$AVING OUR FUTURES
A FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

National Middle School Association recently teamed with America’s Promise Alliance to identify 100 middle grades educators to implement and evaluate the Saving Our Futures financial responsibility curriculum. These teachers also submitted outlines of service-learning projects that would engage their students. The ten best project outlines received $1,000 grants to implement their plans. One grand prize winner was also selected to receive an all expenses paid class trip to Washington, D.C.

for more information, and to download your free copy of the Saving Our Futures curriculum, please visit www.americaspromise.org/financialresponsibility
Ms. Koch’s class at Drake Middle School in Arvada, Colorado, won the grand prize with their project, Connecting Generation to Generation, raising more than $4,000 for local nursing homes and volunteering a combined 250 hours of service.

$1,000 grant recipients

LaShawn Allen
Jack H. Skirball Middle School • Los Angles, CA

Liesa Bailey
Irving West–Waverly Shell Rock School District • Waverly, IA

Lisa Booker
St. Matthew School • Gahanna, OH

Stacy Hawthorne
Claggett Middle School • Medina, OH

Becky Hobson
St. Agnes Academy–St. Dominic School • Memphis, TN

Kristen Jensen
William Thomas Middle School • American Falls, ID

Billie Jean Kelly
Clark Moores Middle School • Richmond, KY

Tristin Koch
Drake Middle School • Arvada, CO

Melissa Stolz
RA Jones Middle School • Florence, KY

Rachel Woolbright
Rockwell Charter High School • Eagle Mountain, UT
In October I attended the annual Middle Level Education Summit at Georgia College and State University. John Lounsbury presided over the closing session and introduced the featured speaker, Elizabeth Koller, executive director of Perspectives on Growth and Development. Ms. Koller’s session, titled “The Science of Brain Chemistry and Youth Behavior,” explained how the levels of five key brain chemicals, or neurotransmitters, influence certain human behaviors. As Dr. Lounsbury delivered the introduction, he told the audience that he had first heard Ms. Koller speak at a Georgia Middle School Association conference, and he described how he had been intrigued by the “cutting edge” ideas she had shared during her session. Dr. Lounsbury was visibly excited about what he had learned from Ms. Koller and what she was about to teach all of us, and as he spoke, I thought to myself, “This man never stops learning.” Indeed, after 50-plus years as a scholar in the field of middle grades education, John Lounsbury continues to be the quintessential example of a lifelong learner.

We all have much to learn about our profession—about the subject matter we teach and the ways we teach it, about the students and families we serve and the communities they call home, about the political and cultural conditions that influence our work. Each school year, teachers implement new and improved instructional strategies, researchers offer fresh insights into teaching and learning, and school administrators find better ways to restructure schools and use data. Those who actively work to promote excellent education for young adolescents are members of a worldwide middle grades movement that undergoes continuous renewal and is built on a base of knowledge and expertise that grows every school day. This knowledge base encompasses developmental and cognitive psychology, school leadership, curriculum and instruction, educational philosophy, and many other disciplines and areas of inquiry.

All educators have a professional duty to be current and knowledgeable in their fields. Too often, professional “learning” is relegated to one-day teacher in-service programs or district-wide staff development activities. Hayes Mizell, distinguished senior fellow with the National Staff Development Council, asserted in a recent blog that teachers need to assume greater responsibility for their own professional learning. He decried top-down approaches to professional development in which superintendents or other administrators determine staff development needs for entire schools or districts without input from teachers. Such approaches rarely meet the real needs of teachers. Educators encourage their students to independently plan and regulate their own learning, and they need to apply these practices to themselves as well.

Typically, at the start of a new year, people resolve to improve their lives in tangible ways. They commit to healthier living by exercising more, eating less, and dropping bad habits such as smoking. They may set financial goals to save more money, reduce credit card debt, or purchase a home. Some people also set professional goals for themselves at the start of a new year. For middle grades educators, the dawn of 2010 can be an opportunity to resolve to learn. This learning can take many forms.

• Setting tangible, achievable professional learning goals.
• Forming faculty learning groups or book clubs.
• Fostering collaborative learning within schools by ensuring that teachers have designated times and places to meet.
• Seizing “learnable moments” that occur during the school day and outside of school.
• Attending professional development events sponsored by NMSA or other professional associations.

