the actual lesson instruction helped prepare university students for their mentoring responsibilities. The university and middle school student teams had to stay on task to accomplish the planning and practicing of their lesson plans. This required leadership on the part of the university students. They took the lead in delegating the responsibilities and negotiating the level of involvement in their teams. University students were instructed to divide the responsibilities of the lesson and involve the middle school students in as much of the actual lesson implementation as they were prepared to accept, with one stipulation; each member had to contribute in some way during the lesson, even in a very minor role. The flexible participation requirement was intended to encourage middle school students to feel a part of the planning process and the actual classroom instruction, without feeling overwhelmed with too many responsibilities or unchallenged or incapable by only having minor involvement.

For the most part, middle school student teachers provided individual help to elementary students as they worked on preparing their honesty link. However, a few of the middle school students played a larger role by providing their own examples of honesty for elementary students to model and by calling on students responding to questions during large-group instruction. An important point to be made here is that the middle school students were very reluctant to commit to a particular role during the practice session. In fact, after the practice session, university students wondered if the middle school students would participate at all once in the elementary classrooms. The university students need not have worried. The following morning in the elementary classrooms, middle school student teachers stood side by side with their university team members during instruction, interacted positively and in a professional manner, passed out the lesson supplies, and provided assistance to elementary students when it was needed.

The practice session concluded with completion of the written lesson plans, the assignment of responsibilities to each member, and a successful practice run of the honesty lesson. The honesty lesson was taught the following morning in an elementary school in the same district as the middle school. In fact, many of the American Indian middle school students were former students of the elementary school, and many also had younger brothers or sisters attending the school. This added to the experience, as participating middle school students were motivated to do their very best “teaching” for former teachers and younger siblings. While each team carried out its lesson plan on honesty, the classroom teachers remained in their respective classrooms to monitor the activities.

The university and middle school student teacher teams introduced the concept of honesty by charting what the elementary students knew (K), what they wanted to know (W), and, following the lesson, what they learned (L), about honesty. The KWL chart is a teaching strategy that encourages student involvement by asking students to identify what they know about the concept and then asking students what they want to learn about it (Durning & Matyasec, 1999). Following the lesson, the chart acts as an assessment tool with students explaining what they learned about the concept. Used effectively, the information gathered on the KWL chart guides instruction, providing the teacher with valuable information about students’ prior knowledge and experiences as well as the success of the lesson instruction.
In this particular lesson, the university and middle school teacher teams asked their elementary students to provide definitions of honesty and examples of situations in which they were honest as well as instances when they did not tell the truth. These definitions and examples were shared during the opening class discussion and listed on the KWL chart. Elementary students were then encouraged to identify what they wanted to learn about honesty. These student-generated questions and statements were also posted on the KWL chart. This led to university and middle school teacher teams discussing with the elementary students the difficulty of rebuilding trust once it is broken. To reinforce this, elementary students were asked to think about ways they could show honesty in school, in their home, or in their tribe or community. One-by-nine-inch colored strips of paper were handed out to the elementary students by the teacher teams.

The elementary students were then told to put one of their ideas about honesty on the strip of colored paper. During this time, both university and middle school students moved around the classroom helping individuals or small groups of students as needed. After students completed their individual honesty link by writing or drawing their honesty example on the strip of colored paper, all students were asked to sit in a circle on the floor to discuss the individual examples. As examples were shared, each link was added to the classroom honesty chain by inserting the colored strip and taping the ends to form the link. During the circle time, the teacher teams prompted students to practice their addition and subtraction skills using the links as manipulatives that could be added and taken away from the chain.

The chain, made up of these individually created honesty links, was intended to portray the importance of honesty in building and maintaining trust. Finally, in an effort to drive home the importance of honesty, a teacher team member removed a link, breaking the chain. The broken chain was intended to represent the broken trust that results when someone does not tell the truth. The lesson concluded with teacher team members asking students what they learned from the honesty lesson. Their responses were documented on the KWL chart.

The lesson on honesty was well received as each elementary student was guided in the development of an “honesty link” that was added one by one to the honesty chain. By the end of the lesson, each elementary classroom was decorated with its own newly constructed honesty chain. The elementary students were encouraged to continue building their honesty chains throughout the school year.

What We Learned
After the teams finished teaching their honesty lessons in the elementary classrooms, university and middle school students met for a debriefing session. The discussion flowed easily as groups were asked to reflect on their lessons and talk among themselves about what parts of the lesson worked and what they could have done differently. Finally, I asked for volunteers to share with the entire group what they thought they had gained from the experience. The university students, who had all been placed in leadership positions from the beginning of the experience, seemed at ease now sharing their thoughts with the large group. They described an increased confidence in their leadership abilities, an increased awareness of cultural differences, and a better understanding of working with middle school students. University teacher education students described being most surprised by the level of responsibility that the middle school students accepted during the actual lesson instruction.

The middle school students expressed an increased level of confidence in pursuing a career in which they thought they could succeed.

The middle school students described feeling more confident in front of the classroom speaking with students. They expressed an increased level of confidence in pursuing a career in which they thought they could succeed. As one middle school student put it, “The elementary students actually listened to me during the lesson.” As a result of the actual teaching experience, middle school students had more questions about teaching and the teaching profession.

Silence eventually fell over the group, and I let it linger, hoping to encourage more middle school students to share their thoughts. And then
suddenly it happened. A middle school student raised his hand, shifted his body slightly, and in a soft, unwavering voice proclaimed, “Today I felt the honor of being a teacher.” One could have heard a pin drop. I dared not speak for what seemed several minutes for fear that I would not be able to hold back the emotion. I could feel the entire room taken in as the one reserved American Indian boy whom I had deemed the least likely to succeed in this experience raised his hand and made us all feel proud of our chosen profession.

Developing a Teaching Exploration Experience in Your Middle School

The following objectives guided the Teaching Exploration Experience and can provide direction for developing a teaching exploration experience in other middle schools. These objectives include informing interested middle school students about (a) the teaching profession, including why individuals choose to become teachers, (b) how students can become licensed teachers and, (c) what it feels like to plan and implement lesson instruction to elementary students.

Middle school administrators, counselors, and teachers are encouraged to implement a career exploration experience that encourages students to look at teaching as a career choice. When considering a teaching exploration experience for middle school students, begin by identifying the students who are interested in the teaching profession or who show aptitude toward the profession. A teacher recommendation can be a strong reinforcement to a middle school student hesitant about his or her own potential.

Second, promote the teaching career exploration event by making participation contingent on the successful completion of an application process such as a written essay. Third, collaborate with current teachers or teacher education students willing to provide mentoring to middle school students. Mentors most valuable to the experience are those willing to share their own reasons for becoming teachers as well as those prepared with current information about teacher education programs. Equipped with information about what is expected in teacher education programs, students may begin planning accordingly or, at the very least, make more informed decisions during high school.

Fourth, identify lesson ideas that offer middle school students opportunities to help plan and participate in lesson instruction. For middle school students to feel a part of the experience and for the experience to be successful, time must be provided for middle school students to look at teaching from the other side—a teacher’s perspective. The actual teaching experience provides middle school students an early opportunity to explore how they feel in the shoes of a teacher.

Finally, the success of the teaching career exploration experience was due to strong collaboration between the school principals, the middle school counselors, the teachers, and the project coordinator. Because of the efforts of many, the important details including schedules, room assignments, recruitment procedures, and communication with faculty and staff were established and successfully managed.

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- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
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- High expectations for all members of the learning community
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning
- Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning

By Deborah S. Yost & Robert Vogel

With the advent of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, schools are being held accountable for measurable increases in student academic achievement as evidenced by performance on standardized tests. This movement has significant implications for the professional development of teachers who are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their underachieving students are making adequate gains on standardized tests. These issues are especially prominent in middle school environments where many teachers continue to hold elementary certification (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2002)—certification that does not meet the NCLB definition of “highly qualified.”

This We Believe (National Middle School Association, 2003) calls for teachers who are prepared to work effectively with middle level students—teachers who are lifelong learners and committed to ongoing professional growth. The NMSA statement recognizes that middle level students have the capacity to learn, grow, and achieve to their highest potentials if they have competent and caring teachers to foster this growth. Well-articulated and authentic professional development is required to move teachers to higher performance levels, thus boosting student achievement. However, despite the recommendations of NCLB and NMSA, professional development practices in the United States remain inadequate (Borko, 2004; Collinson & Ono, 2001; Lieberman, 2000) and inappropriate for middle level teachers (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2002).

In response to this challenge, the co-authors obtained a substantial school/university partnership grant, entitled Project Achieve, from the School District of Philadelphia to create a professional development model in one urban middle school to measure the extent to which

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intensified, personal professional development aimed at increasing teacher expertise would have an impact on student performance on district-wide benchmark assessments. Students take benchmark tests approximately every six weeks, which are focused on evaluating the extent to which students have mastered key concepts and skills in the core curriculum. Project Achieve staff focused on fifth and eighth grade teachers during the grant period from August 2004 to June 2005. Several instruments were used to measure student achievement, teaching effectiveness, and teacher self-reported use of research-based strategies.

Prior to the implementation of the grant, the co-authors searched the literature to discover important elements relating to professional development of both new and experienced teachers, looking especially for studies in which professional development was tied to student achievement (see Figure 1).

There is limited research regarding professional development's effect on student achievement (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Borko, 2004). However, a recent study by Mariage and Garmon (2003) focused on student achievement as a result of a large district-university partnership using large-scale reform strategies, which included professional development activities for teachers. The study showed significant gains in student achievement as a result of providing (a) support for district-wide change efforts, (b) new collaborative structures and professional development, and (c) conceptual leadership throughout the change process.

