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Every Setback Presents New Possibilities

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.
—Dickens (1859, writing of events in 1775)

The times they are a-changin’ —Dylan (1964)

What an exciting time to be an educator of youth! The world around us is providing so many teachable moments that we are blessed with an abundance of possibilities. Both Dickens and Dylan can provide inspiration for us. As we look for relevant and challenging themes to tie together standards-based instruction, teachers need look no further than the recent transformative Presidential election for issues that can relate the interests of young adolescents to curricular standards. To start the conversation, here are a few possibilities:

1. Racial history: Civil War, slavery, civil rights
2. Foreign relations: Iraq, Vietnam, China, India
3. Opinion polling: significance, accuracy
4. Social services: health care, education
5. Constitutional rights: individual freedom, public welfare
6. Checks and balances: decisions, accountability
7. Voting rights: historical expansion of the franchise
8. Political discourse: persuasion, propaganda
9. The Green Revolution: energy policy, environment
10. The economy: government role, duties of capital managers, and individual responsibility

These topics can provide the framework for a team to develop an interdisciplinary unit on Presidential elections in democracies.

Topic number 10 above provides a segue to a second grand opportunity: an interdisciplinary unit on The Economy. The dramatic events of the past few months are unprecedented in U.S. history, and their global impact may be unprecedented in world history. So many learning opportunities relating middle grades curriculum to students’ interests and concerns can be developed from some of these recent developments, reflecting a litany of new lows and record declines for the U.S. economy:

1. Employment: Nov. 2008, worst monthly job loss in 34 years
4. Biggest one-day DJIA loss (-777 points) and biggest one-day gain (+936 points) occur just two weeks apart on September 29, 2008 and October 13, 2008.
5. Consumer spending: Biggest drop in 38 years in the third quarter (July, August, September 2008)
6. Economic Productivity: Biggest drop in GDP in seven years during third quarter
7. Bank problems: Most bank failures in 13 years during third quarter
8. Home prices: Biggest quarterly drop in history during third quarter
9. Retail sales: Nov. 2008, biggest drop in sales in nearly 40 years
10. Baby boomers impending retirements: 78 million will soon become eligible for Social Security and Medicare benefits

This list can stimulate curricular discussions about real-world conditions that affect young adolescents and their families, which teachers can use to connect students to standards in compelling ways.

With obstacles come opportunities for growth and improvement. The best way to deal with the changes occurring is to study and understand them. The good news for teachers of young adolescents is that we have an unprecedented opportunity to help our students learn what they need to know to prosper in a season of hope. To paraphrase Dickens: create an age of wisdom, while avoiding an age of foolishness; achieve a season of Light, while avoiding a season of Darkness; arrive at the spring of hope, while avoiding the winter of despair; as we have everything before us.
Curriculum Integration in the NCLB Era

04 In Overcoming Obstacles to Curriculum Integration, L.E.S.S. Can Be More!
David C. Virtue, Jennifer L. Wilson, & Nikki Ingram

12 Academic Teams Promote Cross-Curricular Applications that Improve Learning Outcomes
Deborah K. Reed & Cori Groth

Teachers Actively Learning Throughout Their Careers

20 Transitioning from Teacher to Teacher Leader
Deborah S. Yost, Robert Vogel, & Michael D. Rosenberg

28 Preservice Teachers Experience Middle Grades Curriculum
Karynne L.M. Kleine & Laura Sims McBryar

38 Putting This We Believe into Action in Performance-Based Teacher Education
Laura Van Zandt Allen, Kim K. Ruebel, Melanie W. Greene, Janet E. McDaniel, & Vikki Spencer

Departments

02 Every Setback Presents New Possibilities
The Editor Reflects
Tom Erb

50 Using the Lesson Study Approach to Plan for Student Learning
What Research Says
Susan J. Lenski & Micki M. Caskey

58 Promoting Vocabulary Learning with the Interactive Word Wall
Research into Practice
Janis M. Harmon, Karen D. Wood, & Kendall Kiser

48 NMSA in Action

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In Overcoming Obstacles to Curriculum Integration, L.E.S.S. Can Be More!

David C. Virtue, Jennifer L. Wilson, & Nikki Ingram

Integrative curriculum
Kevin stands knee-deep in the middle of a creek on a sunny October morning. Looking toward the creek bank, he holds up a wet, rusty object. “What do you think it is?” he shouts to Hector, who is kneeling in the sand filling test tubes with water samples. Kevin and Hector are engaged in an eight-week unit on the water cycle and stream ecology. They and their classmates had been concerned about the polluted conditions of a local creek, so with their teachers they developed an inquiry-based, integrative unit of study that combined class work, field study, and a service-learning component.

Integrative/Interdisciplinary curriculum
“You should start a new paragraph here,” Mr. Ramsey advises. “Thanks,” Taylor replies to his geography teacher, as he works on his team’s written report on orangutans. One of Taylor’s teammates designs a poster display across the hall in the science classroom, while another diligently works in the computer lab, trying to finish a PowerPoint presentation on orangutans before lunchtime. Taylor’s teachers have designed an integrated unit on endangered species that includes a trip to the local zoo and culminates with team reports and presentations on an endangered animal.

Correlated curriculum
“Okay, class. Look at the chart on page 231 that shows monthly rainfall in Brazil. Can anyone tell me what the average monthly rainfall in Brazil is?” For the first time in weeks, Shannon’s hand shoots up to answer the question, along with a dozen other hands. “I know this,” Shannon thinks. “We’re learning averages in Mr. Hooper’s math class.” Shannon’s math and social studies teachers have decided to correlate the curriculum standards for their subjects and reinforce the same skills and concepts in both of their classes.

Conventional curriculum
The sound of the bell startles Kendall. The high-pitched drone signals the end of social studies class, and she is somewhat relieved. The bell also reminds her that math class is next. “And what are we supposed to be doing in math today?” Kendall wonders, as she tucks the half-finished social studies worksheet into her binder. Unfortunately, Kendall’s experience typifies the conventional approach to curriculum in middle school classrooms throughout the United States.

The vignettes in this article represent various approaches to middle level curriculum design, each of
which we have experienced as students, teachers, and teacher educators in middle school classrooms. Arnold (1997, adapting Brazee & Cappeluti, 1995) located these approaches on a continuum with conventional curriculum and integrative curriculum at opposite ends. Kendall is experiencing a conventional school curriculum, in which clear boundaries exist between subject areas, and teachers make no effort to bring coherence to the curriculum. In contrast, some of Shannon’s teachers are implementing a correlated curriculum, in which certain vocabulary, concepts, and skills are reinforced in multiple subjects. For Taylor and his classmates, the curricular boundaries between different subjects are blurred. They are experiencing a curriculum that may be considered interdisciplinary or integrated. Kevin and Hector’s teachers joined with their students to develop an integrative learning experience. Curriculum at this level of integration will:

- Explicitly involve questions and concerns from the young people who actually carry out the unit.
- Involve widely shared, larger world concerns that are clear and compelling.
- Engage a wide range of knowledge, skills, and resources.
- Pose opportunities for in-depth and extended work.
- Present possibilities for a wide variety of activities.
- Present possibilities for personal and social action, both in school and outside school. (from Beane, 1993, p. 75)

Does Kendall not deserve the same kind of engaging, integrative learning experience that Kevin and Hector are enjoying? What would it take for Kendall’s teachers to make the curriculum more coherent, more engaging, and more integrative?

Ideally, teachers have access to adequate instructional supplies and resources, the Internet and other technology, and other material support; relationships among teachers, students, and staff are positive, trusting, and collaborative; common planning time, flexible scheduling, and other structural/organizational supports are in place; and the overall school culture supports curricular innovation (e.g., Beane, 1993, 1997, 1999; DeCorse, 1996; Nesin & Lounsbury, 1999). However, Kendall’s teachers may be working under conditions that are less than ideal for developing fully integrative curriculum.

We believe that any teacher or team of teachers can change or overcome these material, relational, structural/organizational, and cultural conditions that can impede curriculum integration. In this article, we share some examples of incremental steps our teams have taken to develop and implement more integrative learning experiences for our students.

**Sometimes L.E.S.S. is more**

The process through which teachers transform the curriculum over time is best explained by incremental change theories (Boyd, 1979; Helms, 1981). Arnold (1997) asserted that most teams accustomed to conventional curriculum will have difficulty if they attempt to begin developing curriculum at the integrative end of the continuum. More likely they will try only a short unit or two their first year, choosing topics that fit most easily with the conventional curriculum. As they gain confidence and experience working together, effective teams will become more flexible and enlist more student initiative and responsibility. (p. 455)

Teachers will tinker at the margins of the curriculum, effecting incremental change, until they begin to feel comfortable with the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, and they are willing to cede control of some curricular decisions to their students.

Curricular change does not have to be sudden or revolutionary, nor does it have to involve an entire team of teachers. Individual teachers in a single classroom and teams unaccustomed to collaborative efforts can take incremental steps toward integrative curriculum. In short, when it comes to curricular change at the middle level, sometimes L.E.S.S. is more. Individual teachers...
and teams of teachers can move toward the integrative end of the continuum by using local, school-based resources; by employing emergent curricular designs that capitalize upon teachable moments; by starting with simple, less complex approaches to integration; and by implementing small-scale integrative learning experiences within a single classroom.

While the school social environment can be a rich curricular resource, teachers can also guide students through interdisciplinary, field-based investigations of the natural environment on or near campus. For example, each school year, David taught his seventh grade geography students about weathering and erosion by taking a walking tour of campus to search for evidence of these physical processes. Other educators have developed local or school-based studies of watersheds (e.g., Endreny, 2007; Kenney, Militana, & Donohue, 2003; Tanner, 2001), meteorology (Kahl, Horwitz, Berg, & Gruhl, 2004), and ethnobotany (Reed, 2003).

By tapping into local resources, teachers can make the curriculum more relevant and meaningful for their students. Family and community members can be living textbooks for oral history projects (Carter, 1995; McCarthy, 2003; Wyatt, 2001). School and community needs can be catalysts for powerful service learning experiences (Bohnenberger & Terry, 2002; Harris & Harris, 2007; Kesson & Oyler, 1999; Laroder, Tippins, Handa, & Morano, 2007). Teachers should brainstorm potential curricular resources in the school and community—individuals, businesses, museums, historical sites, parks—and they should include students in this process. As Nesin and Lounsbury (1999) asserted, sometimes the search for information and instructional resources can be “a part of learning how to learn” (p. 20, emphasis added).

Emergent design
Emergent (Jones, Evans, & Stritzel, 2001; Jones & Nimmo, 1994) or generative (Cordeiro, 1995) curriculum design is usually associated with early childhood settings; however, teachers at all grade levels may encounter opportunities to seize teachable moments and develop curriculum generatively with their students. David was teaching seventh grade world geography when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred. During the weekend that followed, he was overcome with a sense of urgency about his role in helping his students understand what was happening and why it was

The learning goals would serve as a compass to guide their discovery, rather than a roadmap with a specific destination.

Leverage the local
Teachers can overcome material and organizational challenges to integrative curriculum development by leveraging resources in the school or local community. While David worked in the media center at a pre-K–6 school, he had the opportunity to help the sixth grade students with their inquiry projects in science class. Each year, the sixth graders designed scientific experiments and presented their findings in a science fair format, with data displayed on colorful tri-fold boards. Students typically designed inquiry projects about things like battery longevity (Which battery lasts longer?), plant growth (Does music affect plant growth?), or the effectiveness of popular sports drinks (Which sports drink gives an athlete more energy?).

One year, several students had difficulty formulating research questions that interested them. David asked them if they ever considered doing research about their school. He pulled books and journals from the teacher collection in the media center and showed the students how researchers study countless aspects of social settings like schools. The students were fascinated to learn that both researchers and they had the same kinds of questions about school regarding things like gender, student behavior, and instructional strategies. They designed studies to answer their own questions: Do boys and girls engage in different kinds of play activities on the playground? Do students behave differently at different times of the day? How do students and teachers use hallway space in the school? The students conducted authentic investigations of the social environments in their school, and they presented their findings to their classmates, parents, and teachers during the science fair.
happening. David realized that his students would grow up with the repercussions of these events, much as Cold War politics and the threat of nuclear war shaped the global climate in which his generation was raised. He spent that weekend restructuring his world geography curriculum.

David wanted his students to know the facts about 9/11 and the “War on Terrorism”—the who, the what, the where, and the when. He wanted his students to explain the aims of the United States government’s War on Terrorism and to form and defend a personal position regarding these efforts. Most importantly, he wanted his students to develop an interest in the political affairs of the world in which they lived and to form the attitudes and habits of informed global citizens. His slogan was, “It’s your world. Learn about it. Understand it.”

David distributed the learning goals to his students early in the unit, and he explained them one by one. He also explained that they would be learning about this phenomenon together as events unfolded, and the goals would serve as a compass to guide their discovery, rather than a roadmap with a specific destination.

The unit quickly became a team-wide, correlated effort with contributions from the math, science, and language arts teachers. The unit included analysis of TV news clips; several teacher-designed WebQuests; a persuasive writing assignment that required students to defend a position related to the war in Afghanistan; and an activity that involved the use of spreadsheets to compare statistics related to quality of life (e.g., literacy rates, infant mortality) in select countries.

The tragic events of September 11 provided an opportunity for David and his team to depart from “business as usual” in their curriculum so that they could address questions that were significant and meaningful to them and to their students.

Keep it simple
Jen’s seventh grade team wanted to move toward more integrative curriculum, but she and her colleagues had some reservations about beginning at a stage of curriculum integration in which content area lines were blurred. Instead of trying to begin at the integrative end of the curriculum continuum, they kept it simple by starting out with a “parallel design” model (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 51).

Jen and her teammates chose the topic survival and addressed this concept in each of the four core content areas and during advisory time. The culmination of the “Survival” unit was a three-day camping trip. During advisory time, students learned about orienteering, packing for a camping trip, knot tying, Morse code, and first aid. Each advisory group practiced campfire skits, and they met with a panel of eighth graders that had already experienced a team camping trip to learn more about what to pack and what to avoid.

In their content classes, the students explored the concept of survival in several ways. In English/language arts (ELA) the students participated in literature circles with books such as Hatchet (Paulsen, 1987), Island of the Blue Dolphins (O’Dell, 1960), Julie of the Wolves (George, 1972), and A Girl Named Disaster (Farmer, 1996). They created and maintained the seventh grade team Web site, which highlighted the unit (e.g., posting student interviews, reporting on advisory activities), and they participated in an inquiry project in which students explored survival in ways that related to their daily lives (e.g., surviving divorce, being cut from a team). In geography class, the students explored the survival skills one might need to live and travel in various foreign countries and within different cultures. The math and science teachers worked together to extend the orienteering instruction that was introduced during advisory time.

During the three-day camping trip, the students participated in night hikes, outdoor cooking, ropes courses, arts and crafts, and many other activities. They kept journals in which they recorded things they learned
and memorable experiences they had. Upon returning to school, they wrote about these experiences in their ELA classes.

From a logistical standpoint, there is nothing simple about planning and managing a camping trip with 90 seventh graders. In terms of curriculum integration, however, Jen’s team took a simple approach that allowed the teachers to maintain control of the curriculum in their respective content areas. By starting simply with parallel integration, Jen’s team worked through some of the cultural and relational constraints of a separate subject curriculum, and they now had a basis for moving into more complex and sophisticated approaches to curriculum integration.

**Start small**

Organizational and structural constraints make interdisciplinary planning difficult or impossible for many middle school teachers. In departmentalized schools, for example, teachers often find themselves isolated. Three strategies teachers can employ in a single classroom to make their curriculum more integrative are read alouds, WebQuests, and critical literacy activities.

Reading aloud to students has long been considered an effective way to promote reading in middle grades classrooms. However, as more and more teachers explore the power of literature across the curriculum, read alouds are increasingly being viewed as a way to promote student engagement and curriculum integration (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Laminack, 2006; Richardson, 2000; Trelease, 2006). Jen recently observed a seventh grade math teacher who uses the book *The Greedy Triangle* (Burns, 1995) to introduce the characteristics of polygons and to help students see examples of polygons in everyday life. Other texts used for read alouds in middle level math classrooms include Joan Bauer’s *Sticks* (1996) and Cindy Neuschwander’s (1997, 1999, 2001, 2003) *Sir Cumference* series.

A sixth grade teacher who was one of David and Jen’s universe students uses read alouds in her science class. For example, when she teaches the standard for identifying the characteristic structures of invertebrate animals (e.g., segmented worms), she reads the book *Diary of a Worm* (Cronin, 2003). Students learn what worms eat, what they do for the environment, and how they live in a humorous yet informative way. Other read alouds aligned with this science standard are *Animals Like Us* (Mills, 2005), *Animal Fact/Animal Fable* (Seymour, 1979), and *The Insect Class* (Zabludoff, 2006).

A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented online lesson in which students engage primarily with information from digital sources (Dodge, 1995). WebQuests have been

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**Figure 1** Curriculum organizing principles—several views from least to most integrated

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<td>Preintegration/ Flexible Scheduling</td>
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<td>Parallel Disciplines</td>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
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<td>Coordinated or Overlap Teaching</td>
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<td>Complementary</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Cooperative Teaching</td>
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<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Multidisciplinary–Fused or Integrated</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>Webbed</td>
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<td>Interdisciplinary Thematic Units</td>
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<td>Whole Language</td>
<td>Structured Core</td>
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<td>Multidisciplinary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated Curriculum</td>
<td>Unstructured Core</td>
<td>Content &amp; Themes Derived from Students</td>
<td>Integrated Curriculum</td>
<td>Student Identification of Issues &amp; Problem Areas</td>
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shown to increase student engagement and motivation, raise academic achievement, and bridge the gap between electronic and print literacy (Bryand, 2005; Kahl, Horwitz, Berg, & Gruhl, 2004; Lipscomb, 2003; Reinhart, 1999; Rozema, 2004; Swindell, 2006; Wagman, 2005). The authors contend that well-planned WebQuests may also provide opportunities for teachers to integrate subject matter and to engage students in authentic, real-world problem solving.