The many middle grades educators who are active, purposeful, lifelong learners are members of a living, vibrant middle grades movement; yet too many other educators remain stuck in a middle grades moment. They have grown complacent in their practice, let their professional knowledge stagnate, and allowed their personal educational philosophies to fossilize. Understandably, many educators struggle during their busy days to find time to engage in meaningful learning experiences for themselves. Resolving to make professional learning a top priority is a necessary step in the right direction.

Resolve to Learn in 2010

A View from the Middle David C. Virtue
Middle School Journal

January 2010  Volume 41 Number 3

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New Feature

Extensions

This issue features questions and ideas for extending learning about topics in each article. Use the extensions to promote individual reflection, to stimulate discussion within teams, or to support professional development in your school.
Bridging a Cultural Divide with Literature about Arabs and Arab Americans

Tami Craft Al-Hazza & Katherine T. Bucher

Middle school is a time of many changes for young adolescents. They are “searching for individual identity, struggling with society’s norms, and grappling with moral issues” (Boston & Baxley, 2007, p. 561). They are changing and maturing physically, cognitively, socially, and psychologically as they develop their identities; establish, maintain, and end friendships and social networks; develop interpersonal skills; build self-esteem; and critically examine themselves and their physical features (Manning & Bucher, 2005). They may explore different behaviors, ideas, and beliefs (Marcia, 1980), and they may undergo crises of identity (Erikson, 1963; 1968). Young adolescents are also involved in a series of changes imposed by the structure of the educational system as they transition from elementary school and begin anticipating a transition to high school.

While all young adolescents may feel developmental and transitional pressures, minority and immigrant students may feel these pressures more acutely than most majority students. For example, the transition periods leading from elementary school to middle school and then from middle school to high school may present special problems for minority students (Cauce, Hannan, & Sargeant, 1992). Akos and Galassi (2004) found that race may “play a role in school transition outcomes” (p. 102) and in feelings of connectedness. While students who are actively engaged in school may be somewhat protected from transitional problems (Eccles et al., 1992), many minority students have feelings of detachment from the education system.

Another area of concern for minority students involves the development of identity and self-esteem. As young adolescents mature, they begin to develop a sense of cultural and social identity as well as a sense of personal identity and self-esteem (Allen, 2004). While politics, economics, relationships, and public perceptions affect identity, identity development is also an “interplay with race, ethnicity, [and] religion” (Shah, 2006, p. 218). This interplay may be especially difficult for minority and immigrant students who must be able to merge their native or traditional cultures with a new or majority culture. Rather than forgetting one culture, they must assimilate both to achieve ethnic solidarity (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Immigrant children may face a sense of cultural bereavement or uprooting in which a loss of cultural identity has a direct impact on self-esteem (Eisenbruch, 1988). In addition, they may feel a sense of dissonant acculturation (Rumbout & Portes, 2001) as

This article reflects the following This We Believe characteristics: Value Young Adolescents — School Environment — Adult Advocate
they outstrip their parents in learning the language and culture of a new country. When this happens, a young adolescent may feel alienated from his or her parents and from peers at school.

The issues described above may be especially acute for young adolescents of Arab descent who may possess feelings of detachment. Although many Arab Americans have traditionally been successful in school (Nieto, 1992), academic success is not always a predictor of psychosocial adjustment. Students may have high grades that mask feelings of depression and low self-esteem (Bankston & Zhou, 2002). Schools are key socialization and acculturation agencies (Hones & Cha, 1999; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990), and a student’s perception of acceptance in school is a major factor in his or her overall adjustment to a new culture (Nguyen & Henkin, 1980). Because of these factors, teachers must ensure that Arab-American students have positive school experiences, especially during the critical developmental period of young adolescence. In this article, we provide information to help middle school teachers understand the Arab immigrant and Arab-American young adolescents in their classrooms. After briefly describing Arab history and culture and discussing specific problems facing Arab American and Arab immigrant students, we suggest literature about Arabs and Arab Americans to use in the middle school curriculum and place in the school library media center.