The following provides an overview of Project Achieve, which focused on individualized professional development of urban middle school teachers during the 2004–2005 academic year. The aim of the project was to increase teaching expertise and skill in implementing a district-mandated core curriculum for the purpose of increasing student academic growth.

### The Four Major Elements of Project Achieve

#### Professional development training

A two-day teacher workshop was conducted prior to the 2004–2005 academic year. The focus of the workshop was (a) to build community among 15 fifth and eighth grade teachers at Grover Washington, Jr., Middle School, (b) model inquiry-based teaching methods, and (c) demonstrate formative and summative assessment techniques. Participants were actively engaged in learning activities and simulations that demonstrated research-based instructional and assessment techniques.

At this workshop teachers were given questionnaires to obtain a baseline regarding their use of research-based teaching strategies, amount of agreement in using these strategies, and beliefs with regard to the viability of using these strategies with their urban students based on Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning model (Marzano, 1992).¹ The model provides teachers with a five-element instructional framework that incorporates research-based practices with theories of learning:

#### Figure 1

**Research on Professional Development**

Research on Professional Development (PD) is presented in the context of school/university partnerships, teacher induction programs, and other models of PD. The literature suggests that effective PD should:

- Establish professional communities where teachers and professors have opportunities to collaborate with one another in small learning communities (Johnson, Duvernoy, McGill, & Will, 1996; Lieberman, 2000; Mariage & Garmon, 2003).
- Enhance shared decision-making among the leadership team and teachers because teacher leadership is strongly connected to teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995).
- Develop inservice workshops that are accompanied by ongoing support of teachers’ use of new instructional strategies through study groups, coaching, observation, and data-based feedback (Spencer & Logan, 2003).
- Engage principals and teacher leaders in self-evaluation to enhance the risk-taking behaviors of teachers (Hackett & Schmidt, 1995).
- Require new teachers to reflect on their teaching practice, using action research (Kelley, 2004).
- Design collaborative induction programs to develop reflection skills and ways new teachers can employ assessment strategies and analyze standards-based strategies and student learning (Wood, 2001).
- Individualize PD efforts to meet the needs of new teachers in the context of each school; professional development must be collaboratively developed to define a focus (Brownell, Yeager, Sindelar, van Hoover, & Riley, 2004).
- Provide opportunities for mentorship relationships to develop among new and more experienced teachers as learning is influenced by the development of mutual relationships and trust (Hertzog, 2002; Wood, 2001).
- Develop a school climate where feedback and collegial interactions stimulate greater reflection and skill development among teachers (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Branford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald, & Zeichner, 2005).
- Evaluate the extent to which teachers are able to motivate students to learn through observation and feedback, and data-based analyses of student performances (Berliner, 2005; Cooter, 2003; Ivanci, 2001).
1. **Attitudes.** Effective teachers understand that all learning activities are filtered through students' attitudes and perceptions.

2. **Knowledge Application.** Effective teachers help students to acquire new knowledge by encouraging them to relate new knowledge with what they already know and by providing them with opportunities to organize information in ways that facilitate learning.

3. **Extension of Knowledge.** Effective teachers help learners to refine and extend their knowledge by providing opportunities for them to use higher order thinking skills.

4. **Using Knowledge.** Effective teachers involve students in long-term, self-directed projects that require investigation, decision making, research, problem solving, and intervention.

5. **Habits of Mind.** Effective teachers should help their students develop sensitivity to feedback, desire for accuracy, persistence in the face of difficulty, and resistance to impulsive actions.

Throughout the school year, Project Achieve staff members also worked closely with the leadership team (principal, vice-principals, and teacher leaders) to guide professional development based on questionnaire responses and observations of teaching performance. The School District of Philadelphia hired master teachers in the role of teacher leaders to assist classroom teachers in implementing the core curriculum more effectively. Several of the workshops and team meetings focused on standards-based assessment practices, having teachers analyze their students' benchmark scores to develop plans to re-teach content, lesson plan design, and individualized help for struggling teachers.

**Observations of teachers**

A key feature in the Project Achieve professional development model was a focus on providing teachers with non-threatening feedback based on formal classroom observations of their teaching. An observation instrument was created based on Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning model, thus, both the questionnaire and the observation instrument evaluated the same competencies. Formal observations occurred October, February, and April, with several informal conversations about teaching and learning occurring with teachers during the interim periods.

The Project Achieve professional development model closely paralleled a typical student teacher supervisory routine, in that the initial formal observation provided a baseline for performance and set the foundation for future, personal/professional development with individual teachers. The goal was to bring each teacher along a continuum of growth in teaching effectiveness based on Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning model.

**Action research projects**

Five teachers conducted action research projects that evaluated the effects of a program or other aspect of their teaching practice. Project Achieve staff members worked with these teachers in the design, measurement, and analysis of data. Final reports were written by teachers, which included a short literature review, research question(s), data collection strategies, analysis of data, conclusions, and implications for practice. Action research projects allowed teachers to become researchers, taking on a more professional role in the middle school.

**Web site for teachers**

A Web site was established at the school that offered information for participating teachers related to effective teaching strategies, examples of exemplary teaching in the form of short video clips, action research projects that were conducted by teachers, and general information about Project Achieve.

**Project Participants**

The 15 fifth and eighth grade teachers who participated in this project were not volunteers. Their average age was 35. The five male and 10 female teachers had taught a mean of 6.5 years, with a mean of 5.6 years being in urban schools. Of this cohort of 15 teachers, eight were elementary certified, four held special education certification (K–12), and three held dual certification in elementary and special education. Only two eighth grade teachers were certified to teach a content area and held middle school certification.

The middle school enrolled more than 1,200 students, ranging from fifth to eighth graders. The ethnic breakdown of students was 66% African American, 14% Latino, 14% Asian Pacific, 5% White, and 4% other. Sixteen percent of the population was classified as students with special
needs, 4% were enrolled in gifted and talented programs, 23% were classified as English Language Learners, 7% were bi-lingual, and 24% took advantage of the extended day program.

Results of Project Achieve

The purpose of implementing Project Achieve at this urban middle school was to explore ways that teacher professional development and increased teaching expertise could be directly tied to increases in student achievement. The results of the project revealed major increases in student achievement as measured by benchmark testing over the year compared to non-participating teachers.

Benchmark scores

As Figure 2 depicts, the students of participating fifth and eighth grade teachers outscored those of nonparticipating sixth and seventh grade teachers on the mathematics benchmark scores over the year. In reading, eighth grade classes outscored the sixth and seventh grade benchmark class scores, while the fifth grade scores lagged behind all grades.

Figure 3 shows fifth and eighth grade scores from the January and March benchmark tests in 2005 (Project Achieve) compared to the same test periods in 2004 (non-participation). The results show positive differences between student achievement scores in the year of project implementation compared to the previous year in both the fifth and eighth grade classes.

Pre- and post-questionnaire responses

Questionnaire data showed limited gains in the fifth and eighth grade teachers’ self-reporting of whether they regularly use, know how to use, or believe their students are capable of benefiting from the desired teaching strategies. The Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning questionnaire items were based on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “almost always” to “almost never.”

Pre-questionnaire results were high, with a mean average across all five categories of 5.88 (out of a possible 7 total score). The average of all five categories in the post-measurement was 6.19, showing a pre-post difference of only .31. However, an item analysis revealed larger differences between pre- and post-test responses on 12 items. Teachers made gains of .50 or better on the following question items:

- Communicating daily academic goals/objectives to students
- Developing lessons that connect to students’ prior knowledge
- Using daily assessments to observe student progress
- Using information from daily assessments to adjust future lessons
- Understanding how to create lessons that access students’ higher order thinking skills
- Using visual organizers
- Planning instruction that requires students to think critically
- Incorporating a variety of questions in lessons
- Designing lessons in which students are required to apply content learned in different ways
- Creating lessons in which students are required to consider alternative points of view
- Understanding how to create a classroom environment in which students participate in the decision making process
- Stressing accuracy over assignment completion

Table: Benchmark Analysis by Grade During Project Implementation

INCLUDES ALL CLASSES (INCLUDING SPECIAL EDUCATION)

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Teacher observations
Large gains were made in teaching performance as measured by three formal observations (October, February, April) based on Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning model (see Figures 4 & 5). Initial observations showed relatively low incidences of teaching behaviors that corresponded to the five Dimensions of Learning. By mid- and post-observations, however, teachers in the study made gains in all Dimensions of Learning. Teachers were observed by Project Achieve staff members for approximately 45 minutes to one hour during each formal observation. If teachers demonstrated the desired skill, the observer recorded the skill as occurring. Non-instances of desired teaching behaviors were given a “0.” Therefore, these data showed the percentage of instances that desired teaching behaviors occurred; scores were then averaged across the five Dimensions of Learning.

A comparison of questionnaire and observation data
A comparison of the high self-ratings with low, initial observation ratings of these teachers reveals a large discrepancy between what teachers think they do and what they actually practice in the classroom. High self-ratings could have occurred because the questionnaire was administered just prior to the beginning of the school year, thus, teachers may not have had enough experience with their students to rate themselves realistically. It is equally plausible that teachers may have overrated their use of research-based strategies because of a lack of understanding of these strategies, which subsequently became clearer to them throughout the year. This latter reason seems logical in that the growth in teachers’ self-reported use of research-based strategies was only minimal from the pre- and post-questionnaire responses, yet observations of their teaching performance revealed larger growth in the use of these strategies.

Focus group discussions
At the end of the year, Project Achieve staff members invited teacher participants to discuss what they gained from participating in the program. The most prominent theme obtained from this discussion was the impact the observations and feedback had on teachers’ growth. Teachers noted that they enjoyed receiving non-threatening and constructive feedback on their teaching. They also reported that having a voice and discussing improvements that they could make in their teaching was beneficial. Similarly, discussion centered on the fact that reflecting on their practice helped teachers to become more focused on student learning. Several teachers indicated that they were constantly engaged in thinking how they might “get kids to where they should be.” Teachers also discussed how they gained a different perception of their roles as teachers. Instead of always having to be the expert in their classrooms, they realized that giving students some autonomy helped to motivate them.