As described earlier, David created WebQuests to teach about the events of September 11, 2001, and Jen frequently used WebQuests in her social studies class when she taught seventh grade. Jen recently observed a middle school teacher who effectively integrated the two subjects she taught, social studies and English/language arts, through WebQuests about radio shows (Windaroo State School, 2007) and U.S. Presidential elections (Schoolmaster’s Delight, 2007). Through these WebQuests, students engaged in individual investigations of the electoral process, then they worked in small groups to create a radio broadcast about the upcoming Presidential election. Teachers can create their own WebQuests by using templates found at www.WebQuests.org.

Teachers in any subject area can employ critical literacy strategies, which help students explore, interpret, and understand various types of text and media at deep levels (Johnson & Freedman, 2005; Knickerbocker & Ryck, 2006; Leland et al., 2003). Students may wrestle with issues such as power, voice, and representation as they come to better understand their own perspectives on society. Invitations are organized much like learning centers or stations; however, they are distinguished by the following features:

- Occur in social learning environments
- Focus on making meaning around one experience
- Welcome varied experiences, languages, and resources
- Represent our best current understandings
- Embrace opportunities to use multiple ways of knowing to construct and contest meaning

- Value alternative responses
- Promote the social aspects of learning by taking up issues in students’ lives and placing inquiries within social contexts
- Encourage practices that reach across all dimensions of critical literacy
- Invite further inquiry. (Van Sluys, 2005, pp. 5–6)

Jen has implemented “Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder,” an invitation in which students explore societal stereotypes of beauty and attractiveness. Students measure the features of Barbie dolls and action figures and compare them to measurements of average-sized people. They explore and deconstruct texts about body image, culture, and stereotyping, and they reflect upon their own ideals in relation to societal stereotypes.

Nikki taught critical literacy activities through a unit called “Power of Pictures,” in which she used pictures from Hurricane Katrina to teach her students how to analyze images in the media. Her students learned to distinguish observations from inferences, and they studied how various forms of media use words and images to influence human behavior. Equipped with these critical literacy skills, Nikki’s students extended their learning to a study of propaganda posters from World War I. Students employed the critical literacy skills they had acquired to identify and make inferences about the visible details in the posters; to deconstruct the messages they conveyed; and to evaluate the effectiveness of the propaganda.

Read alouds, WebQuests, and critical literacy strategies offer inquiry-oriented learning experiences that allow students to explore real-world issues in personal and meaningful ways. Because they can be implemented in any content area during one or two class periods, these strategies provide small ways for individual teachers to make the curriculum more coherent, more engaging, and more integrative.

Conclusion

Middle level educators need to be ever mindful of the overarching purpose of successful schools for young
adolescents, which is to “enhance the healthy growth of young adolescents as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient young people who are optimistic about the future” (National Middle School Association, 2003, p. 1). Effective middle grades practices, such as team organization, interdisciplinary planning, advisory programs, and flexible scheduling, have been shown to support the general purpose of young adolescent schooling (Erb, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000), but none of these practices should be viewed as the goal or purpose, in and of itself. Moreover, the implementation of any or all of these practices does not guarantee success and, by the same token, students are not doomed to failure if their schools do not fully implement effective middle grades practices. Teachers can and should strive to develop curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory (NMSA, 2003), even under conditions that are less than ideal.

We urge teachers to remember that sometimes L.E.S.S. is more. Many challenges to curriculum integration can be overcome by using local, school-based resources; by employing emergent curricular designs that capitalize on teachable moments; by starting with simple approaches to integration; and by implementing small-scale integrative learning experiences within a single classroom.

'Editor’s Note
Various authors have used different terms over the years to describe the integration continuum of middle school curricula. Figure 1 is included to help readers sort out this terminology when consulting different writers on curriculum integration. Also consult the NMSA position statement on curriculum integration available at http://www.nmsa.org/AboutNMSA/PositionStatements/ CurriculumIntegration/tabid/282/Default.aspx

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The middle school concept was conceived more than 40 years ago (Manning, 2000) to more appropriately focus on the developmental needs of young adolescents, both cognitive and affective. It achieved popularity in the 1970s and has experienced growth since. From 1971 to 2001, the number of grade 6–8 middle schools, the most common grade configuration for educating young adolescents, increased by more than 400% (Miles & Valentine, 2001). One of the identifying characteristics of exemplary middle grades programs is the organizational structure of interdisciplinary teaming (Kasak & Uskali, 2005; Manning, 2000; National Middle School Association, 1996), which is reportedly employed by the majority (somewhere between 50% and 80%) of the campuses identifying themselves as middle schools (Hackmann, Petzko, Valentine, Clark, Nori, & Lucas, 2002; Valentine & Whitaker, 1997). However, there is evidence that merely assembling teams of teachers representing the core academic areas is not sufficient to positively impact student achievement, because teachers must first learn how to function as a team and how to work collaboratively (Erb, 2000; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2005).

Indeed, the literature on interdisciplinary teaming (Erb & Stevenson, 1999; Fauske & Schelble, 2002; Rottier, 2000; Thompson, 2000) as well as the experience of the authors indicates that teachers are often ill prepared to make substantive use of the teaming structure or interdisciplinary planning time. Principals have reported to the authors that when teachers actually meet, they mostly discuss discipline and management issues. This is consistent with research findings that as much as two-thirds of common planning time is allotted to issues other than collaborative instructional planning (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Fauske & Schelble, 2002). Even self-reports by team members indicate that only about 17% of their time is spent on planning interdisciplinary lessons (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004).

Several reasons may explain this inefficient use of team meeting time. First, interdisciplinary teaming is founded upon dual purposes: (a) to “build a sense of community,” and (b) “to promote curriculum
integration” (National Middle School Association, 1995, p. 29; 2003, p. 29). The extent to which teams are able to marry those purposes, rather than treat them as separate aims, is related to the second potential pitfall of teaming—the team’s lack of vision (Arnold & Stevenson, 1998) or task clarity regarding what should be accomplished in their meetings (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004). To resolve these issues, ongoing, job-embedded professional development addressing the normative, interactive, and instructional processes of teaming is mandatory (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Erb, 2000; Rottier, 2000).

Background

The middle school team project described here was part of a larger district initiative, started in 2001 by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to create a systemic model of school improvement for increasing student achievement in low-performing schools. Academic teams were established as the conduit for ensuring that the district planning and improvement efforts changed teacher practices. The focus of this article is the middle school team activities that occurred during the 2004–2005 school year, the final year for external facilitation and reform assessment. The authors were involved in two capacities: (a) as the external facilitators leading the cross-curricular academic teams and (b) external evaluators.

The middle school in which this study took place is located in an urban setting in a mid-sized district of roughly 20,000 students. The middle school has slightly fewer than 700 students, approximately 50% of whom are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. The majority of students are white (67%), 15% are African American, 8% Hispanic, and 8% American Indian. While the campus had posted passing rates in the 80th percentile range or better in all subject areas on the 2003–2004 state criterion referenced tests, the disaggregated data revealed that significant achievement gaps existed between the performance of the white students and that of the campus cultural and ethnic minorities as well as those students in special education. Without intervention, the principal estimated it would only be a matter of time before the campus failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), since the community continued to experience growing diversity.

In the beginning stages of the larger initiative, external facilitators met with middle school and district staff members to collect a range of student achievement and perceptual data. These data informed the district’s decision to focus their efforts on improving literacy across the curriculum and to establish interdisciplinary teams charged with carrying out the work at both the middle school and district levels. The district team was comprised of various district staff members, teacher and principal representatives from the district’s schools, and one school board member. The purpose of this team was to create a literacy improvement plan that would lead to increased student performance on the state assessments. The external facilitators guided the district team in working collaboratively to identify systemic problems affecting student reading achievement, develop a plan of action to address the causes of those problems, and implement and monitor the plan for improvement.

Based on the improvement plans established at the district level, a sixth grade interdisciplinary team at the selected middle school was chosen to pilot a process called the Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle, or PTLC (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2006). In this process, teams of teachers studied the state standards and collaboratively selected research-based instructional and assessment strategies to plan effective lessons. After
implementing the lessons and collecting student work, the collaboration team then reconvened to analyze the work and plan instructional adjustments to meet the identified needs of students. Hence, the team cycled back to the planning phase of the PTLC.

The principal wanted to “start small” and use the success of a pioneering team to generate buy-in from the larger faculty. Therefore, she strategically selected members for the sixth grade interdisciplinary team whom she believed to be leaders among their colleagues and strong instructors in the classroom. This group included one teacher who had recently undergone district training in content area reading strategies. All four members were veteran teachers, each with 15 or more years of experience. The team was comprised of one teacher from each of the core academic areas (English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies). While all interdisciplinary teams at the campus continued to have a daily common planning time for discussing issues related to instruction and the district goal of increasing the literacy skills of all students, only the identified sixth grade team was trained to engage in the PTLC during their first period conference time.

The external facilitator met with this sixth grade team once a month throughout the 2004–2005 school year (nine meetings total), recorded field notes from the monthly meetings, and collected artifacts from the planned lessons. As part of the larger project, the external evaluator also conducted annual site visits to the school and district to interview participants about their experiences with the project. Data collected from the monthly meetings with the academic team and from the annual evaluation site visits were used to assess

- The content of the teachers’ discussions during their monthly meetings.
- The types of relationships that were formed among the teachers and with the facilitator attempting to promote professional learning.
- The perceptions about students’ learning that were expressed by teachers when reflecting on their classroom practice.

The following is a summary of findings related to these three topics. Each topic is discussed according to the changes that occurred as the team met from month to month with the external facilitator.

**Teachers’ discussions of the standards**

At the beginning of the study, each of the four teachers on the interdisciplinary team was individually planning lessons as isolated events, rather than starting with the state standards as specified in the PTLC. Even three months into implementing the PTLC, the teachers were still asking the facilitator what she meant when she reminded them to begin designing lessons by studying their standards. As a result, teachers were not progressively building upon lessons or making interdisciplinary connections related to the standards unless specifically prompted by the external facilitator. For example, during the third facilitated meeting in November 2004, the first author helped guide the teachers in examining how their instruction was preparing students for the next standards to be studied. The social studies teacher, Delores (pseudonyms used throughout), had just shared a lesson using a timeline with dates in B.C. and A.D. (B.C.E. and C.E. are the more universal designations that have generally replaced B.C. and A.D. to indicate dates.). The facilitator asked the math teacher, Gabriela, if she could build upon that lesson to help students better understand negative numbers with a number line paralleling the timeline. Gabriela seemed surprised, commenting she had never thought about doing that. As she started asking Delores more about how she had taught the timeline, the science teacher suggested the timeline first be improved to

*An interdisciplinary team relates a unit theme to the disciplinary standards that guide academic instruction.* photo provided by walker
reflect proportional segments, since he was struggling with teaching his students to create a proportional distance line representing the location of the planets. Delores remarked that she had tried to connect units on various time periods with the novels the English teacher was using, but she had never considered how history might overlap with science or social studies.

This revelation seemed to spark Delores’s interest in the PTLC and, for the first time, she began the next month’s facilitated meeting by identifying the state standard upon which her lesson was based. Both she and Gabriela consistently did so for the next three months’ facilitated meetings, but they complained that it took a long time to look up standards and to cross-check them with the state’s assessment information. Nevertheless, they had both experienced success in using strategies developed in the facilitated collaborative planning sessions, so they were expressing enthusiasm and had started asking the first author how to use other strategies.

Despite these positive changes, the interdisciplinary team members were still not engaging in the PTLC process or having collaborative discussions about instruction and planning, save for the one session per month when the facilitator was present. This was also evident in their day-to-day lessons, which did not reflect the research-based strategies associated with the PTLC. For example, the facilitator observed that lessons shared with her on her monthly visits often appeared to be based upon the next chapter in the textbook and used disconnected literacy support strategies with unclear purposes. One team member commented that she could not find a standard or a strategy that fit her unit in the textbook, so she just guessed or “made them up.” Steve, the science teacher, was the most resistant to implementing the PTLC. However, when pushed by the facilitator to authentically engage in the process, the other members also expressed concern that the PTLC would curtail teacher spontaneity and flexibility.

By April 2005, eight months after their initial training in the PTLC, the teachers had finally begun to use their monthly collaboration time to analyze student work for information on how to improve their instruction and to plan better lessons, including literacy strategies. During the eighth facilitated meeting in April, Steve unexpectedly admitted to the group that he needed help in meeting the needs of his struggling students. He said he wanted to use literacy strategies, but just did not know how. In fact, all four teachers acknowledged they needed more training in applying particular strategies to their content areas. Moreover, the English teacher stated the school and district leadership needed to encourage teachers to move away from worksheets and low-level recall assignments. These conversations marked a turning point in the substance of the team members’ discussions. They reflected a better understanding of the benefits of the PTLC, and at the same time, highlighted the considerable work that needed to be done to capitalize on those benefits school-wide.

**Professional relationships**

Moving the team toward a more substantive examination of the standards and of their translation into instruction required the development of collegiality. Although all academic teams on the campus had historically been given a common planning period, the members of the selected sixth grade team did not seem to know how to work collaboratively or how to engage in meaningful dialogue about instruction. To collaborate means more than just getting along well or even sharing ideas. Rather, it is about learning to function as a goal-oriented team that jointly builds knowledge. It requires members to think differently about the entire process of planning, instructing, and reflecting on students’ work and actions. The early facilitated meetings of the targeted sixth grade team, however, were marked by individual teachers sharing lessons in a fashion that seemed to the first author more like a “show and tell” about what they had done. When this occurred, the other members did not provide much feedback or interact in ways that indicated the efforts of one of their teammates had affected the rest.

During the third facilitated meeting in November 2004, Gabriela, a math teacher with more than 30 years of experience, opened up about her frustration with...
a lesson in which she had tried to incorporate a new strategy. She explained that only one of her students was able to work the problem correctly, and she was worried about sharing her students’ papers with the team. The facilitator provided encouragement by showing a method for analyzing the student work, which resulted in the identification of an interesting trend in the students’ incorrect responses. Together, the team traced the students’ difficulty in correctly answering the problem back to the wording of the original problem, and then discussed possible techniques for improving the lesson. With encouragement from her team, Gabriela agreed to re-teach the lesson, employing the modifications they created collaboratively.

Gabriela later told her principal that she had worried she would be judged as a poor teacher if she admitted her frustrations to the group, but instead felt that the external facilitator was really helpful in guiding the team through an examination of the lesson. The principal described being surprised by Gabriela’s enthusiasm for re-teaching the lesson, because the principal had always viewed her as reluctant to change.

In subsequent monthly visits, there was a noticeable difference in the level and quality of collaboration engaged in by most members of the group. By the fourth facilitated meeting in December 2004, the first author noted the team had now moved from simply sharing their prepared lessons to discussing with the facilitator whether they were “on the right track,” as the science teacher put it. Although the teachers were interacting more collegially with the facilitator, they were not, as yet, collaborating with each other or communicating in professionally supportive ways. This was a particular problem for Steve, who tended to dominate meetings with complaints about students who would not do the work he planned. In one of the monthly meetings, he persisted in complaining about his students for more than 20 minutes, despite the facilitator’s attempts to refocus on the PTLC and the other members’ attempts to interject comments about their own lessons. Finally, a member requested the intervention of the principal, who pointedly reminded Steve about the purpose of the meeting and the focus on improving students’ literacy. This incident spurred a constructive discussion about using the daily team planning time more effectively. All members of the team admitted that they had been spending more team time on discipline and management issues than on the agreed upon focus instruction.

During visits over the next three months, the facilitator intentionally and explicitly pointed out opportunities for providing interdisciplinary support. Occasionally, she engaged the English teacher by eliciting her help with expectations for lessons incorporating student writing or the social studies teacher by asking help in anticipating where students would struggle. Team members began reacting and providing feedback about each other’s lessons, rather than simply relying on the facilitator’s comments. Their first attempts tended to be surface-level questions and suggestions about the procedures of the lessons, so the facilitator continued to refocus the team on the standard and on maintaining the objective of the lesson.

By the eighth facilitated meeting in April 2005, the members seemed to finally embrace collaboration. Delores arrived at the meeting eager to talk about how she had sought the help of another social studies teacher in planning a lesson with a literacy strategy, and Gabriela carefully collected all the notes from the discussion on her math lesson so that she could use the advice to make instructional adjustments. But the biggest change came from Steve, who demonstrated a considerable increase in receptivity to the support available from his team members.

The facilitator noted that members concluded the school year by proactively seeking support in planning lessons, rather than reactively dissecting lessons that had already been taught with inherent flaws. They came to the final facilitated meetings in April and May prepared with questions for the facilitator and were relating to each other’s experiences with different strategies.

**Figure 1 The professional teaching and learning cycle**

![Figure 1 The professional teaching and learning cycle](image-url)
Members were even able to tease Steve about deserving an award for “Most Improved.”

**Perceptions of students and student learning**

The most challenging area of improvement for the group, as a whole, seemed to be their expectations for students. During the first author’s monthly visits, team members repeatedly made comments about students who would not do the work or lacked adequate background knowledge to do the work asked of them. Rarely were the team members willing to acknowledge that their assignments were targeting very low levels of thought, which may have contributed to students’ lack of engagement in the lessons. The teachers’ intended objectives were not evident in the assignments, nor could the teachers clearly articulate what they were hoping to accomplish in using the identified literacy strategies. No team member completed a formal lesson plan, as suggested by the facilitator, yet the team did not connect this ambiguity to their subsequent frustration with students’ performance.

Although the teachers’ talk and their professional relationships started changing around the third or fourth month of implementing the PTLC, their negative perceptions of students’ capabilities persisted into the eighth month of implementation. By March 2005, the team was taking a more active role in analyzing student work during the facilitated meetings, but directed the majority of their comments to judgments about individual students. Quotes recorded by the facilitator during the monthly sessions illustrate this point. For example, one teacher stated, “He doesn’t want to do any more than what he has to do,” and another said, “I know he’s in [special education],” in an apparent attempt to justify the student’s poor performance.

Other examples illustrating teachers’ perceptions of students included a protracted discussion about cultural differences affecting whether or not students would do homework, and one teacher’s frustration when her students did not complete a lesson that she thought should have been easy, since they “just had to copy it down.” In these instances, the facilitator tried to guide the teachers in relating the quality of the lesson to student engagement.

For the most part, these interventions by the facilitator proved fruitful. In one of the monthly sessions, the facilitator helped Delores and Gabriela with adjustments to make their instruction more challenging and purposeful. Both later reported that all students worked well and experienced success—even those who were in special education or were English language learners. Gabriela remarked, “The success is that everyone worked. At least they were interested in it. … They didn’t give up.”