Arabs—their history and culture

Arabs populate most of the Middle East and represent a varied blend of peoples from 17 countries commencing with Morocco on the western perimeter of the northern part of the African continent and spanning two continents to Yemen on the eastern border of the Saudi Peninsula (Schwartz, 1999). Although some scholars include additional countries, making a total of 21, it is practical to think of Arabs in three groups: those from the Northern part of Africa including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, and Sudan; Arabs from the Mediterranean region including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine (although the Israeli/Palestinian area is disputed at this time and is not officially recognized as a country, we prefer to include the Palestinian territories in this listing as a separate entity); and Arabs from the Arabian Gulf including Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Although living in different countries and regions with unique and distinctive cultures, these Arabs are bound by an Arab identity that is based on a common language and some shared traditions, such as...
A wide variety of traditions, dialects, religious practices, and customs exists within the far-ranging Arab countries.

Mores and values of right and wrong, standards of public behavior, music, marriage rituals, and humor (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). Although they reside in the Middle East, Kurds, Turks and Iranians are not Arabs, nor are Afghans, Armenians or Pakistanis.

A wide variety of traditions, dialects, religious practices, and customs exists within the far-ranging Arab countries. For example, not all Arabs are Muslims. Although the majority of Arabs follow the faith of Islam, there are also significant populations of Arab Christians, Druze, Maronites, Melkites, and Jews living within Arab countries. Although Arabs in all 17 countries speak Arabic, people in each area speak a different dialect, often making it difficult for them to understand each other. Most Arabs are trained in classical Arabic, which is the language that is used to converse across the various regions.

Arabs in the three regions also have different traditions and customs. In the North African Arab countries, it is traditional practice for men and women to greet each other by kissing on the cheeks four times, but in other areas, men may rub noses. Dress in each area varies as well. In North Africa, men’s robes are wide at the bottom with a striped design topped with a hood, in Egypt the robes are solid white, wide at the bottom, wide at the cuff and have no hood, while in the Gulf they are solid white, straight at the bottom and may button or have a collar. The women’s dress varies as well, with distinction apparent in the cloaks they may wear to cover their dresses—usually black in the Arabian Gulf area, trench coat style in the Mediterranean area, and of various bright colors in Northern Africa. Some adults in the Mediterranean region and teenagers of all the Arab countries may even dress in western style clothes. However, despite the rich array of traditions and diversity of customs, all Arabs are held together by the common identity of being Arab.

Problems facing Arab-American and Arab immigrant young adolescents

Arab is both a cultural and linguistic term used to describe people who share the Arab culture and Arabic language (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2007). Arab Americans are further diversified by social class, religion, education, Arabic dialect, length of time in the U.S., and degree of acculturation (Moradi & Hasan, 2004). A special challenge facing Arab Americans and Arab immigrants is the perception of many Americans about their religion. Although almost 90% of Arab immigrants before the 1950s were Christians, the majority of recent immigrants are Muslims (Haddad, 1994; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007). Following the rise of radical Islamic terrorists and 9/11, Arab Americans and Arab immigrants have often been the target of discrimination (Ibish, 2003), as many Americans associate Islam with terrorism (McMurtrie et al., 2001; Wingfield & Karaman, 1995). Thus, children often tease Arab-American or Arab immigrant young adolescents because of their foreign sounding names, traditional clothing, or practice of fasting during Ramadan (Carter, 1999).

In general, discrimination can lead to a number of psychosocial problems including low self-esteem and high distress (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). Kanner and Feldman (1991) linked depression in children to a daily lack of control over their lives. Specifically looking at Arab Americans, Moradi and Hasan (2004) found a link between discrimination and depression, psychological distress, and lowered self-esteem.