Conclusions
The results clearly show that intervention at the school level with teachers can enhance their instruction in a short period of time. More importantly, there appears to be a direct connection between growth in teaching expertise, as measured by Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning, and student academic achievement. Class scores of the participating teachers on the benchmark assessments were higher compared to non-participants’ class scores, with the exception of fifth grade reading. Further, a comparison of benchmark scores during

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* Benchmark data from Oct and Nov 2003 not available
the year of project implementation with the prior year showed positive differences in these scores during the grant period.

The literature emphasizes professional development that is personalized and needs-based. This study demonstrated that a personalized approach, which focused on participants’ teaching skills based on Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning, positively influenced their teaching behaviors and self-reported use of standards-based practices. This result underscores the need for professional development that focuses on individual teachers.

Another focus of Project Achieve was to provide teachers with essential tools so that they could engage in ongoing formative and summative assessments for the purpose of re-teaching essential skills to low-achieving students. This practice, which was a focus of several grade level team meetings, made an impact on the teachers’ ability to use summative assessments to improve student learning. Data-driven practices are highlighted in the literature as having a strong impact on teacher growth and student achievement.

Implications for Professional Development

A major implication of this research, especially in light of NCLB and NMSA recommendations for quality teaching, is that there is a need for all teachers to understand and evaluate the extent to which their instructional strategies and attitudes are in line with research-based strategies and techniques. Many teachers in this study rated their skills very high on the initial questionnaire, which was not confirmed in observations of their teaching performance. This important finding points to a need for continuing professional development that focuses on making teachers’ tacit knowledge (generally understood and practiced, without knowing the rationale behind the practice) more explicit. This can be accomplished through direct observation and feedback based on Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning model.

Teachers require more time to engage in active reflection of their teaching practice and its impact on student learning and assessment of student work. This requires intensive, personal, or small cohort professional development, as opposed to a major focus on externally conducted, large-scale workshops. Schools might consider a model that many districts, such as Philadelphia, have adopted—the use of teacher leaders (master teachers) to facilitate ongoing, personalized, and needs-based professional development practices.

Action research is a viable tool to enhance the professional role of teachers as it focuses their attention on research-based strategies and constant evaluation of the extent to which students are learning and achieving. This method combined with personalized professional development and small-group instruction, served to focus teachers’ attention on meeting core curriculum standards that lead to measured student achievement.

This study confirmed that teachers need to be provided with regular, non-intimidating, and consistent feedback on their teaching performance based on best practices in education. The teachers in this study discussed their strong desire for feedback that was not connected to formal, supervisory evaluations of their teaching performance. Even more experienced teachers, for whom professional development efforts often fail, may be interested in developing the tools to engage in reflective, data-based teaching practice if they were convinced such teaching tools would lead to significant gains in student achievement.

Figure 4
Observation Data—Fifth Grade Teachers
Notes

A Cronbach Alpha was completed on the questionnaire to measure internal consistency reliability, which resulted in an overall $\alpha = .957$ on the pretest and $\alpha = .946$ on the post-questionnaire responses.

References


I am sure I am not the first person to wish that our young people could simply hibernate for a few years between middle school and high school only to wake up near the end of their sophomore year. Caterpillars enter cocoons and emerge miraculously as graceful butterflies ready to soar—their transformation graceful and mysterious. Unfortunately, the human child is more like a puppy. They are most likely to grow awkwardly out of proportion while eating everything in sight and destroying the house. Like a puppy, they are redeemed by unexpected moments of disingenuous joy that force us to love them. It is sometimes necessary to humor the silly whims of puppies and adolescents while providing structure and stern supervision.

It was not until a few years ago that I realized these analogies for adolescent development were not helpful to me as an educator. While I had often wished for adolescents to adjust their attitudes, I needed an attitude adjustment myself. I found that a new analogy offered me a fresh perspective on adolescents providing greater empathy and understanding of their challenges. I began to look at young adolescents as I would pregnant women.

Unexpectedly, pregnant women and young adolescents have a great deal in common. Both groups are experiencing a great deal of physical change with hormonal influences and discomfort. Similarly, they are experiencing emotional and social changes as their identities are redefined and adjusted. There are even similarities related to changes at a cognitive level, affecting their learning and memory. A primary difference is that a pregnant woman’s changes are more extreme and noticeable over a shorter period of time. It is also true that a pregnant woman garners more respect and sympathy than a young adolescent can. I have no wish to trivialize the experience of pregnancy, yet now I am disturbed by the ways we discount the experience of adolescence.

Nature in Control
Both pregnant women and adolescents are on a preprogrammed journey, often leading them

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beyond their own control. For both groups, the biological changes are the most noticeable and least controllable. Young adolescents are going through a period of rapid growth as their bodies change from children to adult forms (Berger & Thompson, 2003). This growth is uneven and often awkward, thus a middle school boy's feet often quickly expand long before he reaches his most dramatic increase in height. The body's muscle, bone, and fat proportions change as well. As a pregnant woman's organs bear responsibility for two lives, the adolescent's respiratory and circulatory systems face new demands and stress. Their emerging bodies also have new, and often unmet, needs related to sleep and nutrition. Glandular systems are in a state of flux for years, creating obvious changes in skin and hair as well as less visible changes in hormonal balances (Kipke, 1999).

Resulting from all these biological changes are often people who feel like they have little control over their own bodies, let alone their destinies. Their bodies are tired, malnourished, awkward, and uncomfortable. Their hormones trigger moodiness and increased sexual awareness. An ironic aspect of hormones is that they are triggered by social and emotional situations so that more hormones can be released to create more stress. Thus, a pregnant woman or a young adolescent can be somewhat justified in feeling that their bodies are out of control.

**While growth of the frontal lobe sounds encouraging, the expanded territory must be conquered and pruned in the following years before this potential increase in logic and judgment abilities will be reliably available.**

“Brain Drain”

Elementary teachers who encounter their students during puberty have been seen wondering what happened to their focused, competent learners. Similarly, many pregnant women have complained of forgetfulness, blaming a pregnancy “brain drain” for their lack of focus. Some research on pregnant women argues that no cognitive difference exists beyond that attributable to fatigue and stress (Crawley, Dennison, & Carter, 2003), while others point out that a pregnant woman’s brain shrinks during pregnancy and increases in size after delivery (Oatridge et al., 2002). Recent research on the adolescent brain is less controversial, demonstrating that there are changes that can help explain various aspects of their cognitive behavior (Ponton, 1998: Strauch, 2003).

The frontal lobe of the brain goes through a significant growth spurt near the onset of puberty (Brownlee, 1999). While this sounds encouraging, the expanded territory must be conquered and pruned in the following years before this potential increase in logic and judgment abilities will be reliably available. In the meantime, young adolescents experience greater difficulty with multitasking, analysis from multiple perspectives, and emotional regulation through logic. Like a pregnant woman who frets over her forgetfulness and distracted condition, young adolescents sometimes express frustration that they suddenly have difficulty remembering homework or multiple-step directions.

Another significant change relates to their limbic system regulating their emotional behavior (Strauch, 2003). That system is greatly affected by hormonal fluxes and can function out of proportion to the rest of the brain, resulting in young adolescents acting on emotion. They store arcane information in their memory based on its appeal to their emotions rather than practical knowledge that we have failed to make personally relevant to them.

As a society we are somewhat forgiving of a pregnant woman’s occasional distraction and changed focus. We are less forgiving of the fact that our young adolescents seem to have regressed, becoming less attentive and focused. While the academic tasks we assign them become more cognitively demanding, their attention and logic is more sporadic and unreliable. Efforts by many schools to teach organizational, metacognitive, and memory skills to adolescents are very appropriate to their needs. At the same time, an understanding that their distraction is not a deliberate form of contrariness might help us be patient with their forgetfulness.

**Changing Identities**

A pregnant woman experiences changes in her understanding of herself both in terms of body image and social roles as she prepares to be a
mother. Young adolescents undergo a similar shift that is almost more dramatic as the process of self-definition is new to them. While a pregnant woman must consider what kind of mother she will be, a young adolescent considers what kind of person he or she will be—addressing all aspects of his or her future.

Young adolescents are involved in the process of self-creation at many levels. They are establishing their identities in terms of racial and ethnic belonging and acceptance (Manning, 1999/2000). They are developing a sexual identity as they come to terms with their changing bodies and examine sexuality in relation to morality (Berger & Thompson, 2003). Body image is a significant challenge for young people as they learn to accept their own body’s unique shape in relation to cultural standards and norms (Yates & Brodkin, 1994).

As young adolescents attempt to change their identity from that of a child to that of an adult, their transition is often bumpy. It is normal to find the freedoms of adults more attractive than the responsibilities of adults. The desire for new experiences through this process can often lead youth into risky situations (Ponton, 1998). Their urge to be free of the limitations of childhood can lead them away from protective restraints that once kept them safe. Their natural struggle is toward independence. It is ironic that the challenge some new mothers must face is that of interdependence as they recognize that they must become dependent on others to aid in the upbringing of a child.

It should not be surprising that young adolescents sometimes demonstrate egocentrism at this time in their lives. Looking at race, gender, and societal roles, they must often experiment with different views of themselves. Our reactions to them are unwittingly important because much of their self-image is built through the mirror held before them by how others see them.

### Welcoming New Life

Adjusting my attitude toward early adolescence has changed my entire approach to dealing with students. Understanding their process and how it affects their behavior and learning has changed how I interpret their actions. I better understand how to ease their transitions. I have more patience and empathy for their experience as well. While I still do not judge a young adolescent as beautiful as a new baby, I better appreciate their unique beauty. By celebrating early adolescence, I am celebrating the creation of a new person.