Again, Steve showed the most change. During the first facilitated meeting in September 2004, he complained about all the attention being given to reading with few perceived results. In his estimation, at least one-third of his students could not read. Throughout the year, he was most likely to attribute students’ poor performance to a lack of support from home. However, Steve eventually acknowledged his role in student achievement during the facilitated meetings of April and May 2005, by admitting that he needed help addressing students’ needs and by requesting more information about what causes them to struggle with literacy demands.

**Educational significance of the study**

This study provides further evidence that structured use of cross-curricular academic teams can lead to improved integration of subject matter and to deeper understanding of content and pedagogy related to state standards. On a practical level, the PTLC helped
teachers move conversations toward more in-depth examinations of the content standards and student learning. This was reportedly in contrast to their previous tendency to discuss issues with less relevance to making instructional improvements. The middle school teachers in this pilot study demonstrated changes in the way they approached instruction and in the way they collaborated with each other to refine their teaching practices. In some cases, their conversations during the collaboration meetings revealed increasingly sophisticated inquiry about the state standards and how to engage students in the learning process more meaningfully. The teachers began to take responsibility for their students’ learning, and they developed valuable collaborative skills for working as a goal-oriented team in improving their practice.

In addition, this study revealed some of the more theoretical underpinnings regarding the benefits of teacher collaboration as a form of professional development. The PTLC provided a useful process for structuring the team members’ discussions. With the support of the external facilitator, the team members seemed to benefit from the monthly meetings because they were able to learn from their colleagues’ successes and challenges, while building their self-efficacy by supporting each other in adopting new approaches. These changes were gradual and were linked to team members’ ability to verbalize their implicit beliefs about learning and instruction. These beliefs are at the core of their everyday practice, so opening them to structured and supportive examination served as a stimulus for overcoming resistance to change. The benefits of collaboration that the middle school team in this study experienced, as structured by the PTLC, reinforce the importance of sustained, job-embedded professional development.

This study also highlights the important role of the external facilitator in helping teams learn how to collaborate well. Simply giving teachers the time to collaborate is not enough. Teachers need to build their trust in each other and a collective capacity to work together in improving their teaching practices. If teachers are not comfortable with or knowledgeable about engaging in an interdisciplinary planning process, such as the PTLC, providing for team meetings could actually lead to worse outcomes for students. Findings from this study indicate that targeted guidance is necessary to ensure the meetings are a more productive use of time than allowing teachers to conduct planning individually. External facilitators can provide this important function as they create a safe and constructive environment for teachers to reflect on their practices and learn from each other.

As some research has suggested (Kamil, 2003; National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, 2000; Sanders & Rivers, 1996), improvements in the teachers’ instructional practice seemed linked to student achievement gains at the campus. This school demonstrated greater improvement in the average passing rate on the state accountability tests in all subject areas compared with the average gain of other middle schools in the district not implementing PTLC. The campus’s Academic Performance Index (API), which measures its progress and overall educational success, increased from 1005 to 1276. This exceeded state requirements and surpassed the growth at the other district middle schools, which went from an API of 1007 to 1194.

The funding for this study ended in 2005, so the authors were unable to gather and analyze longitudinal data that would document the team’s continued progress in working collaboratively and maintaining high expectations for their students. Upon completion of the initial year of implementation in the sixth grade in May 2005, the principal had plans to scale-up implementation of the PTLC to include all interdisciplinary teams in the 2005–06 school year. The authors are optimistic that the instructional leadership on the campus was sufficiently emboldened to sustain the work, but previous school reform efforts would indicate that challenges remain. Certainly, the experiences of the teachers in this study suggest that middle school teams may need explicit guidance and scaffolding, as afforded by the PTLC and the support of an experienced facilitator, to ensure that teachers

Team members proactively sought support in planning lessons, rather than reactively dissecting lessons that had already been taught.
• Maintain a focus on the content standards and student engagement in the learning process.

• Know how to collaborate by building on each others’ strengths, sharing effective practices, and processing not so effective ones.

• Maintain high expectations for their students and employ effective strategies for helping students achieve.

The work with this team highlights the need for continuing assessment that focuses on the process of strengthening interdisciplinary middle school teams. Assessment needs to address such issues as collegiality, follow-through, preparation, openness to new ideas, a focus on standards, and the role of facilitators in supporting effective collaboration. Ongoing assessment is necessary to ensure the success of interdisciplinary teams in boosting student achievement.

Editor’s Note
Many of the resources relied on for this project are no longer accessible or have been updated. Visit the National Middle School Association Web site (www.nmsa.org) for current resources on middle school organization.

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Transitioning from Teacher to Instructional Leader

Deborah S. Yost, Robert Vogel, & Michael D. Rosenberg

With a growing emphasis on student achievement as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and a strong emphasis on accountability (National Middle School Association, 2003), schools are searching for ways to improve student learning and achievement. According to Gabriel (2005), teachers can make a difference in schools because they are aware of the issues related to learning and, therefore, know what is needed to make learning a school priority. Indeed, many researchers agree that both skillful teaching and school leadership are factors that result in improved student learning and achievement (Gabriel, 2005; Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; NMSA Research Committee, 2003). The points emphasized in National Middle School Association’s (NMSA) This We Believe regarding teacher development and courageous leadership are particularly germane to this discussion.

National Middle School Association (2003) established priorities for middle level schools in the position paper, This We Believe. These priorities focus on middle level teacher preparation and continuous professional development addressing how to work effectively with middle grades students. Central to the mission of establishing successful middle school environments is the notion of courageous and collaborative leadership. Courageous and collaborative leaders have as their top priority high standards not only for students but teachers, ancillary staff, and administrators (Beal & Arnold, 2005; National Middle School Association, 2003). “High-performing middle schools have high-performing, learning-centered leaders—principals and teachers—working collaboratively to enhance student learning (NMSA Research Committee, 2003, p. 61).

Research has documented that skilled and highly effective teachers make a positive difference in student learning and achievement (National Middle School Association, 2003; NMSA Research Committee, 2003). Research has also shown that more time spent on quality professional development means more effective teaching. Hence, NMSA asserts that more research is needed that connects quality professional development to student learning outcomes. This article examines the results of a teacher leader training model entitled Project Achieve, which focuses on improving middle level teaching performance and student achievement. The teacher leader model was implemented at an urban middle school during the 2005–2006 academic year. The premise of Project Achieve is that when teachers are...
given opportunities to improve their teaching practice through on-site, personalized, professional development by teacher leaders, increased student learning follows naturally.

**Perspectives**

National Middle School Association asserts that teachers must be committed to holding high expectations for middle level students by providing them with rigorous content and developmentally appropriate practices to achieve higher levels of academic success (McEwin & Dickinson, 2005). In addition, principals of quality middle schools positively influence instruction by making educating students a top priority and establishing a system to monitor student progress (National Middle School Association, 2003).

Accordingly, teachers and leaders must recognize that achievement is related to factors both extrinsic and intrinsic to schooling (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). Extrinsic factors such as socio-economic status, parental education, early stimulation, and cognitive factors all contribute to a student’s ability to succeed in school. Intrinsic factors are related to classroom and school practices, teachers’ belief systems, and the socio-cultural dynamics of the school environment. This article focuses on the intrinsic factors found in “skillful teaching and leadership” that translate into increased learning for all students (p. 53). To be effective, teachers must

- Believe that all students are capable of learning.
- Explicitly teach intellectual habits to students.
- Collaborate with others in planning, so as to learn best practices from each other.
- Engage in constant renewal of their knowledge and practice.

Skillful leadership, according to these authors, leads to productive learning when

- There is accountability.
- Learning is the top priority.
- Teacher learning is embedded into daily practice.

What Krovetz and Arriaza (2006) described is a model of professional development in which teachers collaborate with other teachers and the leadership team to improve student learning. National Middle School Association (2003) asserted that professional development should be balanced between formal (e.g., classes, workshops, conferences) and informal (e.g., collaborative groups, joint lesson planning, peer coaching, study groups), and the process should be seamless and connected to goals for student and teacher growth. This position is in line with the research literature showing that professional development focusing on teaching skills works best when it is needs-based and non-judgmental, provides continuous learning over time, and focuses on professional growth goals (Research Points, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cooter, 2003; Kelley, 2004).

Few studies to date have attempted to make a strong connection between school leadership, professional development, and student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Research Points, 2005).

**The teacher leader model of professional development**

**Project achieve**

An article in the January 2007 issue of *Middle School Journal* (Yost & Vogel) provided the first-year results of Project Achieve, in which a mentoring model of professional development (PD) was implemented at an urban middle school by the authors of the article. The results of that effort demonstrated significant gains in instructional expertise and student achievement over that first year, compared to the results for non-participating teachers and data from prior years.

In year two, the project focus shifted to developing the leadership skills of six teacher leaders (TLs), former teachers who were appointed to leadership positions by the principal of the school based on their excellent teaching evaluations and expertise in either
mathematics or reading. These TLs were responsible for carrying out the PD plan created the year before with approximately 42 fifth through eighth grade middle school teachers in an urban school with a student body of approximately 1,150 students. TLs were responsible for modeling lessons, working one-on-one and in small groups with teachers using Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning Model (Marzano, 1992), holding lesson planning sessions, and planning and implementing both small-group and school-wide inservice workshops for teachers at the school based on teachers’ needs. The Dimensions of Learning Model is an instructional framework that focuses on basic teaching and learning skills related to (a) attitudes and perceptions about learning, (b) acquisition and integration of knowledge, (c) extension and refinement of knowledge, (d) meaningful use of knowledge, and (e) productive habits of mind.

Several data sources were used to measure teacher growth and student achievement. To evaluate the extent to which the teacher leader model was successful in increasing instructional competence, questionnaire and observation protocols were developed based on Marzano’s (1992) Dimensions of Learning Model. The pre- and post-questionnaire responses measured teachers’ beliefs and self-reported use of Marzano’s strategies over time. Pre-, mid-, and post-observations were conducted by the TLs after being trained to use the instrument and an acceptable inter-observer reliability was established ($r = .83$). The observation data measured the extent to which teachers were actively using the teaching strategies. In addition, student achievement was measured using both curriculum-based and standardized test results against data from a comparison middle school in the same district with similar demographics and a traditional model of professional development. In addition to data collected to measure the efficacy of the model on instructional growth and student achievement, Project Achieve staff also collected data on the educational process of becoming a teacher leader.

**Models of teacher leadership**
The Project Achieve teacher leader model is designed to address the professional development of teachers at the school through informal and formal sessions. In addition to the district-mandated workshops teachers were required to attend, the TLs in this study spent the majority of their time conducting demonstration lessons, reviewing lesson plans, providing feedback on observations, leading team discussions, and implementing inservice sessions for teachers at the middle school. This group was also responsible for teaching a 90-minute class, in addition to their duties as instructional leaders. The TL model, therefore, is almost solely focused on instructional leadership.

The focus of our work with the TLs was to teach them how to be leaders so that they could work effectively with teachers, with the understanding that effective teachers positively influence student learning. This was a challenging task because it has been well documented that teacher leaders are caught between the two very different worlds of the teacher and the principal, each having different accountability perspectives (Blase & Blase, 2006; Gabriel, 2005). As these authors pointed out, TLs possess authority and responsibility, but no power. Blase and Blase (2006) challenged the efficacy of the TL model because of the difficulties that TLs face in their formal roles as school leaders, and they proposed, as an alternative, an informal model of peer consultation in which teachers develop a reflective stance from working with a nonthreatening, collaborative teaching partner. These authors also provided information on other models of informal teacher leadership as follows:

- Career Lattices (flexible leadership roles, committee work)

![Figure 1 Teacher leader instructional competencies](image-url)
• Professional Development Schools (focus on the teacher as professional through leadership opportunities that arise from the partnership)
• Constructivist Leadership (collaborative teacher groups sharing ideas, engaging in action research)

Although these informal models address the problem of teacher professionalism through collaboration, in our opinion they do not go far enough to promote effective site-based professional development. Under informal models, who will be responsible for determining teachers’ instructional needs and developing informal or formal sessions to address those needs? Not all teachers have adequate teaching skills (Carver & Katz, 2004) or the motivation to improve their teaching practice through informal collaboration efforts.

Gabriel (2005) asserted that TLs have the capacity to make a profound and positive impact on the school environment if they are given opportunities to develop adequate coaching and mentoring skills. However, TLs must be provided with training on how to effectively lead teachers. After working with six TLs and the leadership team over the past year, we believe that the teacher leader model is a viable strategy to increase teaching expertise and, concomitantly, to improve student achievement.

**The teacher leader training model**

The TL model of professional development was embedded into the leadership team at the host school. The principal made the TLs an integral part of this leadership team, working to improve the educational experience for all students at this urban middle school. This model is in line with the precepts of *This We Believe* that advocate collaboration and active participation in discussions of best practices to promote greater student success (Kinney & Robinson, 2005). During the 2005–2006 academic year, the leadership team was comprised of a principal, two assistant principals (AP), and six teacher leaders. The APs were responsible for conducting periodic, formal observations and reviewing lesson plans on a weekly basis, among other duties. The principal monitored the efforts of both the APs and TLs on a daily basis and provided appropriate guidance when necessary. The leadership team met on a weekly basis to discuss the teachers’ and students’ progress and to decide on a plan of action. This administrative structure provided ample individualized support to teachers at this school, which ultimately had a positive impact on student learning and achievement.

We have found that there is a steep learning curve in the TLs’ transition from teaching to leadership positions. Teachers are often promoted to leadership positions within their schools because they are excellent teachers. However, being an excellent teacher does not mean that one is able to communicate with others about how to be a good teacher or knows how to deal with teachers who are not open to constructive criticism. Through our efforts in working with this group of TLs, we discovered five elements that are vital to the development of effective TLs in their transition from teacher to leader within an urban middle school environment (see Figure 1).

**Instructional leadership**

Our quest to enhance the leadership skills of a group of former teachers began with a solid understanding of themselves, their learning and leadership styles, and how adults learn and react differently. From knowledge that all people are different and, therefore, require diverse mentoring approaches, we introduced models of collaboration and consultation.

Through our weekly meetings, TLs posed many questions regarding how to communicate constructive criticism to teachers and how to teach them strategies in line with their needs. This was a difficult challenge for the majority of the TLs. However, they subsequently discovered that the most important aspect of working with teachers is establishing trusting relationships.
It was important that a non-threatening and collaborative environment be established at the school, with improved instruction the goal. Gaining the trust of teachers is a prerequisite to being able to work effectively with them. Content related to leadership and learning styles, as well as coaching and mentoring models assisted the TLs in their transition to instructional leaders.

**Powerful instruction**

Even though this group of TLs were accomplished teachers, it was difficult for them at first to understand how to communicate with others about what good teaching is. They had an intuitive grasp of expert teaching, but a deeper understanding of how to translate those feelings into explicit knowledge was needed. Focus group discussions with the TLs at the end of the year revealed that their enhanced knowledge of Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning Model (see Figure 2) and use of the model as the basis for teacher observations helped them to make their understanding of good teaching more explicit. The framework also enabled TLs to provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching performance and assisted them in creating one-on-one, small-group, and inservice sessions based on teacher needs.

**Data-based analysis and assessment practices**

We found that one of the most important indices leading to teacher growth and student achievement was a frequent analysis of benchmark test results by teachers and their TLs. This is supported by the National Middle School Research Committee’s (2003) findings that high-quality leadership uses data as a decision making tool. Principals and their teachers should be engaged in meaningful discussions about student learning and achievement through analyses of curriculum-based and authentic assessments (Kinney & Robinson, 2005; Thompson & French, 2005). The benchmark tests used by teachers in this study are curriculum-based tests given to students every six weeks to measure the extent to which they learned the core curriculum. All teachers and the leadership team at the school were engaged in using benchmark data to improve instruction and learning. The TLs introduced a software program to teachers that provided individual and aggregate student benchmark and other standardized test data. On a systematic basis, teachers were exposed to data analysis regarding the efficacy of their own teaching. The district required each school to submit a report based on a school-wide analysis of the benchmark results and to use these data to develop professional development goals. The TLs, therefore, analyzed each teacher’s benchmark class performance and developed PD goals from that analysis. In this way, data-based instruction was used by all teachers and the leadership team.

**Content area expertise**

*This We Believe* supports middle school teachers’ expertise in their content areas (National Middle School Association, 2003). For the TLs to develop credibility, teachers must also view them as experts in their fields. Therefore, it is important that TLs enter their leadership roles as experts in a specific content area. All TLs in this study had expertise in either reading or mathematics and were assigned to work with teachers who were teaching in those content areas. All high school department chairs enter their positions with content-specific expertise, but it is also important that TLs on the elementary and middle school levels also possess a solid knowledge base in a content area. This provides a foundation for respect, collegiality, and collaboration. In their work with teachers, the TLs were often engaged in research on the latest content area teaching techniques and programs that were subsequently shared with teachers in mentoring or inservice sessions.
Reflection
It is important that the TLs and their teachers develop a reflective stance toward their work. One of the precepts in This We Believe emphasizes the importance of all constituents in the middle school environment engaging in reflective practice, including middle school students (Kinney & Robinson, 2005). The more teachers reflect on the practice of teaching the more likely they are to make meaningful change in their classrooms (Harste, Leland, Schmidt, Vasquez, & Ociepka, 2004; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Yost, 2006; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Action research, journal writing, discussions, and actively thinking about the efficacy of their own instructional practices stimulate a reflective stance in teachers (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Kelley (2004) reported the results of a teacher induction study in which professional development focused on teachers’ evaluating the efficacy of their own teaching practices through the use of inquiry projects. The results revealed greater rates of teacher success and retention. It is, therefore, important that TLs understand how to enhance teachers’ ability to reflect, using different methods and, equally important, to use the practice themselves as they reflect on their own work with teachers.

Project Achieve results
Teacher leader data
Data were collected on the content of the TL meetings held throughout the year by Project Achieve staff. These data captured interesting trends in the transition from teacher to instructional leader. Data from the first two months of school revealed that it took this group of TLs this length of time to settle into their roles as instructional leaders. During this time, they were overwhelmed by a myriad of housekeeping responsibilities of getting supplies to teachers, ensuring that students were where they should be, preparing teachers for the first benchmark and fall standardized tests, developing beginning-of-the-year inservice sessions, and prepping for team meetings. It was not until November that the TLs were able to work earnestly with teachers on skill development.