Young adolescent Arab Americans or Arab immigrants may also face a conflict between personal identity and cultural identity. When young adolescents from cultures that place a high value on family loyalty come to the U.S. and try to adapt to the majority culture, they often have difficulties adjusting to the emphasis that Americans place on individual competence and competition (Eisenbruch, 1988; Ascher, 1989). For example, Arab values stress the importance of family and religion, respect for elders, and the importance of family before self (Moradi & Hasan, 2004). Arab society is both collective and authoritarian with children expected to adhere to their parents’ and teachers’ expectations and regulations (Dwairy, 2004, p. 277). Thus, in Arab cultures, the young adolescent identifies with the family and bases his or her self-esteem on family status and
reputation and on support and approval from the family (Dwairy, 2002). Using an authoritarian style, many Arab parents emphasize obedience, restrict autonomy, and maintain control. Even at school, when an Arab student encounters verbal, physical, or emotional abuse or aggression from an educator, he or she may assume that this is the normal role of a teacher and will not complain. As a result, many young Arab adolescents may have emotional and behavioral problems including depression and low self-esteem (Dwairy, 2004).

**Role of multicultural literature**

When students interact in schools, they bring their cultural differences as well as their physical, emotional, and cognitive differences. Through the use of good multicultural literature in schools, educators can "help to break down [barriers] … [and] can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community … with good stories that make us imagine the lives of others" (Rochman, 1993, p. 19). When authors incorporate themes such as friendship, family relationships, survival, justice, and conflict resolution into their books, readers can begin to make connections across cultures (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 1998). Serving as a “vehicle for socialization and change” (Harris, 1997, p. 51), literature allows young adolescents to replace stereotypes with an understanding of the similarities and differences among diverse cultures (Bucher & Manning, 2006).

Imagine going through twelve years of education and never reading a story that reflects your life or your cultural heritage. Unfortunately, most Arab immigrants and Arab Americans graduate from high school never having read a single story that validates and reaffirms their culture to them or to their classmates (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). In fact, most Arab Americans and their fellow classmates only receive a negative view of Arabs through hearing and reading sensational news headlines that highlight terrorist activities occurring in the Middle East.

Before 9/11, most educators were not aware of Arab immigrants or Arab Americans sitting in classrooms across America (Nieto, 1992). No special efforts were made to include the literature of Arabs in the curriculum or school library or to affirm their cultural identity. Americans had a vague idea of life in the Middle East, and stereotypes of the camel-riding man in flowing robes and head scarf persisted. They had no specific details of exactly who Middle Easterners were and what their values and culture were. Since 9/11, Arab Americans and Arab immigrants have increasingly become targets of hate crimes and discrimination (Wingfield, 2006), with some Arab-American students relocating due to excessive taunting and teasing at school that resulted in psychological trauma (Spiegel, 2006). Young adolescents should not have to sit in a classroom and fear for their safety due to their ethnic heritage.

However, before educators can help young adolescents, they must overcome their own prejudices, misconceptions, and knowledge gaps (Timm, 1994; Blakely, 1983; Trueba et al., 1990). A number of researchers have found that culturally-based misunderstandings arising from the incongruities between the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of teachers and students can be devastating to the learning process (Duckworth, Levy, & Levy, 2005). To
combat this, teachers must become globally aware with flexibility, respect, and tolerance toward all cultures (Duckworth et al., 2005). As teachers begin to understand the backgrounds of students, they become more compassionate (Hones, 2002).

Arab and Arab-American resources for teachers

Within the confines of an article, we cannot provide a complete, detailed description of Arabs and their culture. There are, however, a number of excellent resources for teachers who want to learn and teach more about Arabs. Two useful resources are Understanding Arabs by Margaret K. Nydell (2005) and Books About the Middle East: Selecting and Using Them With Children and Adolescents by Tami Craft Al-Hazza and Katherine Toth Bucher (2008). Figure 1 includes complete information about these and other resources as well as some online resources.

Arab literature

By introducing Arab literature into the middle grades curriculum, teachers can help Arab students develop positive self-images and help other students increase their awareness of and sensitivity to diverse cultures. As they identify with Arab characters in the literature they read, non-Arab students will develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the Arab culture. In this article, we focus on high-quality Arab literature featuring Arab adolescents. The books are separated into two themes: friendship across borders and overcoming struggles and conflicts.

Friendship across borders

Several books address the theme of friendships that cross cultural and even political borders. Samir and Yonatan by Daniella Carmi (2000) is a thought-provoking, well-written story about a young Palestinian boy, Samir, who is forced to travel through roadblocks and unfamiliar territory to an Israeli hospital to receive treatment for his injured leg. The underlying theme throughout the book is one of tolerance and seeing beyond stereotypes as Samir overcomes his fear of being in a Jewish hospital surrounded by Israelis and, ultimately, replaces his fear with the friendships he forges with the young Israeli children who share his room in the hospital.