### References


Celebrating Teachers and Teaching

Losing the Fear of Sharing Control: Starting a Reading Workshop

This We Believe Characteristics

• An inviting, supportive, and safe environment
• High expectations for all members of the learning community
• Students and teachers engaged in active learning
• Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory
• Multiple teaching and learning approaches that respond to their diversity
• Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning

By Lesley Roessing

We stood in the empty classroom. Lisa looked up at me. “I couldn’t understand what I read last night,” she said.

I looked at her, speechless. The class was reading a novel, and I wondered why Lisa had been failing the daily quizzes. These were genuine “right-there” questions, designed only to see if the students had read their nightly assignments.

Of course, you do. You’re a good student. I bit back my thoughts.

“I did the reading both nights; really, I did. I just don’t understand what I read.”

I looked down at this little, trusting face. Goodness! This child expected me to teach her reading. Even worse, she needed me to be a reading teacher, not the literature teacher I considered myself, with degrees in English and comparative literatures, courses in literature, literary theory, speech and writing, and one lone course in Reading Across the Curriculum in my Secondary Education Masters program. I was here to teach eighth graders how to appreciate literature, not how to read it! I sighed; Lisa and her problem were not going to go away.

Then it dawned on me. I might not be trained as a reading teacher, but I was a reader. I thought about what I do as a reader. I connect the reading to my life, to other works, to what is going on in the world; I question; I visualize what I am reading; I read between the lines and predict what is going to happen. Sometimes I even reread or grab a dictionary for clarity.

Lisa and I sat down, and I made a plan for her. The next day we met again. For two days I asked her to try various strategies.

The third day Lisa came to class. “I understood what I read last night, and I remember it!” That class period she passed the quiz and contributed to the group discussion.

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Too close for comfort, I thought. I realized that Lisa was motivated enough to tell me that she could not comprehend the text. How many more were just coasting along on class discussions? There was no way to avoid it; I needed to become a reading teacher. That summer I enrolled in the Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project’s Literature Institute. There, I read the masters, Atwell to Zimmerman, and planned for next year.

The Control Issue
Reflecting on my teaching style, I realized that the way I taught gave me control of the classroom and control of my students. Control was safe; I knew what I was doing, but were the students learning? Obviously, not all of them. I resolved that I would read and apply the insights recorded by others—that I would work out a feasible plan that addressed teaching the state standards and fit into a middle school curriculum. After reading and reading, I vowed to change my classroom into a true reading-writing workshop so that my students could improve their reading skills and learn to love reading and literature as much as they loved writing. As I had previously done with writing (Roessing, 2004), I would trade total control for some student choice.

I began my journey to release this total control of my classes’ reading, to share responsibilities with my students. But, I needed a plan. I teach two eighth grade heterogeneous language arts classes in a 6–8 middle school. For the past 15 years, my literature curriculum had been comprised of a mixture of short stories, poetry, folk tales, a play, and two or three novels. I interspersed magazine and news articles and essays, typically as background for the novel units or as examples for expository writing. In my language arts classes, all the students read the same literary works at the same time and for the same amount of time, all of which I controlled. The only choice the students had was their independent reading 25 minutes per night, and I did give them a (limited) choice of responses.

Did my students like reading? Not especially, although a few did mention that they particularly liked one chapter in Rifles for Watie. Was I in control of what we did and what we thought in my classroom? You bet! And everything moved along smoothly. I assumed that everyone was reading, and that, if I force-fed enough culture and showed them how to find the answers, one day they would all love to read as much as I do and would read as well as I do.

Then came Lisa. And there was Richard, who admitted he never even opened the book; he just listened in class and scored the highest grade on the test “since the teacher did such a thorough job of explaining the book and answering her own questions.” There was Alan, who did not even pretend to read, who said he would rather go to summer school where they did not have to read so much. And there were the students who insisted that they loved to read but stopped so that they would not have to read my books.

The depth of my problem suddenly struck me when I read a quote from one of Wilhelm’s students. Randy defined school as “a bunch of crap that doesn’t mean anything … you just do a bunch of crap for someone else [the teacher] so you can get through the year” (Wilhelm, 1997, p. 12). That sentence really got to me. It affected me, not just because it was true, but because I had ambivalent feelings about it. First of all, I could see many of my students saying the same thing, and, second, I really thought that my “crap” was important. I worried that my students needed my crap—that they could not become educated without it. And that is when I knew I needed to change.

First of all, where did I get this idea that I needed to control all aspects of my classroom, especially reading, afraid that students would not learn what they needed, that the product would not remain sacred? Through writing workshops, I had somewhat successfully turned over responsibility of writing to the students. But reading was a different matter. Thinking about my classes with this new insight, I felt the same as Atwell (1998), who said that after her “writing revolution” she realized, “Writing was something that students did, and literature was something I did to students” (p. 21). I was determined to empower my readers and move toward a reader-centered classroom. I decided that I would learn to share control of reading: what (choice of literature read), how (movement from a variety of shared readings to book club readings to individual reading experiences), where (a realistic combination of reading workshop and at-home reading time), and, most importantly, why (validation of reader response). I began to agree with Wilhelm (1997) when he wrote, “Creating this new environment [would be] a new and difficult direction to move in as a teacher” (p. 11).
My Plan

The first step was admitting that my teaching methods had become ineffective. Students needed to read better, and they needed to be able to read well to enjoy reading. Therefore, if my goal was to have students love reading as much as I do, they needed to read as I do. However, as pointed out by Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1995), “We found an assumption that reflects our (teachers of secondary English) own experiences rather than that of the contemporary adolescent student: ‘I’ love literature, and ‘I’ managed to ‘get hooked on it,’ and somehow, so will they; ‘I’ will help them get there. The teacher is still the director” (p. 21). No one directs my reading; no one tells me what to read, although I appreciate recommendations, and I find that I expand my tastes when I am introduced to diverse types of literature—especially when the introduction serves a purpose. I love to talk about my reading with people who are reading the same book and also with those who are not reading that same book (or article or poem). And I appreciate time to read. My students needed the same—recommendations not requirements, peers with whom to discuss their readings, and time to read.

I recognized that, in my role as teacher, I could not break my control abruptly—not for my benefit, but for my students, I needed to prepare them for the transfer of power. I had to give them the tools they would need to assume control of their own reading and learning. An analogy came to mind. When I stopped smoking, I went “cold turkey,” which successfully broke my habit but was not effective for my weight; I should have planned for a substitution for the cigarettes (other than food). In the same way, I could not just say, “Go forth and read. See you in June.” Giles (1993) (cited in Spiegel 1996) wrote, “Teacher trust of students does not mean teacher abandonment of students” (p. 335). I needed to train my readers with demonstrations and strategy lessons. Purvis, Rogers, and Soter (1995) explained Rosenblatt’s Literature as Explorations, writing, “Exploration doesn’t mean being lost in the woods. It means finding out about new territory for the explorer. The students are the explorers, but they need guides who help them” (p. 77). I needed to become a guide, and my lessons would become their maps, assessments their compasses.

I decided that the most effective journey toward independence would be to begin with shared readings—short stories, poetry, and informational articles first, then a novel. Rief (1992), a strong proponent of reading workshop, advocated differentiated reading experiences, “We read fine literature in many different ways: kids choose their own books, we read different books to each other, and sometimes we read the same books together. I think we need to get at reading from all those angles” (p. 101).

Starting the Path Toward Independence—Shared Readings

In September my classes began reading short stories so that I could teach reading strategies using writings that we could read during class time and discuss together. I introduced each new concept with an approximately 25-minute lesson that included an example, guided practice, and independent practice and repeated the same strategy over the next week or so with 10-minute follow-up lessons. Most of these initial concepts focused on reading strategies, such as questioning, visualization, inferring, and connecting, and others focused on literary elements and classroom procedures (collectively referred to as “focus lessons”). We read these stories in varied ways: I read aloud, modeling strategies; students read aloud, using Reader’s Theater techniques; and students read silently. The method depended on the story and the students’ reading proficiencies. I know that student reading improves most by reading, but I felt it was important to model reading and strategies. Reading aloud is primary, especially in training readers.

Each class began with a focus lesson. Next, we would read the story, and we would discuss the story, focusing on the strategy or literary element being taught or practiced, scaffolding on past lessons. Many times, when I read aloud, we would practice a strategy, questioning or inferring as we read. When students were more practiced in the strategy, they would read silently, using sticky notes to mark strategies used.

After introducing a variety of reading strategies and skills through shared stories and, later, factual magazine and news articles, my classes segued into a shared novel. One aspect of control I retained was in choosing shared readings that I really like, that I am passionate about. As Rief (1992) pointed out in Seeking Diversity, “If I am not passionate about the book and what it says, I will not pass on that love of learning from reading” (p. 105). On the other hand, I chose stories and books that we
read together based on the interests of adolescents and relevance of the texts to my students and their lives. “Selection ... is a significant factor in engaging many adolescents (and any reader) in what they read” (Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1995, p. 24). There were three reasons for my choice of novel: I had enough class sets (practicality); it was a story that most, if not all, would find interesting and that a heterogeneous class could read with some assistance; and the novel lent itself to practicing such reading strategies as questioning, inference, and visualization. I knew it was important to choose a novel that everyone could and would read and that would generate discussion and even debate.

**Continuing the Path—Book Clubs**

After these shared readings, the students were ready for the next step: Book Clubs (also known as literature circles (see Daniels, 2002; Latendresse, 2004)). For this experience I looked for books for which I could round up five or six copies of enough novels of different genres and topics, and diverse reading levels to give choice to every group—class novels from years past, novels of which I had duplicates and the library had a copy or two, novels from the summer reading list donated by students.