The first observations by TLs of teachers took place at the end of October. Data from baseline observations were surprising in that many teachers failed to use strategies outlined in Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning Model (see Figure 2). It should be noted that the observation instrument contained 28 teaching competencies spread over the five model domains. The TL observer was required to note whether an instance of the teaching behavior listed on the observation form occurred or did not occur. These data were calculated into a percentage score indicating the extent to which the teacher was observed using these competencies during the lesson. Aggregate data from all teachers is shown in Figure 3.

Subsequent observations showed significant growth in teachers’ use of these strategies. Weekly meetings with the TLs after the first observation turned to serious discussion regarding how to communicate and work with teachers who displayed ineffective teaching practices.

It is also interesting to note that around mid-year, Project Achieve staff noted some communication problems emerging from the TL group, which began to affect their work. After a couple of sessions on group dynamics and stages of group development, Project Achieve staff made the decision to work with the TLs one-on-one to deal with personality issues and to personalize instruction based on their needs. Differences in leadership styles needed to be addressed if the group of TLs were to move forward focused on the goal of improving instruction. Working with the TLs on an individual basis appeared to assist them in further developing their own metacognitive skills regarding instructional leadership. Aspiring to a level of comfort in the TL role was challenging for all study participants, but this goal was ultimately attained by all.
Teaching efficacy and student achievement data

Based on questionnaire and observations of teaching practice, results of year two of the Project Achieve teacher leader model of professional development revealed positive and significant differences in teachers’ knowledge and classroom use of research-based teaching strategies as outlined in Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning Model (see Yost, Vogel, & Rosenberg, 2007). In addition, positive and significant differences were found on the January reading benchmark and state standardized tests in mathematics and reading, compared to an urban middle school control group in which a traditional professional development model was used. It should be noted that the host middle school attained adequate yearly progress (AYP) based on March 2006 standardized test scores, while the comparison school did not achieve its AYP goals. Although a direct correlation cannot be made between the TL model and AYP status, the data revealed significant differences between the host and comparison schools on the reading and mathematics standardized test scores that were used to determine target achievement goals.

Discussion and implications

In this age of accountability, it is important that all schools search for ways to improve instructional expertise using models such as Marzano’s (1992) Dimensions of Learning as well as professional development that reflects NMSA’s This We Believe precepts and the research literature. Adult learners (new and experienced teachers) require site-based, personalized, professional development that is in line with their current practices and levels of skill development. This cannot be accomplished by top-down administrative decisions.

What we found most surprising in the results of this study was that when Project Achieve’s urban teachers were first observed using Marzano’s Dimensions of Learning competencies as a guide, far too many teachers did not demonstrate even the most basic teaching strategies, such as a set induction or closure. Moreover, many teachers did not provide opportunities for students to practice the content or any activity to extend knowledge or encourage higher order thinking. Given this information, we clearly saw that improvement in basic teaching skills was important to increase teaching effectiveness. If the goal of enhancing instruction was to be achieved, the teachers at this urban middle school required on-site, needs-based professional development provided by teacher leaders.

In our work with six teacher leaders over the year, we were able to isolate five primary factors that facilitated their transition from teacher to teacher leader and identified several professional-growth areas that needed mentoring assistance. Instruction centered on personal leadership styles, learning styles of teachers, various consultation and mentoring models, research-based instruction and management practices, data-based assessment practices, expertise in the subject area, and reflection. These areas provided a foundation for instruction in developing the leadership capacity of the TLs. We also discovered a need to improve TL-group communication, as this became a threat to the positive functioning of group members, and we subsequently provided personal, one-on-one mentoring to that end.

In light of this year-long project, we gained tremendous insight into what teachers need to become effective instructional leaders. As Blase and Blase (2005) noted in their book on leadership, the teacher leader model often fails because of the challenges associated with being torn between two worlds—those of administration and teaching. However, Gabriel (2006) asserted that the role of instructional leader is often given to people with no formal training, hence the publication of his book on leadership. This study demonstrated very clearly that the TLs struggled mightily in their quest for a balance between those two different worlds and, thus, benefited greatly from instructional leadership coaching.

Although informal models of teacher leadership develop a positive and professional learning atmosphere at the school, it is equally important that situated and needs-based professional development for teachers is not lost. Not all tenured teachers possess adequate teaching skills, and TL models such as the one outlined in this article are needed to ensure that all students are given an equal opportunity to learn in the middle school environment. It is also imperative that TLs receive inservice training and mentoring to give them a chance to succeed in their roles as instructional leaders.

“Being an excellent teacher does not mean that one is able to communicate with others about how to be a good teacher.”
One important result that cannot be quantified is the positive, professional synergy that was observed among teachers as a result of the inclusion of the TL model in the leadership team at this school. Therefore, we believe that the organizational structure of the leadership team, which, in this study, included the participation of six teacher leaders, was responsible for a school culture that embraced positive change in teaching efficacy. Not all made tremendous strides in their teaching, but the majority of teachers were able to enhance their teaching practices to positively affect student learning and achievement. Given that there are many tenured teachers who do not demonstrate teaching effectiveness, this instructional leadership model provides a vehicle to address this reality. As Kinney and Robinson (2005) stated, an effective instructional leader requires

Keeping the best interests of the students at heart; establishing a culture where teachers, parents, community members, and students work together to turn a shared vision of high expectations into reality; and thinking outside the box to continually challenge the status quo in the name of school improvement. (p. 19)

Many higher education institutions have begun to develop instructional leadership programs to enhance the leadership capacity of teachers who find themselves elevated to the role of teacher leaders. Continued research and program development in this area would strengthen instructional competencies through creative and courageous leadership.

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Preservice Teachers Experience Middle Grades Curriculum

Karynne L. M. Kleine & Laura Sims McBryar

Picture this idyllic scene: A seasoned father strolling with his young son out to the end of a dock jutting into a sparkling lake. The time has come for the lad to learn to swim. Expecting that his caring father would ease him into the water and offer gentle instruction, the boy was eager to master the elements of swimming. In seconds his heart was pounding as he sputtered for air, alarmed to discover that he was immersed in cold water up to his chin. In the distance, he could see his father making crawling motions and yelling, “Kick, kick! Use your arms! You can do it!” Angry, flailing, beseeching, the boy was stunned by the fact that his father had just tossed him into the lake and expected him to swim.

That startled, insecure boy represents what a cohort of 17 preservice middle grades teachers encountered as they learned to “stroke the crawl” in a curriculum class that was to provide an unconventional approach to understanding middle grades curriculum concepts. In spring 2006, as they entered the first session of this middle grades curriculum class, collaboratively taught by two professors, they were given a syllabus that was 70% blank (See Figure 1 for the performance objectives on the syllabus and Figure 2 for the initial outline of course activities prepared by instructors). Given the students’ familiarity with the paradigm of “taking classes” honed from 16 years of a passive education, this was hardly what they were expecting. The cohort of students was told that their challenge, through consensus decision making, was to complete the nearly empty syllabus. They were first to determine the ways in which the objectives for learning about middle grades curriculum would be met and assessed and then to settle on the time and activities to do so.

Given a deceptively simple charge on the face of it, the students soon reacted to the shared responsibility for learning much like the young boy. Some of them were gasping for air, trying to figure out what they “really” were supposed to accomplish. Some of them were incredulous and could not conceptualize what was being asked of them, while some expressed feelings of abandonment and resisted participating in a process that felt unnatural. Having never encountered such an open-ended, ill-structured task, they patiently tried to keep afloat as it became ever more difficult to avoid drowning, all the while hoping that someone would come along to toss them a life preserver.

This article reflects the following This We Believe characteristics: Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so — Students and teachers engaged in active learning — Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory
Before the semester began, the students had been assigned to read *This We Believe in Action* (Erb, 2005) and *A Reason to Teach* (Beane, 2005) in preparation for the class that met twice weekly for 75 minutes. At that point, the readings were informative for the preservice teachers, but their understanding of the concepts they contained was insubstantial. While they may have acknowledged that they did not truly understand the meaning of terms such as **active learning**, **integrated curriculum**, **learning community**, and **democratic classroom**, they certainly did not foresee something so drastic being done to help them make sense of the abstract concepts. Nor did they expect they would have to undergo such discomfort to truly understand theoretical concepts.

The professors had decided that leaving the planning process largely unstructured would enable the students to **experience** the terms, in all of their anguish and exultation, thereby making it more likely to result in significant learning outcomes they could apply to their teaching practices. What follows the Background section is a conversation between one of the professors and one of the students who experienced the course and wrote this article as their means of making more sense of their differing perspectives on the experience.

**Background**

The seeds for middle grades curriculum can be traced to the “progressive movement,” in which reformers such as William Heard Kilpatrick (1918) promoted the project method as a means to experience learning. Kilpatrick recognized that an accumulation of fragmented bits of low-level knowledge could never substitute for learning. Kilpatrick’s vision is alive today in the problem-based learning approach and case study methods employed effectively in many educative settings (see for example Muth, Polizzi, & Glynn, 2007a, 2007b). The theorist John Dewey (1933/1998), Kilpatrick’s contemporary, referred to educative activities as those that call on the learner to integrate the intellectual and the emotional aspects of thinking to create lasting, felt, and processed learning. “The real problem of intellectual education is in the **transformation** of natural powers into expert, tested powers. The teacher will see that the **psychological** as well as the **logical**, instead of being opposed to each other (or even independent of each other), are connected as the earlier and the terminal, or concluding, stages of the same process” (p. 84, emphasis in the original).

It seems that the best approach for making learning relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory, as is advocated in *This We Believe in Action* (Stevenson & Bishop, 2005), is by experiencing it and then devoting time and effort to thinking about what it means. When progressive ideals espoused by Kilpatrick (1918), Dewey (1933/1998), and Beane (1993, 1995, 1997) are coupled with the physical and social developmental demands of the typical adolescent, experiential learning becomes the ideal framework for delivering middle grades curriculum. In other words, middle grades curriculum, when implemented fully, is an experienced, emancipatory, transformational curriculum that encourages learners to engage in dialogue to explore their own underlying assumptions about their limitations and explanatory stories about their capabilities. The curriculum to be learned results from an interaction between content concepts and the individual learners. Learning about oneself and the others in the group is as important in forming a learning community as standards-based content. This is democracy as Dewey (1933/1998) and Beane (2005) advocated.

These changed responsibilities for teachers and students contrast sharply with more traditional notions of school roles. The American teacher has come to be considered the all-knowing provider. As the provider that has all of the knowledge and information, she assigns tasks and parameters for success while monitoring and sometimes rewarding achievement. The teacher directs her students in the possessive sense and is seen as the central focus of the classroom. Neo-Vygotskians Tharp and Gallimore (1988) referred to these features of American schooling as manifestations of an “unchanging bureaucratic, supervisory culture” (p. 23) that has resulted in a lack of “assistance, responsiveness, joint productive activity or building of common meanings and values” (p. 26). In other words, for as long as there have been American schools, the curriculum has tended to be unidirectional, coming from the teacher, and mastered independently by each student. To “experience middle grades curriculum” would be just the opposite. It would consist of multifaceted, active learning, requiring the contributions of all participants to operate as a true learning community, based on living democratic precepts. Below, Laura begins the dialogue, representing...
the perspective of a teacher candidate who experienced middle grades curriculum during the course.

Laura speaks for the preservice teachers

The professors for the course, which took place at a small liberal arts university, were well informed about the work of Dewey, Beane, and other Progressives and purposefully designed this curriculum course so that it had to be experienced and could not be passively absorbed. As preservice teachers, it was relevant for us because we were soon to have the daily and long-term responsibility of designing and implementing middle grades curriculum. The professors saw this as the ideal opportunity to allow us to examine, without the constraints of tradition that operate in so many middle schools, what curriculum best suits middle level learners.

When presented with a nearly empty syllabus and the realization that the course was ours to design, we got right to work, an orientation we had seen modeled throughout our educational careers. Although we were unsure of the route we would take, we knew we would have to work to get there. One preservice teacher, April, stepped apprehensively into the semester. Later examining the work ethic of the group, she discovered that members were differently motivated. “I believed everyone would try to do the minimum amount of work possible, as long as we met the objectives,” she wrote.

“That was not the case,” she later reflected. “We were different; some wanted to go above expectations with work, while others wanted to do nothing.”

Looking back on the experience, I can see that, in the beginning, we resorted to technical methods of planning to hurriedly “get the job done,” as do compliant workers, who are most concerned with dividing the task equally, minimizing the complexity of the duties, and being efficient. Consequently, we divided ourselves into small groups, one for each objective, to design the activities and assessments to demonstrate that we had met expectations. While we implemented an opportunity for the work of each small group to be reviewed by the large group, there were almost no disputes or discussion of other possibilities when we came together as a large group. We agreed, and we moved on. With this efficiency orientation, we hastily assigned equal amounts of work that precluded the chance for true consideration of the possibilities for the best design. We mistook cooperation for collaboration, the former eases dissention, while the latter is more typically found in high-performing organizations. We did go through the motions of planning, but without stopping to assess our learning, we probably stymied opportunities for our growth.

In retrospect, we recognized that we spent much time creating a solution for a problem we had yet to define. As a result, almost every session for the first few weeks was like being trapped in a whirlpool—very repetitive, with the group making decisions that were soon rescinded. Since we did not have agreement on the problem, we had no common criteria by which to judge our solutions. Even after trying different methods to escape the whirlpool, such as documenting our agreements, the duplication and frustration persisted. The class, as a whole, was discouraged by the seeming redundancy that emerged, because we had differing conceptions of what our task was and did not communicate these well to one another. Looking back now, I can say that the redundancy was an unheeded signal that we needed to learn how to approach the work of planning, rely less on routine means of exploring options and reaching agreement, and more explicitly communicate our understanding.

Laura reflects on the roles of students, learners, and teachers

During this curriculum experience, the instructors did not take on the traditional role of authoritarian

A preservice teacher carries out an instruction activity of his own design with middle grades students.
directors. Instead, they could be found sitting among the teacher candidates, sometimes listening to and talking with individuals or small groups but almost never delivering instruction to the entire class. They even met with small groups of preservice teachers over lunch outside of regular class time. This rubbed many of us the wrong way, as it failed to meet our expectations regarding instructors’ roles and the time for them to assume those roles, but it also made me ponder the value of such a shift. Tabitha, reflecting over the semester, expressed it best when she wrote, “In my mind teachers taught, and students learned. However, in our class, students taught, and teachers learned. This also got me thinking about reversals in my own field placement class; my students could teach each other, instead of listening to me all day. This gives the students ownership of their education and classroom.” The irritation provided a catalyst for me and my colleagues to reflect on the taken-for-granted roles that Tharp and Gallimore decried (1988).

More irritation arose when an early assignment asking for an analysis of learning was returned to us. From the professors’ perspective we, the learners, had “missed the mark,” and they told us so. It seemed that our analyses were short on support and more personal than analytical. Uproar ensued in response to this information, as we assumed that we were being told to redo an assignment, when our general consensus was that we had not been given enough indication of how to be successful with the assignment—the teachers had not done their jobs. Carla later expressed her irritation at the returned assignment.

I felt confused and aggravated. … I had not been told how to do the assignment, and when I did it the way I thought it should be done, I was told to redo it. … Why did the professors just not [give us an example] to begin with?

While learners tried to accept the teachers’ feedback, once more it felt as though they were expected to do the teachers’ work. Vocal cohort members voiced their discontent with the lack of instruction, while sometimes even non-vocal members expressed dissatisfaction with the class. Josh wrote, “There were some days that I just wanted to scream and punch something because I was so frustrated.”

But Josh and others had mistaken response for analysis. I see now that as students we expected to have the terms explained to us whether we understood them or not, be given explicit instructions, follow those precisely, and be told by the teachers that we were successful. At the time, we did not understand that the discomfort was to help us question traditional roles of teacher/“boss” and student/“worker” that we accepted as appropriate. Indeed those rare, pre-arranged days when the instructors took charge and “taught” the content—lecturing, conducting recitation, and giving assignments—were consoling. It became apparent that human beings crave predictability, and we were very human.

Since students are “supposed to” receive instruction from teachers and do as they are told, the role reversal caused difficulty. Daniel said, “I have heard more people complain about ‘doing the teacher’s job’ this semester than I could have ever expected. It seems that sometimes people just want to be given work to do, rather than plan their own agenda.” Our previous experiences as a cohort constrained our development as a learning community. Polite in class but privately complaining to our compatriots in the cohort, we were unwilling to declare our concerns publicly to the whole group. But as preservice teachers in this particular situation, we were both students and teachers. However, before we could
take charge of our teacher role, we had to give some thought to analyzing what was going on in our student roles. Like swimmers stranded on a sandbar long after low tide with no compass to help navigate back to the dock, we were hesitant, uncertain of what to do, and we lacked direction for achieving the goal.

**Karynne reflects on the roles of students, learners, and teachers**

What appeared to the students as the professors not doing anything was misleading. As teachers, we were finding it difficult to restrain ourselves from giving instruction, when that would have allowed us to appear competent or to be seen as “rescuers.” Those functions are traditionally ones that teachers feel comfortable fulfilling. However, we continually had to assess how much and what kind of assistance to offer, what we would call **responsiveness**. The preservice teachers would ask us, “Are we doing this right?” and rather than clarifying what should be done, our feedback was purposefully sanctionless and often left the teacher candidates with even more questions about the process of meeting the objectives. Although we felt that we were there to model, ask questions of, offer encouragement, suggest resources, and participate in the learning community, our actions began to disrupt the preservice teachers’ perceptions of traditional teaching roles. Such disruption resulted in emotional struggling for the preservice teachers, determined as they were to read the “hidden” affirmations that they expected we, as instructors, should convey. However, the teacher candidates failed to recognize that we anticipated their disgruntlement and had steeled ourselves in advance. In fact, during class we often assisted one another in remembering not to respond to student attempts to get us to fulfill traditional roles that would stifle their striving for competency. Eventually, through joint productivity and a transformation of the individual students into a learning community the preservice teachers started to give thought to what they were learning and how they were learning it.