Interspersed throughout the book, flashbacks of Samir’s life give the reader insight into the emotional consequences that living in an occupied land has on a child and his family—something that most American students have never considered. Samir also reflects on his fears, his identity, and his past decisions. He contrasts his previous friendships with the new friendships he is establishing and reflects on his current view of a people he had previously considered his enemy, the Israelis. The writer reveals Samir’s analytical reasoning concerning his brother’s death, his father’s emotional distance, and his grandfather’s profound sadness. The story ends with Samir establishing a close friendship with an Israeli boy named Yonatan and, in the closing moments of the book, even Tzahi, who had antagonized him throughout the story, makes gestures of friendship.

This book truly promotes tolerance and crossing cultural divides. It was the winner of the 2001 Mildred L. Batchelder Award given by the Association For Library Service to Children, and it received honorable mention for Children’s Literature in the Service of Tolerance sponsored by UNESCO. Relationships, friendships, and family are concerns for all adolescents; and adolescent American readers will be able to relate to Samir and his struggles, albeit the surroundings and culture may be very different.

Continuing with the theme of friendships, an especially enlightening introduction to the Arab culture is Habibi by Naomi Shihab Nye (1997). The story revolves around Liyana, a 14-year-old Palestinian-American girl whose family decides to relocate to Palestine just as she is becoming a teenager. Young adolescent readers become immersed in the vibrant cultural of the Middle
East as Liyana chronicles the experience of becoming an immigrant and explores her Middle Eastern heritage.

The author examines numerous social and emotional issues that immigrants experience, such as leaving established social networks, creating new friendships, feeling like a stranger in a strange land, and the experience of leaving almost all worldly possessions behind. Liyana, the main character, has to develop a new set of interpersonal skills to be able to relate to and communicate with the people of this new culture; and she has to critically examine the values, beliefs, and behaviors that she had internalized and considered socially acceptable.

The young adolescent reader will learn about a wide and wondrous variety of exotic practices and customs and a diverse set of characters who have different beliefs and who view the world through the lens of a different culture. Due to the author’s extensive experience in the Middle East, the book offers in-depth insight into the culture with detail that enriches the reader’s understanding of the region. *Habibi* has won many awards, including the Jane Addams Book Award and recognition as a 1998 ALA Best Book for Young Adults.

Other books that can be used to deepen and enhance students’ understanding of the Arab world and the theme of friendships across borders are *Running on Eggs* by Anna Levine (1999), *Crossing the Line: A Tale of Two Teens in the Gaza Strip* by Alexandra Powe-Allfred (2003), and *Teen Life in the Middle East* by Ali Akbar Mahdi (2003).

**Overcoming struggles and conflict**

Many books address the problems associated with overcoming obstacles. An excellent book that gives insight into young adolescents who grow up facing conflict and struggle is *Children of Israel, Children of Palestine: Our Own True Stories* by Laurel Holliday (1998). In this book, Holliday attempts to help students understand the Middle East conflict by relating real-life stories instead of giving a narrative of historical events. She believes that this approach will enable young adolescents to relate to and truly understand the emotions, feelings, and struggles adolescents from a very different culture are experiencing.

*Tasting the Sky* by Ibtisam Barakat (2007) continues with the theme of young people facing immense struggles. Barakat talks about her life growing up in Ramallah and her experiences as a child living during times of occupation and invasion. The story provides a dramatic narrative, an account that will enable young adolescent readers to feel the uncertainty, fears, and struggles of young people who live in war-torn areas.