The students looked through the offered selection of novels and chose their books and, thereby, formed their book clubs. Lessons associated with this experience focused on choosing appropriate books by reading level and interest, working cooperatively in a group, and other club management issues. We had practiced literature circles a few times for our discussions of the shared novel so the class was familiar with meeting in this way.

I explained that in book clubs the members would first meet and decide how they were going to read the book. They would meet every other day to discuss their reading and would be given time for in-class reading. I gave them an approximate finish date, and the club was to decide how many pages to read for each meeting. It was left up to the discretion of the members to make such decisions as to whether to read more or less over weekends; take other activities in consideration; start slowly and, as they became familiar with the plot, move more quickly; to co-operatively prepare their schedule. It was also within their jurisdiction to plan the in-class reading time. They could choose to read aloud to each other or read silently or work on response journals during that stage.

Instead of assigning roles to each student, I deviated from Daniels’ (2002) original model by requiring each student to bring to each club meeting a discussion point, a quote or passage to share aloud, an analysis of a new vocabulary word, and one question, prediction, or connection made with the text. That way, absenteeism did not leave a gap in the discussion, a problem I had discovered in past years of literature circles. I found that most of the students kept up with the readings and that the few who did not still benefitted from the discussions, were “caught up” by the meetings, and wanted to read for the next session so that they could participate (and not incur the disdain of the peers who took this deficit personally since it now affected them). At times, members of groups met with other groups to compare characters, settings, plots, or writing styles.

Each student was required to bring to each club meeting a discussion point, a quote or passage to share aloud, an analysis of a new vocabulary word, and one question, or connection made with the text.

After students finished reading and discussing the book, each book club prepared a presentation of their choice to share the book with the rest of the class. We had quite a variety—brown bag projects, readers’ theater, skits, interactive class activities, and a Jerry Springer talk show. These gave my other students ideas of other books to read during the next stage: individual reading.

**The End of the Path: Individual Reading**

Now my classes were ready for individual reading—what some might refer to as “reading workshop,” although I felt that we had been workshopping all year. Atwell (1998) defined workshop as “student-centered in the sense that individuals’ rigorous pursuit of their ideas is the primary content of the course” (p. 71). By this point I had introduced and they had practiced all the reading strategies and were familiar with literary elements as well as a variety of writers’
crafts. They had read literature chosen by me and self-chosen literature; students had read aloud and read silently; they had discussed writings in large groups and in small groups; they had reflected together and individually. They had also practiced a variety of reading responses. The classes had been trained toward independence. Also, beginning with shared readings and progressing to book clubs and now to individual reading, each class had built a reading community. In this way, by the time students were reading self-chosen texts, they did not feel they were reading alone; they were reading separately but not in isolation—individually, not independently.

As the first step in preparation for the individual readings, I thought about my classroom library. I realized that, since many of the books had belonged to my own children, variety was missing; for example, there were few horror or sports books. I needed to think of the interests and reading levels of all of my students and offer a variety of reading levels, lengths, and genres. I ordered from book clubs, hit the second-hand bookstores, and, during the year, asked my students for donations of books. Well into reading workshop, students would send me to the bookstore on weekends with a list.

A valuable activity was having the students rearrange the classroom library. For years my library of approximately 400 books was organized by author. The books sat there, year after year. After teaching genre, I distributed books to my classes and asked students to read the covers, look through the books, talk to others, and decide on genre classifications for their books. Productive discussion among students flourished. There were discussions about genre but also discussions about authors and books read. Short book talks spontaneously took place. We then re-shelved the books by genre, labeling each shelf: Horror, Mystery, Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Historic Fiction, Biography & Memoir, Folktales, Multicultural Lit, Adolescent Life, Romance, Sports, Classics, Drama, Poetry, Short Stories, Nonfiction. Almost immediately, books started flying off the shelves. The students felt more secure; a boy who wanted a sports book did not fear ending up with a romance and did not mind trying a new author since he knew that the book would be somehow related to sports. Mystery readers tried Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes, authors above their usual pleasure reading level. And, if students were looking for particular authors or books, they usually knew under which genre to find them.

Next, the students needed to be prepared for individual choices. Lessons on choosing books for a variety of interests and purposes, on authors, and on varying genres for varying purposes, as well as examples of book talks given by our librarian, students, and me helped my students to “cross the bridge” to independence. Natalie said, “Over this year … I also read books suggested by other students, which I have never really done before.”

Individual Reading Workshop Begins

I had explained the process of reading individually as opposed to book club reading. I explained the concept, and the students knew that they could choose what to read and where in the classroom to read; they could get comfortable and would be reading for at least a half hour per workshop class, which was a little more time than they usually had in book clubs. Finally, I held my breath, and we began. I presented my focus lesson (nothing new there) and told the students that they could now go to places in the classroom where they could comfortably read. I looked on in amazement as Heather took out her fleece blanket and headed to lean against the back wall, Tommy pulled out a Spiderman pillow and sat under a table, and a few students sat on the carpeted floor in various parts of the classroom; many stayed seated at desks but moved, turning their desks sideways and even backwards.

They are making a mockery of this, I thought pessimistically. What have I done? I’ll never get control back.

Then they got out their books and read—each of them, all of them! I got my file folder with overlapping individual 3”x5” cards taped inside and a pen and started making the rounds of conferences, asking them about their choices, whistling inside but looking like all this was expected. I felt like Sally Fields at the Oscars saying, “You like me! You really like me!” But, in this case, referring to reading workshop.

By the time students were reading their own texts, they did not feel they were reading alone; they were reading separately, but not in isolation—individually, not independently.
And, in each reading workshop they read. And in each reading workshop until the end of the year, I was amazed and thrilled. I would like to give an example of the students who did not read and the brilliant plans I used to get them to read, but the simple truth is that, this year, everyone read in class every time. Surely, not all students always remembered to bring their books, but they were trained to go to our bookshelves and get a book of short stories or poetry, or even a magazine, for the period. When students finished their books, they went to the bookshelves for another—with some conferring with me or other students—or to our school library. By March or April, readers usually knew what book they wanted next.

I often tell the story of when my two classes got off the same schedule. My second class of the day walked in with their books, and I said, “It can’t be your reading day; the last class said it was their reading workshop. I must have forgotten to change the workshop signs on the hall bulletin board last night.” They started laughing. One student said, “Period 3 told us they lied to you. It was their writing day, but they wanted to read.” Lying to read? I didn’t know whether to be angry or proud.

Scheduling Workshops

During the earlier time of shared readings (short stories and our novel), I had also taught writing with shared writings. Our school is on a modified block schedule: Language arts classes are 85-minute periods, all year. Therefore, usually this writing was accomplished during the half period before or after reading or on days after a reading was finished. As the classes moved to book clubs, I began alternating reading and writing workshop days, posting a sign outside my door to remind students. Typically, I began class with a non-workshop lesson such as language study or standardized test-taking skills. I started workshop time with a 15-minute lesson (including the reading aloud of a picture book, poem, excerpt, or continuing story, the focus lesson itself, and guided practice of the skill or strategy presented or reviewed in the lesson). After individual reading time of 30 to 35 minutes, we ended with a 10-minute share, discussion, and, at times, a book talk. Thirty minutes, in my estimation, was the perfect length for reading and writing some responses. As the students read, I circulated, conferring with about one-third of the class for about 15 minutes; the remainder of the time I read. Experts differ, but I think it is important for students to see me, as a model, read and react to my reading—laughing, crying, gasping. I also talked about my books during share time and gave book talks. I read a range of adolescent books, “adult” books, and books which my students lent me. Students also borrowed the books I was reading. There were some books that I was still in line for at the end of the year. I was part of the community, and it felt good. I got to know my students as readers and could, therefore, recommend books. They got to know me as a reader and also recommended books.

To improve reading, reading should occur daily. For homework during workshop, students read for 25 minutes each night, five nights a week, and wrote journal entries, sharing their at-home reading experiences.

Student Response

Through my personal professional development, I became familiar with Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory. As Wilhelm (1997) explained it, “reading is a ‘transaction’ in which the reader and the text converse together in a particular situation to make meaning.” (p. 19) In other words, readers construct meaning from their transactions with the text. Teaching that focuses on finding the correct answers or interpretations or teacher meaning is efferent or informational reading, and to teach students to experience, enjoy, and own literature, or, as she would say, read aesthetically, I must not even try to control the reader’s response. Gone were my lists of questions, the lists of topics that must be covered. I let readers engage with the text on their own playing fields. How can literature be life changing and lead to self-discovery, as it has for me, if I am inserting my life and values between the literature and the self?

As I thought back, I wondered why I was afraid that my students would miss the “right answer,” the correct interpretation of the text. I remember telling a friend that my problem with literature circles was that, even though the students were talking about the reading and were on task, I was afraid that they might not catch everything. She told me to think of my book clubs; did we cover everything when we discussed the book? Exactly who is the arbiter of “everything” (And why did I think it was me)? Where did the reader fit in?

I found, in my search, that I was not alone. In The Literature Workshop, Blau (2003) pointed out,
As a profession, we have for the past twenty or twenty-five years tended to teach composition in ways that are process-oriented, learning-centered (or learner-centered) and collaborative while we have continued … to teach literature in a way that has been product-oriented … [and] text-centered. (p. 3)

Because of this, students feel that they have to search for not a but the meaning in a text. They surmise that only teachers have the meaning; unfortunately, many teachers also feel this way. But I am learning that there are many meanings and that “literary meaning is largely an individual engagement, that it results from the creative effort of a reader working from a text.” (Probst, 1994, p. 41). Probst further explains,

We must try, first of all, to respect the natural influence of literary texts upon readers [emphasis in the original]. He continues, “Our first task, if we accept that position, is to make sure that the literature has the chance to work its effect on the readers, to make sure we don’t get in the way, substituting other matters for that vital influence. … Implicit within this vision of literary experience is a respect for the uniqueness of the individual reader and the integrity of the individual reading. We have tended in the past—influenced strongly by the professional tendency to insist upon the rightness of certain readings, upon conformity to established interpretations—to seek consensus in the classroom. (pp. 37–38)

Probst also suggested that teachers guide the design of instruction to incorporate certain principles, such as “invite response to the text,” “give students time to shape and take confidence in their responses,” and “let the talk build and grow as naturally as possible, encouraging an organic flow for the discussion,” among others (p. 42).