Another obstacle to our understanding the design of the course was that the cohort of preservice teachers had already completed many courses together, and all appeared to have a comfortable relationship with each other. This course enabled a veneer to be rubbed off, revealing a less amicable relationship; but the external facade gave way to a healthier dynamic. In terms of dynamics, the group had already undergone the forming and norming stages and the curriculum class brought on attempts to move toward the performing stage (Tuckman, 1984). But throughout most of the process, tempers flared, and discontent and tension were alive throughout the room. The students’ struggle to remain superficially polite to each other and to the professors reoccurred often, but underneath, the preservice teachers were

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**Figure 2** Curriculum course calendar with 70% of class meetings to be determined by students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Content/Responsible Person(s)</th>
<th>Key Information/Assignment Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/8 M</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/9 T</td>
<td>Literature Circle; Goals and Responsibilities development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/10 W</td>
<td>What questions do you have about middle grades curriculum and about yourself as a middle level professional? What do you need to learn?</td>
<td>Online summary due 1/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/22 M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of social curriculum development due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/31 W</td>
<td></td>
<td>Class Structure due; GMSA 2/5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/7 W</td>
<td>Instruction—classroom management plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/12 M</td>
<td>Instruction—classroom management plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/14 W</td>
<td>Instruction—classroom management plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/9 W</td>
<td>Instruction—integrated curriculum unit</td>
<td>Classroom management plan due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/11 M</td>
<td>Instruction—integrated curriculum unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/16 M</td>
<td>Instruction—integrated curriculum unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/25 W</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integrated curriculum unit due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/30 M</td>
<td>Evaluate others’ integrated curriculum unit/All</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/1 W</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
experiencing feelings of betrayal and abandonment. After class sessions, several cohort members routinely vented their frustrations and assured each other that soon the professors would step in to rescue all from the discontentment. Irritated by fears that they would not be able to successfully master the content, since the teachers were not directing the class, disputes between group members became commonplace. Again, in retrospect, the preservice teachers were unaware that in establishing a true learning community, storming is a necessary part of the process. Their past experiences led them to believe that there should not be any expression of conflict, except to trusted friends outside of class. Therefore, they failed to appreciate that no matter how unpleasant and scary, community members must negotiate individual differences within collective objectives. Ironically this adherence to “civil behavior” impeded the cohort of preservice teachers from true problem solving and performing as a learning community.

**Learning from struggle:**
**Significant strokes identified by Laura and Karynne**

A watershed was crossed when several of the preservice teachers had done enough thinking about their course experiences to begin to see the meaning of student engagement in the curriculum development process. Their confidence was bolstered enough to express their criticism of the proceedings. They had to be assertive to make the members stop and assess the direction in which they were going. They realized how redundancy kept emerging because people failed to accept that the most important learning gains were of an affective nature, but they continued to go through the motions to appear to be meeting content standards. The same few people were speaking vociferously and often with no true mechanism for polling the thoughts and feelings of the whole group. It dawned on some learners that there was unequal participation in and responsibility for learning because they had not had a conversation about what the group wanted and expected to learn from designing the course. Though the cohort of preservice teachers could have designed almost anything for the course, they discovered they were unwilling to expand their partial views, which resulted in a stifling experience.

With sufficient reinforcement, a few students took the bold step to force a class discussion about the dissatisfaction with the proceedings. It was as though each had been given a safety vest that provided courage to examine what the cohort had designed and why the cohort had designed it in such a way. One profound recognition for the group was that the objectives had been treated as individual items to be ticked off a list rather than looking for the unity that undergirded them all. Members had read NMSA’s *This We Believe in Action* (Erb, 2005) and Beane’s (2005) *A Reason to Teach* before entering the class, but had failed to understand from the reading that the preservice teachers needed to provide active learning for themselves. In a stroke of creative genius, some members confidently suggested an activity to enhance their understanding of middle level curriculum: creating for themselves a DVD of best middle level curriculum practices occurring in area schools. The cohort members gave permission to themselves to go in a new direction and ascertained that creating the DVD, entitled *What We Believe*, would be an invigorating, challenging, relevant, exploratory, and integrating project for everyone.

To create this resource, the preservice teachers had to plan the project; obtain approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research work with human subjects; solicit and secure participation from constituents; arrange work sessions; conduct interviews; edit materials; keep each other informed and make continual adjustments; evaluate the outcome based on benchmarks; and complete countless other tasks, each of them a learning opportunity. It was not a perfect curriculum, and not everyone benefited equally, but it was a learning experience from which we all grew and developed in important ways. Many of the learners were especially empowered by the fact that, in the end, they provided for themselves, and were not provided with the ideal of middle grades curriculum.

“This failed to meet our expectations about instructors’ roles, but it also made me ponder the value of such a shift.”
The greatest learning gain was an understanding that the accepted version of middle grades curriculum as a document handed over to the teacher obscures its real meaning; middle grades curriculum is a living process. The product was less important to the learning than was the fact that learners had puzzled over what it was to be and then worked vigorously to give it shape and form.

First person account of learning

Laura: In my final reflection as a learner in the course, I recognized my own turning point, which I recorded in my journal, “Being bold is what I had to do.” I realized how much we, the quiet, passive members, were missing out on by sitting aside and letting others take charge. A democratic classroom does not mean that everyone is in charge, but it sure does not work with passive members. Although I “followed the crowd” for a few weeks, I wanted to speak up and be acknowledged for my thoughts and beliefs. I definitely was afraid to come across as oppositional at first, but with others on my side, I was able to begin discussing what I saw as the problem of the class. I eventually came to see that risking disagreement was more productive than faking acceptance of ideas I did not really buy, just to appear to the professors to be making progress.

So while my heart raced one day in class, I decided to plunge ahead and firmly express my views. Instead of being pushed aside, as I anticipated, I found the conversation was buoyed to new heights as discussion turned to identifying a meaningful, collaborative project in which we could invest our efforts. Though I had not expected it, I was rewarded for taking a risk. Although I felt that I would be fighting against the tide to make my point, my willingness to dive in created an opening for us to begin to swim as one school, with all our energy, and in an agreed-upon direction. That day was satisfying because we finally had the end in view and could proceed forward with confidence that we could achieve a goal that we agreed was worthwhile.

Karynne: For me the shift in power was one of the most significant outcomes of the class. It was difficult for Leigh and me, the professors, to expect the students to determine how the course would go, when this was our area of expertise; to refrain from giving and evaluating all assignments, when we knew what we wanted; and to be patient for the community dynamics to emerge, when being verbal and directive would have been more comfortable for us. However, to get the preservice teachers to question the status quo regarding how students learn best, they had to be willing to undergo a great deal of anxiety themselves. The fact that there was another collaborator in the venture for me to turn to made this anxiety easier to manage. We were able to remind each other that if teachers design ill-structured problem solving experiences for students to complete, then teachers have to accept that they cannot control how the process will evolve or stipulate precisely what students will learn. However, teachers can be assured that if they are responsive rather than enabling, the students’ competency will greatly increase, as we learned here. We could not have predicted nor planned for the impressive ways that individuals and the group developed if we had sole control over the inputs for the course.

Laura shares findings

Although students, particularly education students, are often taught to avoid conflict and uneasiness, the discomfort we encountered was necessary for us to reach our goal and to become an effective learning community. Tabitha reiterated the necessity of trials and shared what she learned, “It also taught me that being uncomfortable is not necessarily a bad thing. When we came in, we were immediately made uncomfortable with being given a class modeled on an ill-structured problem. Most people in the class were very uncomfortable, because it was different from anything else we had ever experienced in school.” But Tabitha and others agreed that the learning was much more relevant, and lasting because the format of class forced the cohort members to actively engage in the process of learning. Carla expanded upon this when explaining her own comprehensive gains, “I think the things that I have learned have been both academic knowledge as well as social knowledge.” Jana further confirmed this when detailing the range of her learning rewards. She was as proud that she had learned to run
a video camera as she was to treat, and be treated by, a middle school principal as a colleague. Many learners indicated that they were more interested in participating once they saw the long-term benefits, which then made them eager to take ownership of their learning.

The sense of ownership that was imbued enabled the learners to achieve their goals at a high level and take an active role in educating themselves. The amount of work that had to be conducted outside the class far surpassed the minimum effort required to meet the initial conceptions for meeting objectives. Stephen, the originator of the idea for crafting a DVD of the learning community’s beliefs about middle school, stated, “The most important thing I am going to take away from this class is power. Only by sharing power with students can active learning occur. Active learning involves the student more than just having him or her actively fill out a worksheet. It makes the knowledge relevant, making it more likely to stick rather than just fade away.”

Karen, Stephen’s colleague, changed perspectives over the course of the semester as well: “At the beginning of the class, I really hated the democratic classroom. I thought it was stupid and pointless, and I did not think that anything we did would work. I was wondering why we were being made to do this. Now I feel differently about a democratic classroom. I now know how it motivates students and how it makes them take an active role in their own learning. As a result, I am going to incorporate more democratic practices into my teaching.”

Tabitha expressed a similar sentiment of equity: “Democracy in school is also good because it empowers all the students in the classroom.”

Some of the quieter students of our group learned to speak up and become more vocal, contributing and challenging members of the community. Carla, an emergent, dynamic member said, “I think, in the beginning, I didn’t say much. … (then she realized) If you didn’t speak up, people wouldn’t know what you thought. Then decisions would be made, and you couldn’t say anything if you didn’t say your opinion, so why not say things in the first place?”

Kicking our legs and rotating our arms in the water not only allowed us to actively learn to swim, it also augmented our cohort unity and collaboration. We realized that we could not get through the class without working together, and we could not reach the end without participation and encouragement from others. Although the final way we agreed to “meet” the objectives required each member to work alongside other members, the time spent together taught us the necessity of contributing and using resources found in our community.

We learned important things about curriculum, but more important, we learned about roles that we had experienced in the group. Lauren stated how she, personally, had grown and become more of a coach: “I have developed a strong sense of community through building a relationship with peers in my cohort and through interviewing. Working with others in the cohort has made me realize how much we need each other to provide shoulders to lean on—providing encouragement to one another as well as challenging one another.” As we became less guarded with each other, we began to ask others for their input and assistance as well as more confident in offering our own. We started to learn about other members’ gifts and began to rely on someone being there to pick us up if something went wrong. Even if we felt useless, undeserving, or overwhelmed, someone came to our aid when hardships came. When a kind word was needed, it was given, often at the least expected time. During our semester, we worked many hours together and began to form a real community. Previously, we had superficially bonded, but through this class, we became a high-performing teaching and learning community that included the professors and the preservice teachers. As colleagues, we were able to Preservice teachers collaborate in the design of instructional plans and assessments.
collaborate and our level of professionalism improved so much because we created the standards for performance.

The middle grades curriculum has to be one to hook students and keep them learning in different situations. Andrea summarized this point when she stated, “I have learned the importance of flexibility, and I believe that this was a lesson that was hard for many of us. We were suddenly put into a situation in which the thoughts and opinions of 17 very different people were supposed to be accounted for. This experience should be helpful for us when we enter the field and are expected to design lessons for about 25 unique adolescents.” She went on, “This class pushed me to the limits at times, and I will admit that I have had my doubts. However, I have gained so much through this experience that I do not think I could get in any other way. This realization has come until recently. Previously, I cursed the idea of a democratic classroom, but now I praise it. … The most important thing that I learned was to never give up. I know that there have been many times when we all just wanted to throw in the towel and say that we were through. But, none of us did, at least not for long. Through all of the trials and tribulations, I think that we all learned more than any of us expected to.”

Final thoughts
Convention wisdom dictates that learning comes in incremental bits and gradually builds up from the bottom. But conventional wisdom should always be questioned. The young boy did not expect his father to treat him abruptly when teaching him to swim. He sputtered, but it did not take long for the boy to be in command of his own destiny. The boy needed to believe that he could succeed without his father’s intercession. His father was close by to intervene, if needed, and would never have really let him drown. This is what experiencing middle grades curriculum can be like—learning to command one’s own destiny as a member of a group. We learned to support ourselves and each other as we learned to swim. Middle grades curriculum exists in the learners.

References


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Putting *This We Believe* into Action in Performance-Based Teacher Education

Laura Van Zandt Allen, Kim K. Ruebel, Melanie W. Greene, Janet E. McDaniel, & Vikki Spencer

In the fall of 2002, Trinity University was preparing for accreditation of its teacher education programs by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Texas State Board for Educator Certification. As the chair of the Middle Level Teacher Education Program for grades 4–8, Laura Van Zandt Allen had begun writing the Specialized Program Association (SPA) report to submit for NMSA/NCATE review. She had been a member of the NMSA/NCATE Program Review Board for several years and had read and provided feedback on numerous reports from other institutions under long-standing “guidelines” that required descriptions of course content and field experiences. She could have prepared that report without a worry. However, as she began to write the program report in 2002, she felt quite lost. NMSA had recently discarded the guidelines and had adopted a set of performance-based standards for middle level teacher preparation that required a variety of assessment evidence (standards available at http://www.nmsa.org/ProfessionalPreparation/NMSAStandards/tabid/374/Default.aspx). This new version of the report required that she highlight six to eight of Trinity’s program assessments that would demonstrate that their teacher licensure candidates had met seven new performance-based standards. While Trinity’s program was developed around the NMSA/NCATE standards for initial licensure, a host of questions swirled in her head when it came time to submit the report: How many assessments are necessary to provide adequate evidence of meeting each standard? Can one assessment be used to demonstrate mastery of more than one standard? And, most urgently, are there any examples of assessments from approved programs that might be examined for insight into developing new assessments? Since Trinity was among the first universities to compile a report using the new standards, no examples existed. Professor Allen proceeded to struggle through the report submission, and fortunately, Trinity’s program was deemed to have met program standards. As a result, Trinity University was awarded national recognition the following spring.

Since that time, at four other universities, the other authors have been through the new review process as authors of reviews, reviewers, or members of the NCATE Board of Examiners. They have all raised similar questions to those raised in 2002 at Trinity. As active members of the NMSA Program Review Board, they decided to address their communally felt need for examples of performance-based assessments from approved programs.

This article reflects the following *This We Believe* characteristics: Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so — Students and teachers engaged in active learning — Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to student diversity.
by sharing with each other and with the broader university-based teacher education community examples of performance-based assessments that align with the seven NMSA standards. These assessments were shared in workshop sessions at NMSA’s 2006, 2007, and 2008 Annual Conferences and 2007 Teacher Education Symposium. The positive response to these sessions encouraged us to share our best performance-based assessments in other venues. In so doing, we hope to assist institutions developing or refining middle level programs via the review process and, ultimately, improve the quality of middle level teacher preparation.

The Program Review Process
National Middle School Association (NMSA) has long been actively engaged in improving middle level teacher preparation through the NCATE accreditation process. NMSA is one of 20 Specialized Professional Associations (SPAs) that conducts program reviews for institutions engaged in NCATE accreditation. Since 1989, NMSA has sponsored the review and recognition of programs at the initial (baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate) and advanced (master’s and doctoral) licensure levels. Prior to 2000, a program of initial or advanced preparation submitted a paper “folio” consisting of a description of what was offered to candidates—that is, syllabi of coursework, plans for fieldwork, and so forth. NMSA reviewers read and recommended either for or against national recognition of the program, based on the evidence in the folio.

The turn of the century brought a profound change in the accreditation of teacher preparation programs. This shift—from curriculum-based reviews to standards-based reviews—took place in the context of the accountability movement of the late 20th century. The 21st century ushered in what many refer to as “a culture of evidence.” From P–12 to higher education, providing evidence of learning and data-driven decision making became mandatory. This change has affected no group more than teacher candidates and those who prepare them (Cochran-Smith, 2006). According to Levine (2006), the “shift from an industrial to an information economy has changed both what a teacher is expected to do and what constitutes his or her effectiveness at doing it … [since] industrial economies are concerned with establishing common processes, while information societies focus on achieving common outcomes” (p. 38). In an era of evidence, concern with how much a teacher knows is supplanted by how well the teacher’s students perform.

When NCATE adopted new standards in 2000, NMSA’s Professional Preparation Advisory Board re-wrote the 1989 NMSA guidelines, transforming them into two programmatic standards and seven performance-based standards. The two programmatic standards require evidence of (a) a specific program of study consisting of middle level courses and field experiences, and (b) qualified middle level faculty. The seven performance-based standards (see Figure 1) emphasize accountability; that is, what are the observable, reportable results of the middle level preparation programs offered by an institution? An institution submitting one or more programs for recognition does so by writing a context statement, responding to the two programmatic standards, and then offering six to eight program assessments that demonstrate how candidates meet the seven performance-based standards.

It is not our intent to provide complete information on how to submit a program for NMSA/NCATE review in this article. Detailed information is available on the NCATE Web site (www.ncate.org) and on the NMSA Web site (www.nmsa.org). In addition, NMSA’s program review coordinator, Ken McEwin of Appalachian State University, holds sessions at the NMSA Annual Conference for those professors who might be submitting their programs for review in the coming year.
Assessments

In our collective work, we have developed, enacted, and refined more than 75 assessments and rubrics aligned with NMSA standards (see Figure 1). These are drawn from undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate middle level programs in California, Missouri, North Carolina, and Texas (available at http://hdl.handle.net/10349/344). Most can be adapted for either initial or advanced levels, and many meet more than one standard. For this article, we describe two key assessments per standard. These range from conventional to unique and occur in university-based courses as well as field experiences. What they share is the ability to demonstrate candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for teaching young adolescents.