A number of other novels that explore children and teenagers living through occupation, invasion, and war can be placed in the classroom library for students to gain a more in-depth understanding of how adolescents’ struggle during these difficult times. These books can be assigned as outside readings and used in post-reading

**Figure 1** Additional information about Arabs for middle grades teachers

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<td>Arab American Institute. <a href="http://www.aiusa.org">www.aiusa.org</a></td>
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<td>Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. <a href="http://www.accesscommunity.org/site/PageServer">http://www.accesscommunity.org/site/PageServer</a></td>
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<td>Arab World and Islamic Resources. <a href="http://www.awaironline.org">www.awaironline.org</a></td>
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<td>Caught in the Crossfire: Arab Americans—Information from PPS <a href="http://www.pbs.org/itvs/caughinthecrossfire/arab_americans.html">http://www.pbs.org/itvs/caughinthecrossfire/arab_americans.html</a></td>
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<td>National Council of Arab Americans. <a href="http://www.arab-american.net">www.arab-american.net</a></td>
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<td>Teaching Tolerance. Who are the Arab Americans? <a href="http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&amp;ar=155&amp;pa=3">http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&amp;ar=155&amp;pa=3</a></td>
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discussions to increase comprehension of the Middle East and youth who face enormous struggles. Our recommendations are *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak* by Deborah Ellis (2004), *A Little Piece of Ground* by Elizabeth Laird and Sonia Nimr (2006), *Youth in the Middle East* by David Abodaher (1990), and *A Stone in My Hand* by Cathryn Clinton (2002).

**Conclusion**

As Laurel Holliday (1998) notes in *Children of Israel, Children of Palestine: Our Own True Stories*:

“When country of origin, religion, native tongue, skin color, height, weight, ability/disability, age, gender, sexual preference, etc., are no longer the measures of a person’s worth, we on this planet may have a chance of living together in peace. Until that day comes, let us listen to each other’s stories and teach our children the meaning of equal opportunities and justice. (p. xxi)

We believe when teachers are aware of and respect the cultural heritage of Arab immigrant and Arab-American young adolescents, and when they select and use quality literature about the Arab experience with all students, they will have taken an important step on the road to understanding, equality, and peace for all peoples.

**Extensions**

The authors discuss the importance of using multicultural literature to enhance the self-images of ethnic minority students and to increase the cultural awareness of all students. Work with the school media specialist to inventory the multicultural resources in your school media center. Identify gaps between the cultural backgrounds represented in your school and the resources available to teach about them.

**References**


Cited Books for Young Adolescents


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Members of the educational community, especially teachers and students, need to understand the roles of diversity, prejudice, and privilege in the educational community, but “an understanding of a multicultural perspective must begin with self-inquiry” (Levin & McCollough, 2008, p. 157). In addition to self-inquiry, brain-based research validates that long-term understanding comes through personal experiences, such as incidental experiences that occur in daily life, experiences that are sought out by the adventuring person, or simulated events in a “safe” environment (Sylwester, 2000).

This article describes how preservice middle level teachers at a small regional university planned and hosted a leadership conference for local eighth grade students to engage them in simulations and other learning experiences about diversity, social equity, and privilege. The goal for the teacher candidates, who served as the conference facilitators, and the eighth grade conference participants was to learn about and appreciate their own diversity as well as others’ cultural backgrounds and experiences (National Forum to

This article reflects the following This We Believe characteristics:

- Value Young Adolescents — Committed Leaders — Courageous & Collaborative Leaders
Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, 1999). Although this particular conference was led by teacher candidates, this experience could benefit others who want to acquire a better understanding of diversity, social equity, and privilege. Middle level teacher leaders, student leaders, or principals could replicate these activities and ideas to benefit the teachers and students in their schools.

A call to leadership

The Student Association of Middle Level Educators (SAMLE) at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) in Cedar Falls is one of the nation’s oldest active middle level student associations. At one meeting, the guest speaker, Dr. Geraldine Perrault, suggested that the SAMLE-UNI members host a middle grades student leadership conference. The members of SAMLE-UNI, intrigued by the possibility of this service-learning opportunity, embraced Dr. Perrault’s challenge.

What would planning a conference for young adolescents take? It started with leadership from the teacher candidates themselves. SAMLE-UNI members decided to set up a committee structure in five areas: program planning, sponsorship/budget, food, T-shirts, and publicity/registration. Officers and leading members of SAMLE-UNI then signed on as committee chairs or co-chairs.

At the first meeting of the chairpersons, they decided that understanding diversity was a critical component of leadership. “Social Equity” was the overall theme of the day-long conference, and the group settled on E Pluribus Unum: Out of Many, One as the conference title.