**Students feel that they have to search for, not a, but the meaning in a text. They surmise that only teachers have the meaning; unfortunately, many teachers also feel this way.**

However, here again I gradually loosened control of the students. They needed to be guided to make valid responses. Rosenblatt (1978) defined “valid” response as “an interpretation [which] is not contradicted by any element of the text, and … nothing is projected for which there is no verbal basis” (p. 115). Even though readers are free to make unique and personal responses, they need to base their interpretations on their understanding of the actual text. I taught students a variety of journaling techniques throughout the year so that they were responding in diverse ways. By the end of the year, most students had identified their favorite type of response or modified their journaling to fit their particular reading.

**Student Assessment and Evaluation**

The purpose of assessment is to judge students’ learning and, practically, the quantity and quality of work accomplished. Assessment also makes students accountable and provides feedback to both the students and their parents. I attempted to design a system that (a) would balance an evaluation of both student effort and achievement, (b) was based on observation (by me) and performance (by the student), and (c) would not penalize any student risk-taking in either choosing lengthy books or trying and abandoning books that were not right for them. Readers were required to keep a reading log with the date, literary work, and pages read, along with a response journal that I checked weekly. I expected daily entries in the log, and the journal was to contain responses or reflections from all reading. One student said, “[The requirement] forced me to read each night.”

Assessment was based on quantity and quality of the journal responses and by a demonstration of quantity, quality, and genre variety in reading evidenced by log entries and a genre record card that listed 19 genres plus a personal choice category. This card was divided into genres and, when students finished books, they would place a star sticker in the appropriate box. I was not really looking for quantity of stars (I knew from the log that the lengths of the books varied), but for stars in a variety of boxes. On the other side of the card, students listed each literary work read, genre, dates began and finished (or abandoned), appraisal of the reading level for them, and if they wrote a book review or gave a book talk, one being required each quarter. In celebration of finishing a book, students were also encouraged to write the titles of their books and their names on laminated posters of library books hung on the back wall of the classroom. By June 1, the readers had filled in all 300 books listed on the posters and were clamoring for me to buy another set of posters, ignoring the fact that the school year was ending.
Students were also assessed by their preparation for and participation in workshops, both by the actual time spent reading and the discussions following, neither of which turned out to be a problem. The marking-period grade also reflected writings (based on the shared readings) or projects (book club) created in response to readings and book talks or written book reviews (based on individual reading), all of which were collected into a binder for other readers to peruse for book suggestions and some of which were submitted to magazines. The evaluation process ended with students’ self-evaluation of themselves as readers. These diverse criteria for the assessment of my students’ learning also served to assist me in evaluating the success of my workshop program.

Self-Assessment of Reading Workshop: Did It Work?

The reading workshop incorporates what Hansen called the “four key elements” of learning environments: time, ownership, response, and community, which Keene noted as being timeless, relevant to the creation of meaningful environments, and critical to the passionate engagement of learning (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, p. 7).

During this first year, I observed that students read more, read better, and read willingly. When asked to comment on how their reading changed this year and on reading workshop in general, my students observed these same details about themselves. However, I found it interesting that different students focused their comments on different components of the workshop:

Chris wrote, “My reading has changed a lot since the beginning of the year. In the beginning of the year I absolutely hated to read. By the end of the year I started to like reading, I started reading books that I usually would not have read before like Murder on the Orient Express. Usually I wouldn’t read such a long book. I think this was the first book I read that had more than 200 pages. I was proud of myself.” [Chris read 14 novels in nine genres]

John wrote: “I thought reading workshop was a good idea for the school to use. It made me a better reader, and it was cool how we were able to move around the class and find a comfortable place to read.” [John read 10 books in seven genres and sat in four different places]

Lauren wrote: “My reading has changed a lot this year. Reading workshop made me want to read more, and it taught me strategies that I used during reading. I used to read close to nothing but now I like it a lot.” She continued, “Reading workshop was my favorite thing this year in language arts. I liked it so much because I really enjoy reading now and it really got me into reading more than I ever have before. I enjoyed the lessons in the beginning most of the time too.” [Lauren read 17 novels in six genres]

But I think that Emily made one of the most important points:

“I like reading workshop because everyone can read at their own pace and not worry about [it].”

My students chose how they read and how they responded. And what about me? I read right along with them, sharing my revelations—guiding and guided.

References
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

All over America and around the world the new year is a time of optimism and hope for all, but especially for middle level educators and the young adolescents we serve. Being professional educators means being committed to lifelong learning. I encourage all readers to make a resolution to strive for continuous professional and personal improvement to truly make a difference for young adolescents. NMSA and its 58 affiliate organizations provide a wide array of opportunities to help keep this resolution through publications, dissemination of research, conferences, and online resources.

Consider attending a conference such as NMSA’s Middle Level Essentials in St. Louis; Symposium on Middle Level Teacher Preparation in Destin, FL; or the Middle Level Leadership Institutes in Florida and California. Our affiliates provide local and regional opportunities for developing greater knowledge, skill, and disposition as middle level professionals. Of course, it’s not too early to start planning to attend NMSA’s 34th Annual Conference in Houston, TX. In addition to hundreds of breakout sessions and the opportunity to see top presenters, the conference provides the opportunity to meet with fellow professionals who share your commitment to middle level education. All of these resources help to inform our professional practice.

Lastly, you can use Middle School Journal (MSJ) as a resource for continuous professional development. Start with just one research supported practice. Use it, and share the experience with colleagues during team time or the next staff meeting. Likewise, think about writing and submitting your own MSJ or Middle Ground article based on what you are doing at the middle level. This will not only help to inform the rest of us, it will reinforce the resolution made at the start of the year to strive for excellence and to make a difference in the lives of our middle level students.

Mike Dietz
NMSA President

LOUNSBURY AWARD RECIPIENTS HONORED AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

A special feature of the opening general session of the 33rd annual conference was the presentation of not one, but two John H. Lounsbury Distinguished Service Awards, NMSA’s highest. The 17th person to receive this recognition since it was established in 1978 was Barbara Brodhagen. In her 30-plus years in education, Barbara’s unswerving commitment to integrative curriculum, to student voice, to equity and democracy, and to the grand vision of middle level education has impacted middle level education in special ways. Her deep and abiding respect for the dignity of others and her skills in leading the thinking of students of any age have combined to build her legacy as a truly outstanding teacher, mentor, and model.

A completely surprised Sue Swaim was the recipient of the 18th Lounsbury Award. Sue’s vision, dynamic leadership, diverse skills, creative imagination, and exemplary service have advanced the middle level education movement in ways never before imagined. Noted in the presentation was her leadership role in the development and implementation of a wide variety of initiatives that impact not only individual classrooms and schools but also state and federal policy. Sue has made a lifelong contribution as a leading voice for young adolescents.

Thus, at the 2006 annual conference held in Nashville, two highly professional and most competent educators who have made different but equally significant contributions to the education of young adolescents joined the company of NMSA’s most influential educators. Additional information about their contributions to the field can be found on NMSA’s Web site (www.nmsa.org) in the Awards section.

Mike Dietz
NMSA President
NMSA REWIND

• NMSA’s 33rd Annual Conference in Nashville, TN, brought together 10,500 middle level educators to learn, network, and celebrate. Special thanks goes to the Tennessee Local Planning Committee for their thoughtful preparation that set the tone for a very successful conference. We look forward to seeing everyone in Houston, TX, for next year’s conference.

• The Center for Education Policy hosted a Roundtable Discussion on NCLB’s Definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher on November 29th in Washington, DC. Twenty-three organization representatives gathered to discuss this issue and other NCLB recommendations, seeking potential areas of agreement regarding recommendations to policymakers. Susan Frost, NMSA’s policy consultant, and Executive Director Sue Swaim represented NMSA at this meeting. A variety of meetings focused on the reauthorization of NCLB are occurring, and NMSA is actively involved in many of them.

• NMSA’s Vision Task Force, charged with making recommendations to the board about future directions of the association and the updating of the association’s constitution, met in Columbus, December 8–10, to continue its work. This meeting focused on a review of NMSA’s Constitution with recommendations being presented to the board at its January 2007 meeting.

• Please join with us in welcoming graphic designer Nikia Reveal to NMSA. Her work has won awards from the American Chamber of Commerce Executives, Business Marketing Association, Public Relations Society of America, and the International Association of Business Communicators. We are excited about the graphic design talent and experience she brings to this position.

• NMSA Headquarters is currently undergoing expansion of space. Five new two-person office areas and a new board room are under construction. If things remain on schedule, all work will be completed by mid-January in time for the board meeting, January 19–21.

NMSA DISTINGUISHED EDUCATORS RECOGNIZED AT NASHVILLE

Dr. Betty Dore and Christine Waggoner were honored as the 2006 recipients of NMSA’s Distinguished Educator Award at the opening general session of the Nashville Annual Conference. Launched in November 2003, this award recognizes outstanding practitioners in middle level education—those who have made a significant impact on the lives of young adolescents through leadership, vision, and advocacy.