Standard 1 – Young Adolescent Development

Adolescent Life History Paper

This assignment provides candidates the opportunity to apply knowledge about young adolescent developmental characteristics by examining personal growth and development during their own early adolescence (generally ages 10 to 15). The emphasis of this assignment is the integration of what a candidate knows about young adolescent characteristics and what he or she is observing in the field site into a complete picture, as opposed to segmenting various aspects of growth and development. In the construction of the paper, candidates include personal knowledge of the period and knowledge gained from a growth and development class, text readings, and any class discussions on this topic. Candidates may choose the format of the final paper—including an adolescent journal, a play or short story, pictures with captions and quotes, or a traditional research paper. Institution: University of Texas—Arlington

Shadow a Student Case Study

This assignment requires students to shadow one young adolescent for a day. In studying young adolescent development, candidates will have engaged in readings and discussions about developmental theories and research. The counselors at the on-site program’s middle school will have conducted a class session on early adolescence from the counselor’s viewpoint. Also, six middle schoolers will have served as a “panel of experts” to answer candidates’ questions about their lives and schooling. The school counselors identify 25 representative students to be shadowed for this assignment. Each candidate is randomly assigned a middle school student to shadow for a day. The purposes of the case study are (a) to help candidates make connections between the theoretical material they have read concerning early adolescence and actual young adolescents, and (b) to raise additional issues or questions regarding middle school students and their instructional experience. In a report, the candidates describe their student throughout their day and then relate their observations to what they have been learning about early adolescence and middle schooling. The resulting papers are assessed on their completeness of description, interesting and supportive examples appropriate for the analysis, reasonable inferences so that the analysis and the descriptive data are compatible, integration of course readings and class sessions, and writing conventions. Institution: California State University—San Marcos

Standard 2 – Middle Level Philosophy and School Organization

Design of the Ideal Middle School

This is the final assessment for an undergraduate course designed around the primary question, “What is an ideal middle school?” Throughout the semester, candidates apply their knowledge of young adolescent development from a prerequisite class while studying middle grades philosophy, organization, curriculum, scheduling, physical space, teacher preparation, and parental involvement. Candidates also visit several
local middle schools where they ask teams of teachers and administrators this overarching question, hearing responses from schools with differing student populations and school facilities. The assessment requires candidates, in groups of three or four, to design the ideal middle school. In so doing, candidates have the freedom to select everything from school size and demographics to the design of the building. Presentation choices include PowerPoint or development of a school Web site. This assessment also meets Standard 6.

_Institution: Trinity University_

**Beginning-of-the-Year Case Study**

The purpose of this assignment is to have candidates observe and analyze the ways in which middle school teachers establish climate, routines, and expectations for their classes. All of this is then related to the ideal of the middle school concept. Candidates are placed in a middle school for the teacher development days prior to the beginning of the school year. They shadow a teacher for district professional development, team and department meetings, room setup, and other start-up activities. They interview the teacher about his or her approach to building community with young adolescents. They observe the first few days of the school year with that teacher before returning to the university for their teacher education coursework. The emphasis in the assignment is how middle school administrators and teachers build community at the beginning of the school year. The resulting papers are assessed on their completeness of description, interesting and supportive examples for generalization, integration of _This We Believe_ into the reflection, and writing conventions. _Institution: California State University San Marcos_

**Standard 3 – Middle Level Curriculum and Assessment Interdisciplinary Thematic Unit**

This assignment requires candidates in a course for middle level organization, philosophy, and curriculum to write thematic units in interdisciplinary teams. Each candidate reviews the content curriculum of his or her practicum school to consider and develop a vertical curriculum map for the team. Reviewing the completed map, the team looks for connections and initiates team planning of unit development. Individual unit plans with interdisciplinary elements are evaluated. Concluding class presentations by each team provide an overview of the thematic unit with individual content approaches to the theme and interdisciplinary connections explained. This assignment addresses elements of Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7. Curriculum and subject research, resource use and development, team collaboration, developmentally appropriate pedagogical strategies, technology, and presentation skills are all embedded in this key assessment. Assessment is based on the Missouri Southern State University (MSSU) Unit Lesson Plan format and evaluation tools, with modifications to meet the SmartBoard presentation format and an interdisciplinary approach. Candidates are given an advance scoring rubric and a feedback guide. Each of the criteria is then evaluated as unacceptable, acceptable, or target on a scoring summary for the purpose of data collection. _Institution: Missouri Southern State University_

**Position Paper**

For this assignment, graduate students are initially introduced to the NMSA position statements that are featured on the association’s Web site regarding various aspects of middle level education. Then they are required to select an area of the middle level curriculum that is currently being scrutinized, debated, or revised and conduct extensive research on the issue. Following their investigations, students develop a research-based position on their selected issue, explore the counter-arguments, and explain the implications for young adolescents and middle level schooling. In addition to writing the position paper, the students develop an awareness of the importance of advocating for some aspect of the total school curriculum that is developmentally responsive to the needs of young adolescents. They also begin to develop a knowledge base that is necessary to provide leadership with the development, implementation, and assessment of curriculum. Sample position papers have been prepared in the areas of advisor/advisee programs, accountability and testing issues, sports, integrated curriculum, single-gender classes, school uniforms, self-esteem, teacher licensure, and school leadership. This assessment also meets Standard 7. _Institution: Appalachian State University_

**Standard 4 – Middle Level Teaching Fields Interdisciplinary Internship Field Experience Evaluation**

In this assignment, teacher candidates are required to complete a full-time, five-week internship in a professional development school (PDS) in the semester prior to student teaching. These candidates are placed...
with master teachers who are teaching in the content areas that match their concentration areas. During this field experience in our program, candidates are expected to become familiar with the middle school and its programs and practices. They also have opportunities to work with individual students, small groups, and large groups. They are required to plan and deliver individual lessons, to teach a one-week unit of instruction, to monitor assignments, to observe the students, teachers, administrators, and to become involved with families and community-related events. This field experience assessment, which also meets Standard 5, was designed to give the master teacher a tool for evaluating the teacher candidate (rubric available at http://hdl.handle.net/10349/344). Institution: Appalachian State University

State and National Web Site Evaluation
In this assignment, candidates in a course for middle level organization, philosophy, and curriculum review both the Missouri Southern and the National Middle School Association Web sites in one two-page paper. The objective is to familiarize candidates with the resources available for teaching at the middle level through their professional organizations. Exploration of these sites helps candidates as they develop materials for their own students, using the best available research, resources, and references. Assessment criteria include (a) what interested them most, (b) their favorite link from the site, (c) a brief historical summary of the organization, (d) suggestions for what they would like to see on the site, (e) additional commentary they would like to make, and on the NMSA site only, (f) what research article or summary they chose for a later research summary assignment. The follow-up, two-page writing assignment then has the candidate review/compare/contrast/reflect on the selected NMSA research article or summary and another article on the same topic from a different source. This assessment also meets Standard 7. Institution: Missouri Southern State University

Standard 5 – Middle Level Instruction and Assessment Curriculum Unit
This assignment requires candidates to create a unit of instruction, based on a theme, for a period of five to ten days. The unit must include the following sections: landscape/description of the learners, objectives mapped to state and national standards, daily lesson plans, an assessment and evaluation grid, and a teacher/student bibliography. The assessment grid outlines a pre-assessment, at least two formative evaluations of student performance, and a summative assessment that evaluates student comprehensive knowledge and performance of the unit objectives. The grid aligns unit objectives with state standards, classroom assessments, and student performance on assessments (rubric available at http://hdl.handle.net/10349/344). Candidates complete a total of three curriculum units during the internship and residency. The first unit is completed and assessed within a professional mid-level course, while the next two are designed and taught while in residency. This assessment also meets Standards 3 and 4. Institution: University of Texas–Arlington

Lesson Videotape and Reflection
This assignment requires candidates to analyze and reflect on their own teaching via a videotaped lesson. At the end of each semester in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) year, candidates videotape themselves teaching a lesson they have written. The lesson focuses on strategies and activities that are developmentally appropriate, such as the use of graphic organizers and physical movement. Emphasis is also placed on ensuring instruction is both “hands-on” and “minds-on.” Candidates then watch the tape and write a reflective analysis of their performance, noting what they would keep, what they would change, and why, following the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards format of description, analysis, and reflection. Afterward, the mentor, candidate, and university supervisor discuss the tape and analysis together, setting goals for growth. This assessment also meets Standards 3 and 4. Institution: Trinity University

Standard 6 – Family and Community Involvement
Team and Individual Web Site Development
In this assignment, candidates are required to develop a team Web site as well as individual teacher pages. To

NMSA is one of 20 Specialized Professional Associations that conducts program reviews for institutions engaged in NCATE accreditation.
begin, candidates in a general middle level methods course are assessed for personal teaching styles and accompanying strengths and challenges. Then, assigned to interdisciplinary teams for the course duration, a team identity project is completed, followed by the development of a Web site for the team, with additional pages for each teacher. This broad assignment addresses all seven of the NMSA standards. From the most basic theme and design appeal for young adolescent students, to learning strategies, resources, and the education of and communication with both students and parents, the Web site development assignment requires a team approach. The initial page(s) of the site provide common team information and communication. Links to each team member's personal content area pages provide each candidate the opportunity to develop their personal style and class information. The scoring rubric addresses four aspects of site development, with multiple criteria established for each, based on the applicable standards (rubric available at http:/ /hdl.handle.net/10349/344).

Institution: Missouri Southern State University

Interactive Homework
This assignment requires candidates to develop and use interactive homework. During the internship year, candidates become immersed in the school culture, experiencing everything from open house, parent-team conferences, parent phone calls, and good news cards. To expand parent involvement beyond these traditional forms of communication, candidates learn to use interactive homework—homework that requires the participation of a parent or other adult to complete but that requires no prior knowledge of the adult. Research at the professional development school (PDS) has shown that interactive homework increases parent involvement as well as parent-child communication and that parents appreciate having a chance to see what their children are doing at school. Examples of interactive assignments written by candidates can be found at http://hdl.handle.net/10349/344. Information on interactive homework can be found at www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/tips/TIPSmain.htm. Institution: Trinity University

Standard 7 – Middle Level Professional Roles

Book Review
In this assignment, candidates write a review of a text dealing with early adolescence. Throughout the program, candidates read and review a number of fiction and nonfiction selections dealing with young adolescents. Titles include popular adolescent fiction commonly read in classrooms as well as nonfiction selections with topics ranging from media and technology influences on kids today to topics such as Asperger’s Syndrome. The book review is a critical analysis of a book, not merely an account of its contents or a summary of the “story.” The reviewer interacts with the author by agreeing with the author where possible and disagreeing where the reviewer finds the author deficient in knowledge, judgment, organizing skill, or writing ability. The reviewer also clearly states how much or how little the author has contributed to the reviewer’s understanding of the subject in question and does or does not recommend the book to other potential readers. This assessment also meets Standard 4. Institution: University of Texas–Arlington

Conference Presentation
This assignment requires candidates to present at the state middle level conference. During the fall semester, one or more candidates team with one or more mentor teachers to write a presentation proposal. Topics range from “No More Drab Vocab” to “Using Movement in the Mathematics Classroom.” In early spring, the group constructs the presentation and presents it at the state conference. While there, candidates are required to attend at least three additional breakout sessions and all general sessions. Since this experience provides a level of professional growth and cohort bonding unavailable at the university or at the professional development school, it is funded by the university as an essential program.
**Figure 1** Assessments aligned with NMSA Performance-Based Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NMSA Standards</th>
<th>Assessments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1: Young Adolescent Development</strong></td>
<td>• Adolescent Life History Paper*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle level teacher candidates understand the major concepts, principles,</td>
<td>• Shadow a Student Case Study*</td>
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<tr>
<td>theories, and research related to young adolescent development, and they</td>
<td>• Case Study</td>
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<td>provide opportunities that support student development and learning.</td>
<td>• Young Adult Short Story</td>
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<td>• Parent Handbook/Web Site</td>
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<td>• Adolescent Characteristics Checklist</td>
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<td>• Team &amp; Individual Web Site Development</td>
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<td>• Practicum Reflection Journal</td>
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<td>• NMSA Standards Pre/Post Self-Evaluation</td>
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<td>• Team Data Report</td>
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<td>• Young Adolescent Advocacy Project</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 2: ML Philosophy &amp; School Organization</strong></td>
<td>• Design of the Ideal Middle School*</td>
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<td>Middle level teacher candidates understand the major concepts, principles,</td>
<td>• Beginning of the Year Case Study*</td>
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<td>theories, and research underlying the philosophical foundations of</td>
<td>• Advisory Simulation</td>
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<td>developmentally responsive middle level programs and schools, and they work</td>
<td>• Flexible/Block Scheduling Simulation</td>
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<td>successfully within these organizational components.</td>
<td>• Observation Modules</td>
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<td>• Interdisciplinary Field Trip Plan</td>
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<td>• Interdisciplinary Community Service Plan</td>
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<td>• Interdisciplinary Advisory Plan</td>
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<td>• Middle School Floor Plan Design</td>
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<td>• Practicum Reflection Journal</td>
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<td>• NMSA Standards Pre/Post Self-Evaluation</td>
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<td>• Team Data Report</td>
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<td>• Team Building</td>
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<td>• Middle School Advisory Project</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 3: ML Curriculum &amp; Assessment</strong></td>
<td>• Interdisciplinary Thematic Unit*</td>
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<td>Middle level teacher candidates understand the major concepts, principles,</td>
<td>• Position Paper*</td>
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<td>theories, standards, and research related to middle level curriculum and</td>
<td>• Curriculum Unit (development &amp; implementation)*</td>
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<td>assessment, and they use this knowledge in their practice.</td>
<td>• National/State Standards Report</td>
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<td>• AEIS Report</td>
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<td>• Interdisciplinary Curriculum Unit (development)</td>
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<td>• Mid-Term &amp; Final Student Teaching Evaluation</td>
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<td>• NMSA Standards Pre/Post Self-Evaluation</td>
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<td>• Understanding by Design Unit (development)</td>
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<td>• Integrated, Interdisciplinary, Thematic Unit (development)</td>
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<td>• Teacher Work Sample</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 4: ML Teaching Fields</strong></td>
<td>• Interdisciplinary, Internship Field Experience Evaluation**</td>
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<td>Middle level teacher candidates understand and use the central concepts,</td>
<td>• State and National Web Site Evaluation*</td>
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<td>tools of inquiry, standards, and structures of content in their chosen</td>
<td>• Book Review*</td>
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<td>teaching fields, and they create meaningful learning experiences that develop</td>
<td>• Content Analysis</td>
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<td>all young adolescents’ competence in subject matter and skills.</td>
<td>• Lesson Plans from Methods and Content courses</td>
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<td>principles, and research related to effective instruction and assessment, and</td>
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<td>they employ a variety of strategies for a developmentally appropriate</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 6: Family &amp; Community Involvement</strong></td>
<td>• Team &amp; Individual Web Site Development*</td>
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<td>Middle level teacher candidates understand the major concepts, principles,</td>
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<td>theories, and research related to working collaboratively with family and</td>
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<td>community members, and they use that knowledge to maximize the learning of</td>
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<td>all young adolescents.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 7: ML Professional Roles</strong></td>
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<td>Middle level teacher candidates understand the complexity of teaching young</td>
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<td>adolescents, and they engage in practices and behaviors that develop their</td>
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* Assessments described in text  + Rubric included
component. This assessment also meets Standards 4 and 5. **Institution: Trinity University**

Once programs develop assessments that meet NMSA standards, the task turns to selecting a group of well-rounded, comprehensive assessment artifacts for the Specialized Professional Associations (SPA) report. The report requires six assessments, with the option to include up to eight. Since Assessment 1 requires data from state licensure or professional exams, using all eight assessments helps ensure coverage of the seven NMSA standards. Most agree that lesson and unit plans, along with student teaching evaluations, comprise the foundational assessments; however, beyond these standard examples, the possibilities are vast. As shown in the earlier assessment descriptions, it is helpful, if not necessary, for some assessments to meet more than one NMSA standard. As a whole, the assessments should show “compelling evidence” that candidates are well prepared to teach young adolescents.

**Challenges**

As we five authors have struggled through the program report submission process, important questions swirling in our heads, a number of challenges have occurred to us along the way. All of us were working in middle level preparation programs that were either expanding or restructuring to meet the demands of standards-based teacher preparation. These changes brought forth a host of issues and concerns we had not faced before. Major revision and renewal of a program are exciting, but also daunting. Understanding your program—where you are and where you are heading—is vital. According to Wiggins (1998),

> Assessment should be designed to provide ongoing, useful feedback to both students and teachers on what students have learned. This feedback should be used to improve teaching and learning progressively, not just audit student performance. (Wiggins, 1998, p. xi, xiii)

We could not agree more; the key assessments are tools that can be used to inform our practice and guide program revision. Receiving feedback from the NMSA/NCATE review process and the NCATE and state accreditation processes helps us continually assess our program’s effectiveness. In our collective experience, these processes have led to positive change for ourselves and our candidates. A look at *Turning Points 2000* confirms our thoughts: “For all students to be successful, they must have a thorough understanding of the standards that form the foundations and the concepts and questions that form the frame” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 54). In other words, what we choose as our key assessments would equate to what Wiggins and McTighe (1998) called “enduring understandings,” or what “we want students to remember after they have forgotten the details.” The most important decision we face is determining these key assessments, determining what enduring understandings and essential experiences our candidates should have along the way in their journey toward becoming a teacher. But the most important challenge we face, once the key assessments have been determined, is what to do with the information garnered from these assessments—how to make informed decisions about what our candidates know and are able to do.

Teacher education programs are accountable for our work, for the quality of our candidates, and for the impact they make on P–12 learning. As professors in and coordinators of middle level teacher education programs, we have discussed a number of additional challenges beyond selection and interpretation of the key assessments.

- Gaining support from colleagues within the college and university campus
- Finding ways and means to negotiate with other stakeholders on campus
- Collaborating with mentors and others in the field for many assessments
- Understanding assessment theory (and the additional challenge of avoiding being “rubriced to death” and fighting the urge to have “a rubric for the rubric”)
- Collaborating with program faculty to combine key assessments into one cohesive program (e.g., creating a program portfolio)
- Judging the quality of our teacher candidates
Conclusion

The need to improve the quality of middle level teacher preparation has, perhaps, never been greater than it is today. Studies continue to find significantly higher attrition rates for middle grades teachers than for those teaching elementary or high school, even though they account for the smallest percentage of the teaching force (Texas Education Agency, 1995; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). This, coupled with the fact that only 24 of the 46 states that offer specialized credentials actually require it for those teaching in the middle, leaves much work to be done (Gootman, 2007). As middle level teacher educators, we hope that sharing our successes helps us all come closer to our collective goal of providing young adolescents with teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be the expert teachers they deserve.

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Presented by National Middle School Association

April 24–25, 2009
Red Rock Resort Las Vegas, Nevada

Whether you are just starting a program for middle grades educators or are involved in an established program, this symposium will meet your needs.

Specifically designed for:
• Faculty members of colleges and universities
• Faculty members of undergraduate or graduate middle level teacher preparation programs
• Administrators of colleges, schools, and departments of education
• Policymakers
• Anyone who participates in the preparation of teachers of young adolescents

The symposium will foster a learning community that is actively engaged in expanding the knowledge base for teacher preparation at the middle level.

Visit www.nmsa.org/symposium or call 800-528-NMSA for more information.
Letter from the President
Janet Vernon

Middle level students need the diligent commitment of educators to forecast their individual and collective social and academic needs. Contributions to success are systematic and embedded in our daily interactions with students. A belief in student success is paramount to building a climate of trust, developing relationships, and providing an atmosphere of learning.

Securing a climate of trust can be accomplished in the classroom and in the overall school environment. Young adolescents prefer open and honest adults who allow them to express their feelings and ask questions. Mutual respect is modeled and expected in and out of the classroom. Thus, bullying and put downs are not tolerated and are realistically dealt with.

Students need to know, without a doubt, we care about their individual success. Therefore, being patient, investing extra time, and showing an interest in students’ lives are important to the development of lasting student relationships. It is always important to get to know more about a student’s culture and his or her prior educational experiences.

In some instances, educators assist students in finding mentors or coaches to provide the extra attention they might need. Likewise, we can address the needs of high performers by connecting them with outside opportunities to expand and apply their knowledge base.

Intriguing academic activities and instructional strategies bring learning to life. The following strategies have proven successful:

1. Maintain a variety of learning opportunities for students.
2. Incorporate multiple technology options, distance learning, creative reflections, group interaction, and project-based inquiry to make learning fun.
3. Assist students in setting achievement goals and monitoring their progress.

Fulfilling our commitment to the success of middle level students can be accomplished through a continual focus on individual student needs and teamwork. Middle level educators must learn and grow professionally from conversations with other educators and through professional development opportunities. Our direct impact on student success can never be taken for granted.

Focusing on Dropout Prevention

The leadership teams of National Middle School Association (NMSA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) recently gathered at the NASSP office in Washington to further our collaborative efforts to help stem the dropout crisis.
Erb Receives Lounsbury Award

Thomas O. Erb was presented the John H. Lounsbury Award at NMSA’s 35th Annual Conference in Denver. Tom Erb has been the distinguished editor of Middle School Journal for the past 15 years, taking NMSA’s flagship publication through expansion and improvement. Tom is a scholar, researcher, writer, philosopher, advocate, curriculum specialist, administrator, and, first and foremost, a teacher. His dedicated service to NMSA and middle level education has been extensive, including authoring articles, books, reviews and research reports; presenting at hundreds of workshops and events; and his service to the Kansas Association for Middle Level Education. As a university professor for almost 30 years, Tom has been cited for his excellence at the University of Kansas, where he served for 27 years, and at DePauw University, where he held a distinguished professor post.

Outstanding Teams Honored

Teams That Make a Difference is an awards program sponsored by Pearson and National Middle School Association that identifies teams that work to improve the education and well-being of young adolescents. The following teams were recognized at the 2008 NMSA Annual Conference in Denver in November.

2008 Grand Prize Winners
Stowe Middle School, Stowe, VT
Team Members: Jeff Grogan, Steve Buzzell
Principal: Nancy Shiok
Program: 7th Grade Team
Category: Focusing on Student Achievement

G.W. Carver Academy Middle School, Waco, TX
Team Members: Jim Heston, Mary Duty, David Gibson, Jessica Reisinger
Principal: Pam Correa
Program: Carver Academy Mars Simulator (CAMS)
Category: Connecting Young Adolescents with Communities

2008 Runners-Up
Eagle Ridge Middle School, Ashburn, VA
Team Members: Gabrielle Carpenter, Janice Koslowski, John Johnson, Wanda Cook
Principal: Janice Koslowski
Program: Club 2012

Keith Valley Middle School, Horsham, PA
Team Members: Diane Heitzanrater, Valerie Fasy, Stacy Rotchford
Principal: Jonathon Kircher
Program: Keith Valley Technology Education Program

2008 Honorable Mention
Ridgewood Middle School, Arnold, MD
Team Members: Ann Asher, Brandi Owens, Ryan Wideman
Program: RMS Character Council

Greystone Centennial Middle/Woodhaven Middle School/Ecole Broxton Park School
Spruce Grove, AB
Team Members: Carolyn Cameron, Russ Foster, Mike Hubick
Program: Complementary Arts Common Campus

Mt. Olive Middle School, Budd Lake, NJ
Team Members: Sandra Wozniak, Gail DiCicco, Ernie DiCicco
Program: Middle School Robotics Program

Francis Hammond Middle School, Alexandria, VA
Team Members: Jodie Peters, Robert Murphy
Program: Club BILI, Boys in Literacy Initiative

Teams That Make A Difference

Outstanding Teams Honored

Call for Nominations

Now is the time to be an active advocate and voice in your professional association. NMSA is accepting nominations for the 2009 Board of Trustees. Members are encouraged to nominate themselves or a colleague. Deadline: January 16, 2009. Visit www.nmsa.org for more information.

Present at NMSA09!

We are seeking presentation proposals for concurrent sessions at the 2009 NMSA Annual Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. Concurrent sessions are 75 minutes in length and typically feature innovative instructional methods and school practices. Applications due January 31, 2009. Visit www.nmsa.org for more information.
The Lesson Study approach is a method of professional development that encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching practice through a cyclical process of collaborative lesson planning, lesson observation, and examination of student learning. This results-oriented professional development model is an ideal vehicle for improving instructional practice in middle schools. Characteristically, middle schools are (a) learning communities where teachers and students engage in active learning, (b) places with high expectations for every member of the community, and (c) organizational structures that support meaningful relationships (National Middle School Association, 2003). Middle school teachers have to know their students well—who they are and how they learn best—and use this information when planning instruction and assessing student performance (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Most teacher planning focuses primarily on teacher actions rather than on student results (Ornstein, 1997). The Lesson Study approach, however, can provide an opportunity for middle school teachers to work together to strengthen the link between instructional planning and student learning.

What is lesson study?

Lesson Study is a “comprehensive and well-articulated process for examining practice” (Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokshi, 2003, p. 171). The Lesson Study approach is the way Japanese teachers have studied their practice for decades. Educators from the United States who studied the reasons for Japan’s high scores in mathematics concluded that Japan’s success could be the result of their professional development model. These educators discovered that Japanese teachers had developed a way to examine student achievement using a method that Makoto Yoshida (1999) translated as “lesson study.” Stigler and Hiebert (1999) introduced Lesson Study to teachers in North America in their book about international methods of instruction. Lesson Study is now one of the fastest-growing approaches to professional development in the United States (Lewis, Perry, Hurd, & O’Connell, 2006).

Theoretical perspectives

Underpinning the Lesson Study approach is Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which advances the premise that learning is situated in the specific activity and is embedded within a particular context and culture. Lave and Wenger posited that learning is a social process in which individuals co-construct knowledge rather than transmit knowledge from one individual to the next. In the case of Lesson Study, the learning occurs as teachers exchange ideas and collaborate on lessons for their actual classrooms. Situated learning is a model of learning that transpires in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger).

As teachers engage in the process of Lesson Study, they are collectively examining practice; they are functioning as communities of practice. “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern...
or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, n.d.). The members of the community develop a shared practice, a repertoire of shared experiences and understandings. The Lesson Study approach helps teachers to form communities of practice around planning and teaching. In these communities, teachers construct, organize, share, and refine their knowledge of the lesson. Notably, the focus of Lesson Study remains the collaborative intellectual process rather than the output of isolated products such as a collection of model lessons (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2004). This intellectual engagement is a hallmark of communities of practice, which “provide an avenue for teachers with common interests to interact with other professionals with similar interests to solve problems and improve practices” (Angelle, 2008, p. 56).

Developing and nurturing communities of practice require a number of conditions including the legitimization of participation and provision of support (Wenger, 1998). Legitimizing participation entails giving members time to participate in collegial activities and creating an environment that acknowledges the value of communities. Providing support comes in the form of resources such as meeting space and outside experts. Not only are these cultural conditions critical for fostering and sustaining communities of practice, they also are imperative for creating an atmosphere for effective professional development.

**Communities of practice as professional development**

In recent years, educators and policymakers have expressed growing concerns about the effectiveness of traditional professional development (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). According to research conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Desimone (2002), professional development that centers on teacher learning communities rather than the more traditional “workshop” is more likely to be accepted by teachers and implemented in the classroom. Therefore, a growing trend in professional development is to move away from a workshop approach to one that implements some sort of community of practice and encourages teachers to solve educational problems together.

The research base on effective professional development indicates that there are predominantly six components that should be featured: (a) whether it actively fosters a reform style (i.e., study group, mentoring relationship, teacher research) rather than a traditional workshop; (b) whether it is of sufficient duration; (c) the degree to which it emphasizes the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level; (d) the extent to which it provides opportunities for active learning; (e) whether it promotes coherence by incorporating experiences that are consistent with teachers’ goals and state standards; and (f) the degree to which it has a content focus (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). The Lesson Study approach is a good match for this type of professional development. Teachers using Lesson Study work as a team, either by grade level, subject area, or as an interdisciplinary group, to examine an instructional problem and determine how to apply the solution to current teaching goals. Lesson Study typically spans weeks or months as teachers meet to talk about the issue, plan the lesson, observe each other’s teaching, and meet to discuss student learning. As teachers participate in Lesson Study groups, they actively discuss instructional interventions and share knowledge about how students will respond. Culminating from those discussions, teachers produce a lesson plan that is the result of collective wisdom and experience. Teachers then build on that collective wisdom as they watch each other teach and consider how best to engage students in learning.

**Research about planning**

The research on Lesson Study can be contextualized in the larger body of lesson planning research. The current thinking that lesson planning is a linear path that begins with a teaching objective is based on Tyler’s work, which was published in 1949 (John, 2006). Tyler (1949) proposed that lesson planning should consist of four essential elements: educational purposes or objectives, classroom experiences to attain these purposes, effective organization of the experiences, and determining whether the purposes are attained. According to Yinger (1980), “Education, for the most part, adopted a rational model of planning based on models from economics and from national and city planning” (p. 108). The rational method of planning requires teachers to set goals, formulate alternatives, predict outcomes, and evaluate the effectiveness of reaching those goals. This linear, rational type of thinking became the basis for the predominant model of planning that is taught in teacher education programs today and is considered to be the prototype for lesson plans (Jalongo, et al., 2007).
During the 1980s, a flurry of research was conducted about teacher planning that challenged the notion that teachers use linear lesson plans that begin with teaching objectives (Jalongo, Rieg, & Helterbran, 2007). The results of this research indicated that teachers do not use a linear thought process when they plan. Instead, planning can be likened to the composing process in writing (Owen, 1991). Teachers use a pattern of “nested” decision making, focusing on activities rather than objectives, and they plan based on prior successful experiences and institutional elements such as the school schedule, availability of materials, and the interests and abilities of their students (Brown, 1988). When teachers plan, they engage in mental dialogues about teaching rather than writing down their plans. They think about their lessons and envision how they could implement those plans (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

Recent research bolsters the argument that practicing teachers do not plan using what we have called the traditional lesson plan. According to Ornstein (1997), experienced teachers are holistic and intuitive when they plan. Strangis, Pringle, and Knopf (2006) found that teachers begin planning by thinking of activities or texts, not objectives. Sanchez and Valcarcel (1999) found that 78% of teachers in their study began lesson planning by thinking of the content knowledge, and only 22% began with objectives. Instead, teachers consider the lesson objectives as they teach, and the formats of plans vary according to the content of the lesson (Kagan & Tippins, 1992). Because teaching is a complex process that is improvisational in nature, planning generally takes the form of a mental activity, which is a cyclical process that is successively recursive (Yinger, 1980).

Planning using lesson study
When teachers participate in a Lesson Study community, they verbalize the mental dialogue that usually occurs during individual planning. Further, the group interactions provide multiple ways to envision the lesson. As the teachers negotiate their final plan, they are able to examine a wider range of possibilities for lesson instructions, possible student responses, and how to evaluate student learning. Ideas are shared, examined, negotiated, and decided upon. All of these interactions provide teachers with richer and more varied ideas than they could have generated by themselves. Research that has been conducted on Lesson Study indicates that it has strong potential for effective collaborative planning.

One example of research conducted in the United States studied 15 middle school teachers who used the Lesson Study approach as their primary method of professional development for six years (Vandeweghe & Varney, 2006). The researchers reported that this approach helped the teachers form a vibrant learning community in which they examined their teaching practices. Fernandez (2002) investigated two groups of teachers, fourteen K–8 teachers and nineteen middle school teachers, who used Lesson Study as their professional development focus. They found that teachers’ intellectual engagement and collaborative work were benefits of using Lesson Study, but that there were also a variety of obstacles to this approach including having teachers find time to collaborate with their colleagues, overcoming their fear of having team members observe their teaching demonstrations, and critically analyzing their teaching practices.

In a second study of 16 U.S. teachers who were mentored by Japanese teachers in the Lesson Study approach, Fernandez, Cannon, and Chokshi (2003) concluded that to really benefit from using Lesson Study, teachers need to learn how to apply a critical lens to their examination of lessons the way a teacher researcher would. The same holds true for teacher candidates. Marble (2006) investigated eight teams of three student teachers each who had learned how to use Lesson Study to collaborate on planning. She found that teacher candidates were able to critically analyze their practice when they had the opportunity to look at their planning in this way.

Researchers in countries outside the United States have also conducted studies about the use of Lesson Study. In Indonesia, Marsigit (2007) conducted a pilot study regarding the introduction and use of Lesson Study with secondary mathematics teachers in three cluster sites (i.e., West Java, Central Java, East
Java). Though initial findings revealed improvements in teaching practice, including student achievement, Marsigit cautioned that Lesson Study is only a starting point. In Hong Kong, Lee (2008) investigated secondary English teachers’ professional development using a Lesson Study approach. He found that teachers developed subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, engaged in critical self-reflection, and were more attuned to students’ learning needs; however, teachers also experienced increased levels of pressure from the additional workload and time commitment. In another case study, Law and Tsui (2007) studied how a team of university tutors, mentor teachers, and student teachers used Lesson Study to support student teachers’ classroom teaching. Results indicated that this approach was a transformative professional development experience not only for the student teachers but also for the university tutors and mentor teachers.

Unquestionably, the research on Lesson Study is in its infancy. Lewis, Perry, and Murata (2006) discussed the need for further research on the topic. They recommend that there should be a three-pronged approach to developing the research base on Lesson Study. First, there have been several descriptive studies of Lesson Study projects. Lewis and associates (2006) recommended that more of these studies be conducted and published. In addition to descriptive studies, there needs to be an explication of the mechanics of Lesson Study. For example, what happens when teachers debrief a lesson needs to be examined. Finally, longitudinal studies that investigate how teachers using Lesson Study change their practice over time need to be conducted and reported.

In the next two sections, this column shifts from a review of salient research literature to a focus on the authors’ own work with Lesson Study. After explaining how teams of middle school teachers participated in a Lesson Study project, we describe teacher candidates’ experiences with this approach.

### Using lesson study with middle school teachers

Our focus on Lesson Study was to determine whether this type of collaborative professional development could refocus teachers’ thinking on student learning and develop sound instructional practices. We wondered whether the collaborative nature of the Lesson Study approach could help groups of teachers visualize how to plan for student learning as they discussed and agreed upon the components of a lesson.

Teachers from three middle schools agreed to participate in the project and formed lesson study teams, ranging in size from two to eleven teachers. The teams consisted of a mix of content area teachers including language arts, math, science, and social studies teachers, as well as learning specialists (i.e., special education and ESOL teachers). Though the schools’ geographic locations differed, all three schools served high-needs students. None of the schools had achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) in language arts in the past year and all served populations that had at least 50% of the students receiving free and reduced-priced lunches. For two years, these lesson study teams met regularly to design, teach, observe, and evaluate “research lessons” that emphasized sound instructional principles and observations of student learning. The topics of their research lessons varied widely and included science lessons on genetics and sound; math lessons on algebraic equations; language arts lessons on a short story, prefixes, and roots; and social studies lessons on the plague and state rivers. After each school year ended, the lesson study teams from the three schools gathered at literacy symposia to share their lessons and experiences.

### Lesson Study in action

In the Lesson Study approach, a community of teachers collaborates to plan a single lesson. The teachers talk about how a lesson fits with the overall school goals and
what standards or objectives they want to achieve. To plan the details of the lesson, the teachers use a matrix like the one shown in Figure 1.

First, the teams agree on a lesson that furthers the students’ progress toward a school or content goal. Then they outline the teachers’ actions and brainstorm possible teacher comments. They script some of the comments that the teachers could use during the lesson at critical points. As they discuss teacher actions, they discuss potential student responses. This discussion tends to set in motion a process of reevaluating and revisioning the teacher actions, and the plan is revised until the teachers agree on their best course of action. As the teams discuss teacher actions and student responses, they also reflect on how to evaluate student learning. The teachers in this project were asked to consider four areas related to student learning: student engagement, student behavior, student learning, and student products.

The teachers in each of the three schools focused their plans primarily on student engagement. All of the teachers felt competent in classroom management and did not consider student behavior a major issue in their classrooms. They felt, however, that a lack of engagement prevented students from learning the concepts they were teaching. Each lesson, therefore, had ways (e.g., tests/quizzes, written notes, or worksheet completion) that observing teachers could chart as evidence of student engagement through the lesson. Some teachers also included an informal check for understanding in their lessons. These informal observations of student learning took the form of having students volunteer to answer questions, looking at student work during the lessons, and listening to student small-group discussions.

The Lesson Study approach includes another powerful component: observing the lesson. Some of the teachers in our project were hesitant about having colleagues watch them teach. During Lesson Study, however, the observers do not evaluate teaching; they observe student learning. One teacher in each group taught the lesson, while the others observed students using agreed-upon criteria. For example, if the team agreed that students would be evaluated on the amount of participation in class discussion, the observers would record participation rates. Observers took note of other classroom events during instruction, but their primary task was to observe students.

After the lesson, the team reassembled and reflected on the lesson. The teacher shared his or her perceptions of how the lesson was received. The observers shared the data that they had collected. As a group, the teachers discussed what was successful in the lesson and the elements that could be strengthened. The teachers then revised the lesson, which could be taught again or made public by sharing it at a meeting or publishing it on a Web site.