Dr. Dore has been involved with middle level education for more than 30 years in Maine, Colorado, and Virginia. Her distinguished body of work models the vision and values of courageous, collaborative leadership, shared vision, and high expectations for every member of the learning community.

Christine Waggoner currently serves as principal of South Charlotte Middle School in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. Her courageous, collaborative leadership style and high expectations for students, staff, and community have led a school through a district reorganization to the level of acclaimed success. She also has been an administrator in Belgium and was a founder of the European League of Middle Level Education.

Both honorees have made a difference to middle level education in many different ways on a daily basis. Their individual leadership at the university and middle school levels has had an impact at the national and international levels. To learn more about the work and contributions of these honorees, see the “About NMSA, Awards” section at www.nmsa.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Middle Level Essentials, February 5–6, St. Louis, MO: A conference providing an in-depth look into topics essential to the success of middle level schools. This year’s conference features three strands: Professional Learning Communities, Closing the Achievement Gap, and Literacy Across the Content Areas.

A Symposium on Middle Level Teacher Preparation, February 9–10, Destin, FL: Middle Level Teacher Preparation: Best Practices and Future Directions is the focus of this year’s symposium, developed especially for those involved in preparing middle level educators.

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National Middle School Association is dedicated to improving the educational experiences of young adolescents by providing vision, knowledge, and resources to all who serve them in order to develop healthy, productive, and ethical citizens.
What Research Says

Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., Editor

Teachers as Leaders: Collaborative Leadership for Learning Communities

This We Believe Characteristics

- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so
- Collaborative, courageous leadership
- A shared vision that guides decisions
- High expectations for every member of the learning community
- Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning

By Pamela S. Angelle

The idea of leadership is recognized throughout the school reform literature as critical to school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin, & Fullan, 2004). Through increased understanding of the nature of leadership, the definition of this concept has expanded to include leadership at the teacher level. Given the scope of federal and district mandates that fall upon schools, schoolwide learning and the development of learning communities are essential. If schools are to operate as learning communities, they then cannot do so with the leadership of a single person or with a singular leadership strategy (Harris, 2002). Therefore, teacher leadership becomes imperative to the success of any school reform movement (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Frost, Durrant, Head, & Holden, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Murphy, 2005). If mandates for accountability and improvement are not seen as valuable or are not implemented at the classroom level, they are doomed to mediocrity at best or complete failure at worst. Logically, embracing teacher leaders as part of a vision for improvement is a key to success.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of teacher leadership in schools. To accomplish this end, areas which will be considered include:

- The concept of teacher leadership: definitions, roles, self-perceptions
- The relationship between principal leadership and teacher leadership
- The school culture necessary to support teacher leadership
- The organizational structures that support or challenge teacher leadership.

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Teacher leadership reflects teacher agency, through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshalling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve students’ educational experiences and outcomes (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

**Definitions and roles of teacher leadership**
Teacher leaders are those teachers who maintain focus on student learning, seek lifelong learning for themselves, use facilitation and presentation skills, engage others in shared vision and meaning, develop and maintain relationships with other organization members, work with a sense of integrity, and plan and organize (Bowman, 2004; Moller, Childs-Bowen, & Scrivner, 2001). Snell and Swanson (2000) maintain, however, that expertise is the foundation of a respected teacher leader because the level of expertise establishes credibility with colleagues. The literature alternately suggests that teacher leaders are those who have the ability to “encourage colleagues to change” (Wasley, 1991, p. 23) and have the willingness to “lead beyond the classroom and contribute to the community of learners” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 17).

Teacher leadership has also been discussed as an issue of density where a larger number of people throughout the organization are involved in decision making and creating knowledge (Sergiovanni, 2001).

The duties of teacher leaders typically have more to do with a focus on teaching and learning, rather than a focus on the management of the school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Specifically, teacher leaders may visit and observe other teachers, provide demonstrations and feedback to colleagues, attend conferences to re-deliver knowledge to their peers, and develop curriculum (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000). Collegiality, collaboration, and communication are skills listed as necessary for teacher leadership and are frequently found in the literature (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Davidson & Dell, 2003; Fennell, 1999; Harris, 2002; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Thornton, Langrall, Jones, & Swafford, 2001). Hatch, White, and Faigenbaum (2005) examined teacher leadership beyond the school building level and found that teacher leaders can be effective at influencing policy outside of their school, including the district level and wider audiences through presentations and publications.

Just as the definition and duties of teacher leaders are ill-defined in the literature, so are the roles, though Ogawa and Bossert (1995) argued that leadership is a quality embedded in relationships, not roles. Harris (2003) referred to both the informal roles and formal roles of the teacher leader. Informal roles encompass classroom-related functions such as planning, communicating goals, and regulating activities, while formal roles entail specific positions, including department head or subject coordinator—positions that remove the leader from the classroom.

Teacher leadership roles are defined by Thornton, Langrall, Jones, and Swafford (2001) with a focus on change—in planning and initiating professional development, facilitating communication about the change, or in addressing curriculum development or problems.

The evolution of teacher leadership is discussed by Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) in terms of their roles. The development of the teacher leader role includes teacher as manager (e.g., department heads or master teachers), teacher as instructional leader (e.g., team leader and curriculum coordinator), and teacher as re-culture agent (e.g., reformers of goals and norms, proponents of collegiality) (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Reform coaching is another role taken on by teacher leaders—a role that includes building capacity, serving as a bridge between administrators and teachers, and using knowledge to assist others in changing their practice (Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003).

Coaching roles, including reform coaches and content coaches, emphasize the traits of trust, determination, innovation, perseverance, and calm (Guiney, 2001).

Teacher leaders may alternately see themselves as reflective practitioners, action researchers, collaborators, mentors, instructional experts, or risk takers.

**Self-perceptions of teacher leaders**
A focused characterization of teacher leadership is further muddied by their self-perception, which often differs from the perceptions of their colleagues. Teacher leaders may alternately see themselves as reflective practitioners, action researchers, collaborators, mentors, instructional experts, or risk takers (Wynne, 2001). Teacher leaders, at times, perceive themselves as professional development trainers and curriculum innovators (Mimbs, 2002), while their colleagues may perceive them either in a positive light as teacher advocates (Beachum & Dentith, 2004) or in a negative light as elitists.
harmful to teacher morale, or detrimental to accepted classroom practices (Smylie & Denny, 1990).

Allen (2004) examined teacher leadership in terms of their voice, pointing out that too often the teacher’s voice focuses on everyday management issues rather than school renewal efforts. Moreover, teachers must believe that their voice will be respected, listened to, and acted upon. Otherwise, teachers will be unwilling to participate in any reform efforts. Allen categorized the types of voice in schools:

• Voting voice—which requires little time or risk
• Advisory voice—which requires time and some risk when the outcome is not a foregone conclusion
• Delegated voice—which may include teachers serving on a leadership team, thus requiring time and some risk in openly giving one’s opinion
• Dialogical voice—which requires high levels of collegial interaction, a deep commitment, and a high level of risk.

Silva and associates (2000) noted that teachers’ and principals’ voices are missing from much of the literature advocating for teacher leadership, leading to the conclusion that teacher leadership has yet to be defined by those who actually practice the concept.

If teachers are the leaders, then what is the role of the principal? What are the conditions necessary for teacher leaders to flourish? What barriers might stand in the way of successfully encouraging teacher leaders at the school level? A reflection upon the National Middle School Association’s beliefs (NMSA, 2003) provides a roadmap for the answers to these questions.

The sharing of power by the principal is critical to the success of teacher leadership but does not come without some risk and sacrifice from the school administration.

Principal Leadership and Teacher Leadership

Schools that embrace teacher leadership are those “successful schools for young adolescents [which] are characterized by a culture that includes… courageous, collaborative leadership” (NMSA, 2003, p. 7). Collaborative leaders recognize that in today’s schools, one person cannot adequately address the needs of all members of the school community. Empowering others to lead alongside the principal builds collegiality and shares opportunities for active participation in the improvement of the school. This sharing of power by the principal is critical to the success of teacher leadership but does not come without some risk and sacrifice from the school administration.

In schools that are improving in terms of student achievement, leadership is fluid and emerging, rather than fixed (Harris, 2002). This blurring of leadership between leader and follower is alternately termed as leadership that is distributed (Harris), invitational (Stoll & Fink, 1996), constructivist (Fennell, 1999), and parallel (Andrews & Lewis, 2002). By and large, leadership strategies that foster teacher leadership (Harris, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Silins & Mulford, 2004) parallel those strategies found in the school effectiveness literature (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988; Sammons, 1999; Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1989; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993) and may include:

• Empowering others in the organization
• Promoting a shared vision and communicating it to all stakeholders
• Structuring an organization that promotes collaboration
• Exhibiting high expectations for innovation and effectiveness
• Providing adequate resources
• Trusting, supporting, and caring for others and expecting trust, support, and care in return.

Empowering school teachers as leaders requires that principals relinquish some of their power while still retaining ultimate responsibility and accountability (Harris, 2003). Thus, embracing the concept of teacher leadership may prove difficult for some school principals. Others may accept the concept in principle but not in practice. Acker-Hoevever and Touchton (1999) studied the power relationships of teachers and principals and concluded that conditions for successful teacher leadership call for principals to give up power, to release control, to offer respect and trust, and to set...
up conditions for teachers to practice their leadership. However, a caveat to these obligations from the principal is that teachers must be willing to take the power and leadership when it is offered to them. Teachers must also be willing to cross the invisible boundaries from follower to leader.

Anderson (2004) extended the notion of power boundaries between principals and teachers with three models of influence. The buffered principal is surrounded by teacher leaders who act as foot soldiers protecting the principal from the other teachers. In this model, teacher leaders are the “powers that be” and exert pressure to carry out the decisions of the buffered principal. The interactive principal is involved with and works closely with all teachers and staff. This model is one of distributed, shared decision-making. The third model of influence is the contested principal. This principal is outside the loop and works against the teacher leaders. The teacher leaders, in turn, attempt to undermine the decision-making power of the principal. This is a model of conflict.