Developing lessons using this collaborative approach to teaching produces exemplar lessons that can be published as models of instruction. (We provided our

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Lesson Steps</th>
<th>Teacher Actions: What the teacher is doing</th>
<th>Student Actions: What the students are doing and/or expected student responses</th>
<th>Evaluation: What data are you collecting? How will you collect it? What is the purpose for the data being collected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connect the lessons to goals, previous learning, and standards.</strong></td>
<td>Tell students to spend five minutes reviewing their notes from the “talk back to the text” strategy that they learned. Tell students to reread them, answer questions, or add thoughts.</td>
<td>Students will open texts, look through notes, make some additional notes. Some talking among peers is expected, but it shouldn’t interfere with overall learning.</td>
<td># of students engaged in task&lt;br&gt;# of students talking with peers and/or disrupting others&lt;br&gt;Collected through observation for the purpose of determining if students are on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduce the new concept.</strong></td>
<td>Explain that today students will use what they know about the story to infer, or intelligently guess, why characters in the story act the way they do. Model inference for the students using the first page of the story on an overhead.</td>
<td>Students will listen to the teacher. There could be some side talking or inattention, but the majority of the students will be looking at the teacher and quietly listening.</td>
<td># of students watching the teacher&lt;br&gt;# of students talking with peers and/or disrupting others&lt;br&gt;Collected through observation for the purpose of determining if students are listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teachers with the option of having their lessons posted on the Content Area Teacher Network Web site, http://www.teachers.ed.pdx.edu.) The benefits of the Lesson Study approach, however, are not only the development of a demonstration lesson; teachers who collaborate on the development of the lesson learn from each other how to think about teaching and student learning.

**Mentoring teacher candidates**

In addition to introducing practicing teachers to the Lesson Study approach, we brought this approach into our teacher preparation program. Based on our knowledge of the program, we decided to incorporate Lesson Study into our middle school teacher candidates’ methods courses. Teacher candidates have trouble relating to the kinds of lesson plans that they are taught in their teacher education programs, because these types of lesson plans tend to be far removed from what actual teachers do in the classroom (Maroney, & Searcy, 1996). Teacher candidates are typically taught a linear, rational, ends-means sequence of lesson planning that begins with the objectives of the lesson (John, 2006). We taught our candidates a variety of ways to plan (e.g., differentiated lesson plan, inquiry-based lesson plan, PowerPoint lesson plan) including Lesson Study.

Our experiences introducing teacher candidates to collaborative planning were met with enthusiasm. Teacher candidates are novice planners and welcome input into their lesson planning. They also are accustomed to identifying their proposed actions, so they found the Lesson Study format easy to navigate. However, teacher candidates had much more difficulty than the practicing teachers did in thinking of ways to evaluate student learning. Consistent with research on the development of novice teachers, our teacher candidates were more focused on their own instruction than they were on how students responded (see John, 2006). As the teacher candidates moved into full-time student teaching, however, they were able to develop lessons and work samples that indicated growth on planning for both instruction and student learning.

**Teachers’ intellectual engagement and collaborative work were benefits of using Lesson Study.**

**Advice for teachers and administrators**

Becoming familiar with Lesson Study is an obvious initial step for teachers and administrators alike. To build an understanding of this approach, educators can engage in a book study (see Recommended Resources, p. 57), read journal articles (see References, pp. 56–57), view videos or DVDs (available at http://www.globaledresources.com/), and consult with university faculty or regional education laboratories. Information and links to publications can also be found on Lesson Study Web sites including The Lesson Research Web Site hosted by the Education Department at Mills College (http://www.lessonresearch.net/) and The Lesson Study Research Group at Teachers College/Columbia University (http://www.tc.edu/centers/lessonstudy/).

Once teachers and administrators share a common understanding of Lesson Study, it is necessary to move from discussions to actually engaging in Lesson Study (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2004). As with other innovative approaches, it is best to start Lesson Study with a small, interested group of teachers. These interested teachers, working as a learning community, are more likely to adopt the Lesson Study approach (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Desimone, 2002). Together the group can set realistic expectations for implementing Lesson Study in their school.

To engage effectively in Lesson Study will require certain conditions. First, teachers need time for genuine collaboration to occur (Vandeweghe & Varney, 2006), which administrators will need to allocate in the school schedule. In middle schools, common planning time within the teachers’ instructional day is an ideal venue for Lesson Study, though other regularly scheduled times for teacher collaboration can work. Second, teachers need to make collaboration routine. In Lesson Study, collaboration entails the collaborative planning, observing, and debriefing of lessons. Such collaborative work can encourage teachers to rely on their peers to inject vital feedback regarding the Lesson Study (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2004). Similarly, the collaborative nature of Lesson Study can help teachers...
emphasize critical self-reflection and de-emphasize external evaluation (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998). Finally, teachers need to shift their attention to student thinking and learning when using the Lesson Study approach. When planning, teachers need to adopt the student lens (Fernandez, et al., 2003) and identify indicators of student engagement. During the observation of the lesson, teachers should focus on student work, engagement, and behavior, rather than focusing on the teacher’s ability. By keeping the focus on the students, teachers can gain important insights into ways to improve their instructional practice.

Conclusions

“Effective planning is an essential element of good teaching and of promoting student achievement” (Jalongo, Rieg, & Helterbrand, 2007, p. 42). The Lesson Study approach is a way for teachers to engage in professional development leading to activities that promote instructional change. When teachers meet in professional learning communities to discuss planning, they become active participants in reform. Lesson Study has additional benefits by drawing teachers’ attention to student learning as they think about their own instructional actions. A further advantage of Lesson Study is that it allows teachers to observe students during the teaching of a planned lesson. As teachers observe students, they begin to see teaching from the students’ point of view. This new perspective can change deeply entrenched notions of instruction and result in better student learning.

Acknowledgments

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References


Recommended resources
To learn more about Lesson Study and its use in schools, the following resources are recommended:


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Curricular standards at the middle level and at all grade levels include vocabulary development as part of a comprehensive literacy program. Some of the expectations in these standards include determining meanings of derivatives, studying words systematically across different disciplines, learning polysemous words, and understanding the etymology of words. To address these objectives, teachers need to consider a print-rich classroom environment that supports vocabulary acquisition. One particular artifact associated with print-rich literacy environments is the word wall, a collection of words visually displayed in the classroom that serves as a referential point for discussion. While word walls have typically been considered the domain of primary level classrooms, we have had promising success at the middle level with what we call the “Interactive Word Wall” (Harmon, Hedrick, Wood, Vintinner, & Willeford, in press; Harmon, Hedrick, & Wood, 2007). The Interactive Word Wall strategy is grounded in research and theory supporting the use of social interaction, active student engagement, and the power of choice in working with older students (Gambrell & Marinak, 1997; Kohn, 1993).

In this column, we begin with a brief review of the importance of vocabulary to subject area learning and how key features of research-based vocabulary learning led us to develop the Interactive Word Wall strategy. Then we describe an instructional framework for using the Interactive Word Wall. And last, we provide some actual classroom examples from a middle school social studies teacher.

Research-based vocabulary instruction

The importance of vocabulary in learning is widely acknowledged by educators and is grounded in a wealth of research studies dating back many decades (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006; Baumann, Kame’enui, & Ash, 2003; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000). The findings of vocabulary research provide us with understandings about vocabulary knowledge as a predictor of verbal ability as well as reading comprehension (Sternberg, 1987), the high correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Stanovich, Cunningham, & Freeman, 1984) and how this link is both complex and difficult to separate (Baumann, 2005; NICHD, 2000), and the tremendous differences in word knowledge that can exist in any school classroom and at any grade level for economically disadvantaged students (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Hart & Risley, 1995; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990) and for English language learners (Folse, 2004).

The Interactive Word Wall strategy serves three purposes: (a) associating word features and meanings with familiar ideas, concepts, and experiences; (b) actively engaging students in multiple, varied, and meaningful experiences with words; and (c) highlighting student choice.
**Associative learning**

The role of association tasks in learning and instruction has a long history, having been researched since the early years of the last century from Thorndyke to Pavlov (Wittrock, 1979). Research and theory since these early years has shown how knowledge exists as a vast set of associations of varying degrees represented by images in our minds and related to and triggered by our current and prior experiences (Sadoski & Paivio, 2004; Paivio, 1986). The research on the keyword method, a mnemonic device that involves associative learning, supports the use of this technique for helping students recall word meanings (NICHD, 2000). Essentially, students create a visual image between the word meaning and some familiar part of the word. Baumann, Kame’enui, and Ash (2003) use the example of the word *carlin* meaning “old woman.” The student pictures an old woman driving a car and this image helps later recall of the word meaning. The broad research base for the keyword method favors its use for helping students remember definitions (Pressley, Levin, & Delaney, 1982; Pressley, Levin, & McDaniel, 1987), although some studies noted a problem with long-term retention of word meanings (Thomas & Wang, 1996; Zhang & Schumm, 2000).

**Active engagement**

Many salient studies describing effective vocabulary instruction that can improve reading comprehension are the work of Beck, McKeown, and their associates (e.g., Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Perfetti, 1983; McKeown & Beck, 2004). The “rich” instruction investigated in these studies requires students to move beyond definitional levels to activities that require students to think about and use words in meaningful contexts to produce a deeper level of understanding (Beck, Mcclaslin, & McKeown, 1980). Research has also clearly shown that frequent and varied exposures to targeted vocabulary is critical to word learning (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985; NICHD, 2000; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986).

**Vocabulary self-selection**

Student choice has been validated as a powerful construct in learning (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Kohn, 1993; Reynolds & Symons, 2001) and as a critical feature in exemplary teaching (Allington, 2002). Tied closely to intrinsic motivation, student choice in learning involves other constructs such as student interest, motivation to complete tasks, and, in particular, personal control over the learning. Only a few studies, however, have examined student choice in vocabulary learning and instruction. One study investigated the well-known Vocabulary Self-Collection strategy (Haggard, 1986; Ruddell & Shearer, 2002). This strategy directs students to find new words that everyone in the class should be required to know. The teacher then scaffolds student learning by discussing, clarifying, and extending word meanings. In her study with college students, Haggard (1986) found that self-selection enhanced vocabulary learning and fostered the development of systematic and independent word learning strategies. More recently, Ruddell & Shearer (2002) used the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy with seventh and eighth grade students and achieved positive results for helping students become more independent in learning new words. Fisher, Blachowicz, and Smith (1991) also investigated students’ self-selection of vocabulary words, but in the context of cooperative literature discussion groups. Their findings indicate that a learner-driven approach can enhance students’ independent word learning.

**Recommended instructional framework for the Interactive Word Wall**

Next, we describe an instructional sequence for using the word wall as a focal point for active engagement in word learning. This interactive instructional sequence includes the following steps: (a) selecting words to teach, (b) introducing words, (c) making connections to the words, (d) using the words in meaningful ways, and (e) sharing the word meanings. These steps can be applied to vocabulary instruction in any content area.

**Selecting the words**

The initial step is to select conceptually important words from a passage about the topic to be taught. While there may be many more words that are unfamiliar to some students, only a few of the most critical terms should be targeted for direct instruction. For example, in a social studies passage about the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s (taken from Finkelstein, N.H., *The Way Things Never Were*, pp. 82–84), the teacher may decide that the following terms are important for comprehension: *Sputnik, invincible, devastating, prestige, Communism, dominated,*...

**Introducing and modeling the lesson**

The teacher begins the lesson by introducing the terms using a rich instructional context that can enable students to form a reasonable meaning for the term. This instructional context is typically written by the teacher, since naturally occurring contexts containing unfamiliar terms may not be very helpful to students (Schatz & Baldwin, 1986). For example, for the word *invincible* the teacher can use the following instructional context:

After defeating Germany and the Axis powers during World War II in the 1940s, the United States became an even stronger and more powerful country. In the 1950s the American people felt that no country could ever match their strength and power. However, they no longer felt *invincible* after the Soviet Union launched the first unmanned satellite into space in 1957.

After a discussion about what the students think the word means, the teacher and students can construct a reasonable definition for *invincible*. Given the confusion that dictionary definitions sometimes create for many students (Miller & Gildea, 1987), these co-constructed definitions will be more in line with what Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) called student-friendly definitions. For example, for the word *invincible*, instead of the dictionary definition “incapable of being conquered, defeated, or subdued” (from www.dictionary.com), a more understandable definition would be “describes how you feel when you think that no one person or no one thing can beat you or take you down or win you over.” At this point, students copy these understandable definitions in their notebook.

Another example of an instructional context and a student-friendly definition is the following for the term *Communism* with a dictionary definition of “a system of social organization in which all economic and social activity is controlled by a totalitarian state dominated by a single and self-perpetuating political party” (from www.dictionary.com).

**Instructional context.** While *Communism* is on the decline today, some countries, such as Cuba, China, and North Korea, still try to maintain the social order in which the political party dominates the country, and the goods and services are shared by the people, with little personal ownership for anyone.

**Student-friendly definition.** *Communism* is a word that stands for a way of running a country in which the goods and services of the country are shared by all. All businesses, land, factories, railroads, and so forth are owned by the people. There is no private property.

**Making connections with the terms**

After students have a clear understanding of the word meanings, they engage in word wall activities for making connections, including assigning a color to the word meanings, drawing a symbol, and illustrating a situation. For these tasks, the teacher divides the class into small groups comprised of three or four students. Each group is assigned two of the targeted words. Students then complete the following tasks:

**Connections to Color.** Students write each term on a flash card and then decide on a color that might be representative of the word’s meaning. Any color can be matched to a word, as long as the students can provide a reasonable justification tied to the word’s meaning. For example, the following are possible connections for some of the words listed above:

- *Sputnik*—white—stands for the reflection of sun off the orb
- *invincible*—black—stands for something strong
- *devastating*—red—stands for fire, blood, carnage, and other things associated with destruction
- *prestige*—gold or silver—reminds us of wealth and status
• **Communism**—red—color always associated with the former Soviet Union
• **nuclear annihilation**—gray—black—represents the existence of nothing
• **National Defense Education Act of 1958**—red, white, and blue, our national colors

Once the student groups have agreed on the colors for the words, they color each flash card with the designated color and then hang the card on the word wall.

**Connections to Symbols.** The next task for the student groups is to draw a symbol on an index card to represent the term. Similar to the color selection, students must decide on a symbol that will trigger recollection of the word’s meaning. Some examples for our sample words follow:

- **invincible**—strong man flexing muscles or a stone wall that is impenetrable
- **Communism**—hammer and sickle as on the former Soviet Union flag
- **National Defense Education Act of 1958**—math problem and a microscope to represent the government’s focus on mathematics and science

The symbols are then placed to the left of the flash card of the corresponding word on the word wall (see examples in Figures 1 & 2).

**Connections to Contexts.** The last task for making connections directs students to think of situations or contexts in which the term can be used and to illustrate the situation or context on another index card. For example, for the word **invincible**, one context for using this term could be in reference to an **invincible** army attacking enemies. When discussing the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II, the term **annihilation** could be used. For each of these examples, students draw simple illustrations as reminders of contexts to associate with the terms.

- The students place the index card illustrating a situation associated with the word to the right of the flash card on the word wall.

**Actively engaging the students**

In this segment of the lesson, student groups engage in activities that direct them to use the word meanings to develop meaningful prompts and questions. These prompts and questions will be used later in their interactive presentations to the class. Following the examples of meaningful use provided by Beck and her colleagues (2002), the teacher models meaning prompts, sentence completions, and word associations for the students. Here are a few examples with our targeted words:

**Meaningful prompts**
- Reasons why the United States might have felt **invincible** in the 1950s:
- Reasons why the Soviet Union made the United Stated feel less **invincible** in the 1950s:
- Things that you can describe as **invincible**:
- What you would not expect to see in a **Communist** country:
- Things you would expect to see in a **Communist** country:

**Sentence completions**
- Changes you might have seen in schools because of **NDEA**:
- The United States did not feel **invincible** after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957 because…
- Many people in **Communist** countries are unhappy with this form of government because…
- The **National Defense Education Act of 1958** was important to education because…

**Word associations**
- Could a leader of a country feel **invincible**? Is that a good thing?
- Could a feeling of **invincibility** have devastating outcomes for a country?
- Could human rights be a major issue in a **Communist** country?
- If a **Communist** country has nuclear capabilities, would they feel **invincible**?
- Did the **NDEA** make Americans feel more **invincible**?

**Sharing the new learning**

The final step in the Interactive Word Wall instructional sequence involves student engagement in a synthesis of what they have learned. Student groups gather together all of the information they have about their assigned terms to create a presentation to the class. Their task is
to become the teacher to help other classmates extend and reinforce understandings about the words. While each presentation is uniquely created by the group, students should include the instructional contexts; clearly understandable definitions; references to and explanations of the colors, symbols, and situations of the words on the word wall; and interactive discussions whereby the classmates provide responses to the meaningful prompts, sentence completions, and word associations.

**Actual classroom implementation**

We asked middle school literacy specialist and University of North Carolina Charlotte doctoral student Kendall Kiser to share our Interactive Word Wall strategy with some of the teachers with whom she works. She demonstrated the strategy using the examples we described previously on the topic of the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s with an eighth grade social studies teacher, Ms. Snyder.

Ms. Snyder reported that the Interactive Word Wall strategy coordinated well with her concept model of teaching key social studies terms. For example, the concept words selected for a lesson on Christopher Columbus were change, exploration, and culture. Students identified colors related to the words, symbols, and pictures as well as an oral and written context or situation for the key words. Other concept words used throughout the year were: interaction, technology, artifact, culture, migration, patterns, progress, language, religion, perspective, diffusion, revolution, and economics.

Figure 1 is a segment of the word wall in Ms. Snyder’s classroom illustrating the words revolution, economics, and progress and the symbols, pictures, colors, and contextual definitions chosen by the students. Notice, for example, the students’ use of the color green to represent the term economics and their use of red to represent the term revolution.

Figure 2 is another segment of the word wall showing how the students depicted the concept words exploration and equality. The students used the color blue to represent the bodies of water used for exploration as well as the calming, balancing dimension of the color blue to represent equality as depicted in their drawing of the scales.

Based on the positive reaction from teachers and students in Ms. Snyder’s class, the Interactive Word Wall is being implemented across different content areas and grade levels. Initially, the Interactive Word Wall was introduced to a small number of teachers. As other teachers began to see and hear the positive response from Ms. Snyder’s students, they became interested in incorporating the Interactive Word Wall into their daily instruction.

While the examples shown were for social studies, we have had successes with the Interactive Word Wall strategy across all content areas. The Interactive Word Wall strategy has the potential to enliven the classroom environment with its colorful, student-developed visual display, while motivating students to want to learn the vocabulary terms necessary for a conceptual understanding of subjects under study.

**References**


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