Leadership practices that promote and empower teachers to contribute to school improvement through their leadership create an organization where all stakeholders can learn and grow. This type of learning organization is built upon collaboration, professional relationships, high expectations, and continual learning.

School Culture and Teacher Leadership
The vision for middle schools encompasses learning, not only for adolescents, but for the adults in the school community as well. Schools that promote lifelong learning for all are “successful schools for young adolescents [which] are characterized by a culture that includes ... high expectations for every member of the learning community ... [with] students and teachers engaged in active learning” (NMSA, 2003, p. 7). Teachers who work in a culture of high expectations and continuous learning find that their leadership skills are actively called upon to contribute to the improvement of their school—leadership abilities that might otherwise wax stagnant in other environments.

The culture of continuous learning is sustained through ongoing, job-embedded professional development. Teacher leadership and learning is fostered through a teacher’s role in planning and initiating professional development, where teachers work together to end professional isolation (Guiney, 2001). Through opportunities to model, share ideas for reform strategies, and participate in team-building activities, teacher confidence is boosted, increasing the likelihood that future teacher leadership opportunities will be accepted (Thornton, Langrall, Jones, & Swafford, 2001). Sustaining the initial enthusiasm and extending the learning of professional development can be achieved through interaction with colleagues. This is particularly true if implementation of the professional development is difficult (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000). In addition to professional development, teacher leadership promotes professional relationships and a participatory work environment through consensus building (Fennell, 1999; Ryan, 1999).

This type of learning organization is built upon collaboration, professional relationships, high expectations, and continual learning.

School cultures that support teacher leadership approach problem solving with enthusiasm, focusing on students as the cornerstone for all decisions. Moreover, these schools foster a high level of trust between teachers, principals, and the community. Teachers believe they are competent and effective, embracing opportunities for leadership (Ryan, 1999; Short, 1998). Schools with these cultures are referred to as learning organizations, characterized by collaboration, risk taking, and shared mission (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

The context in which a teacher works is particularly critical to the success of teacher leadership. A healthy work culture of trust and support where both principal and teachers share a purpose or set of goals will lead to a growth in teacher leadership (Moller, Childs-Bowen, & Scrivner, 2001). Work environments where teacher leadership thrives are those that emphasize collegiality, communication, and collaboration. School cultures built around these relationships find that teacher commitment to the job and loyalty to the organization are enhanced (Fennell, 1999).

Organizational Structures and Teacher Leadership
Aspects that mediate the leadership process
Learning organizations with cultures where teacher leadership can flourish require “organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning” (NMSA, 2003, p. 7). In addition, factors in the school that hinder teacher leadership should be
avoided. The following sections outline these success factors and barriers that extend across school levels, including the building level principal, the teachers who participate in leadership, and the colleagues who work alongside the teacher leaders.

### Principals must not only communicate their boundaries for decision making and power sharing but also their expectations for the role of the teacher leader.

**Principals.** Clear communication with the teacher leaders is a vital component to the success of teacher leadership in a school. Principals must not only communicate their boundaries for decision making and power sharing but also their expectations for the role of teacher leader. While assisting the teacher leaders in developing their leadership skills, the principal should also hold them accountable for decisions made. Time release to work with other teachers and keeping administrative duties to a minimum provides a structure that encourages success for teacher leaders.

Principals can offer support for teacher leadership both overtly and covertly. Through empowering teachers, including them in decision making, recognizing their efforts, relinquishing control, sharing responsibility for failure, and giving credit for success, principals can send the message to the school community that teacher leadership is important and accepted in the school culture. Acknowledging and supporting teacher leaders can ultimately contribute to the success of the principal (Barth, 2001). As Bath notes, the success of “those at the front of the line depends on the support of those behind them” (p. 446).

While principal support is critical to the success of teacher leadership, school building leaders also must be cognizant of their own boundaries for power surrendering and communicate this to the teachers. Principals should take on the role of fostering expertise in the teachers, not promoting their own expertise (Short, 1998). Principals cannot really give empowerment to teachers. Principals can only create the environments and opportunities that lead to and support empowerment. As teachers take on empowering roles, principals must clearly communicate the responsibilities that accompany the roles and the goals the empowered teacher should work toward; that is, toward school-level goals rather than personal goals (Short, 1998).

Resources and time are repeatedly cited as barriers to teacher leadership (Harris, 2003; Ryan, 1999; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wynne, 2001). While principals are often constrained by these factors as well, attempting to alleviate these barriers to teacher leadership sends a message of support to the teacher leaders.

**Teacher leaders.** Tapping teacher leaders to serve involves consideration of appropriateness and willingness. Most schools have limited resources and time capacity; therefore, teachers who can meet the greatest need should be selected. Fully supporting a few leaders is better than partially supporting many (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000). Expertise and leadership skills should be considered; however, just as critical, is the teacher’s ability to influence colleagues and take risks. Teachers placed in leadership roles should be those for whom student learning is the first and last priority (Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000).

Once given the opportunity to serve, teacher leaders receive intrinsic benefits from their position. Teacher leaders have the opportunity to be exposed to new ideas and to engage in nontraditional roles. Moreover, teacher leaders are able to collaborate with colleagues. Opportunities afforded to teacher leaders lead to greater feelings of professionalism (Wetig, 2002). As teachers grow in confidence and a self-perception of professionalism, their sense of agency within the organization may also increase; that is, teachers will naturally develop a perception that they have the means to accomplish goals and a shared purpose. Frost and Durrant (2002) contended that teachers do not need autonomy to restore a sense of agency but need a work culture that provides the capacity to exercise leadership, coupled with the satisfaction of having an impact on facets of the organization. These facets include an impact on teachers (e.g., personal, interpersonal, instructional practice), on the school (e.g., the processes, the culture, the capacity), beyond the school (e.g., knowledge), and on the students (e.g., metacognition, achievement).

Teachers who have the opportunity to pursue leadership roles in the school do not always have the willingness to serve. Barth (2001) noted that the Coalition of Essential Schools found that teacher leaders rarely comprise more than 25% of a school faculty. Why are more teachers not involved in this
positive path to school improvement? Several factors may be responsible for this hesitancy. Some teachers are not prepared to confront hard issues or ask tough questions that may be required for decisions that must be made in the leadership role (Bowman, 2004). Teachers may lack the confidence and belief that they actually have the ability to lead others (Barth, 2001).

Teacher leaders may begin their work with high levels of enthusiasm; however, as the realities of balancing leadership roles with classroom obligations and personal lives set in, enthusiasm often wanes. In addition, personal discouragement at the slow wheels of change may lead to stress and burnout. Facing the constraints of time, resources, and flexibility also dampens the spirits of teacher leaders accustomed to excellence (Beattie, 2002; Lanting & Jolly, 2001). DiRanna and Loucks-Horsley (2001) found that burnout was common in teacher leaders because they are responsible for their classrooms as well as school-level leadership. Recommendations from these findings included the need for a leadership pipeline so that initiatives can continue if teacher leaders vacate their positions.

Ryan (1999) found that one of the greatest barriers to successful implementation of teacher leadership came from the types of situations in which teachers were asked to practice their leadership skills. All too often, teacher leaders are called upon to decide technical issues such as textbook choices and grade book packages rather than administrative decisions such as hiring teachers and budget development. Teachers who are asked to determine the individual work assignments of their instructional teams will feel more empowered by the shared decision-making capacity than those teacher leaders who vote on whether caps can be worn by students on Fridays. Teacher leaders who are deprived of the ability to make decisions on what they perceive are critical issues report greater dissatisfaction with their job, more stress, and less loyalty to their principal (Ryan, 1999).

Colleagues and school environment. A school environment that supports teacher leadership includes quality professional development for the teachers, a culture of collegiality and collaboration, and a respect for the autonomy and abilities of teachers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Unfortunately, the greatest resistance to teacher leadership may come from colleagues. Fellow teachers do not always embrace their colleagues as leaders. When teacher leaders attempt leadership roles, fellow teachers may chastise them for being power hungry or wanting control (Bowman, 2004). Too few teachers take on leadership roles because of contentment with inertia and complacency in their current work of teaching. Moreover, insecure colleagues may take on an “us/them” mentality, separating the teacher leaders from the larger faculty (Barth, 2001). Colleagues can provide the greatest challenge to teacher leadership through active resistance to decisions made, initiatives advocated, or simply to the teacher leaders themselves (Barth). In these cases, without the principal’s support, the concept of teacher leadership will likely fail in that environment.

Conclusion

Teacher leadership is a phenomenon in which teachers daily walk on a balance beam, balancing their desire to influence and improve the school-wide organization with their calling to teach children and see them succeed. To ensure success for these teacher leaders, the school culture must value their work, the school principal must support their work, and their teacher colleagues must be willing to work alongside them as they strive for a more effective school.

Expertise and leadership skills should be considered; however, just as critical is the teacher's ability to influence colleagues and take risks.

Collaboration, shared decision making, reflective practice, quality professional development, and shared goals are all part of an organizational culture that promotes the high expectations and school-wide learning necessary for successful teacher leadership. A courageous, collaborative leader willing to share power, extend boundaries, and provide support, respect, and appreciation is critical to a school embracing teacher leadership. Teachers who are willing to take risks, collaborate with colleagues, engage in nontraditional roles, and who are organized and committed to student learning will inspire excellence and contribute to school improvement as teacher leaders. Teacher leadership as a vehicle for implementing school reform requires a commitment from all members of the school.
community. Organizations that embrace leaders at all levels take the first step on the path to creating successful schools for young adolescents.

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