All the teacher candidates had been educated in various aspects of diversity. First, several of the leaders had undergone extensive training for the Residential Advisory Program and served as Resident Advisors of dormitories. They were trained to help others deal with diversity and develop skills in living with others. In addition, all of the teacher candidates had taken other courses that addressed diversity. A three-semester-hour course that dealt with human relations provided opportunities for them to experience and reflect upon their own understanding, dispositions, background, and awareness of diversity. In that course and others, students received extensive instruction in the characteristics of young adolescents and diverse groups, how to help children establish better relationships with their classmates, and the need for and implementation of differentiated instruction. Because of these prior experiences, the UNI teacher candidates were confident they could successfully provide guidance to middle grades students.

The SAMLE-UNI leaders extended invitations to the area’s middle schools, in both urban and rural settings, seeking participants who had leadership potential and represented the diversity of the area racially, socio-economically, and linguistically. At each meeting, committee chairpersons reported back to the large group various possibilities for the conference: criteria for selection and number of student participants, places large enough to accommodate the conference, potential keynote speakers, T-shirt designs, catering services in the area, grant funding sources, and activities for breakout sessions. Using input from the members at the large-group meetings, the chairpersons made final decisions for the conference in consultation with the student organization advisor.

According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), when a leadership team embarks on a journey, they must do so with two overarching tenets: people must volunteer to serve on the team, and they must agree on operating principles. In a very real sense, the SAMLE-UNI leaders fulfilled these two tenets. First, the most active leaders from the membership took responsibility and
volunteered for the leadership positions in the planning and implementation of the middle grades leadership conference. Second, their “operating principles” (p. 104) stemmed from two areas of commonality: (a) their dedication to the idea of hosting a leadership conference, along with their motivation to get the job done; and (b) their common field experiences working with students through a university-school partnership in a middle school with large numbers of high-poverty households and diversity of cultures.

Planning and conducting a quality conference

A strong leadership team, one of the key ingredients in school improvement, proved to be a positive factor in the success of the conference. Marzano and his colleagues (2005) suggested that the six operating principles of significance, quality, responsibility, integrity, ethics, and openness undergird the work of successful leaders. The SAMLE-UNI middle level teacher candidates’ work proved those six principles to be pivotal, and, in turn, they developed activities that encouraged the development of those principles in the young adolescents selected to attend the leadership conference.

A budget committee strived to keep per-participant cost low, yet provide a program and amenities of high quality. Once a theme was developed, the SAMLE-UNI president and her advisors wrote a grant proposal for the event. To their surprise and delight, they secured more than $1,000 from a community philanthropic foundation. Each participant would be able to receive a university folder; pen; agenda; evaluation form; T-shirt; and, commemorating the theme, a shiny, new penny that the federal government had already stamped with the conference theme—E Pluribus Unum. With a written plan of action, the middle level teacher candidates in SAMLE-UNI addressed “questions that matter” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 105) when they decided to host a middle school leadership conference to provide a significant opportunity for learning and growth for a particular audience: eighth grade students with leadership potential from diverse backgrounds. Committed to quality and integrity, the middle level teacher candidates performed responsibly for “the public good” (p. 105) and asked for direct, honest feedback in the form of evaluations at the end of the conference. No course requirement compelled the students to facilitate the conference. Additionally, these SAMLE-UNI leaders paved the way for hosting future conferences—perhaps long after they have graduated.

Responsibility established

As more than 80 conference participants arrived with their chaperones, they were given a healthy snack to start the morning. After they finished their snacks, they entered a large lecture hall to listen to the keynote speaker. Unfortunately, no icebreaker activities had been planned—leading to dead space and a lack of engagement while students arriving early waited for last groups of students to arrive. Relying on their past summer experience as staff in the UNI Camp Adventure® program, two SAMLE-UNI members quickly took over the needed leadership role by engaging the large group of waiting students in interactive cheers, songs, and physical response activities. The atmosphere of shyness dissipated as everyone became talkative, active, engaged, and enthusiastic.

The event officially began when the SAMLE-UNI president explained the day’s agenda, identified the schools of the various participants through a stand-up roll call, and introduced key people as well as the keynote speaker, Nichole Zumbach Johnson. Ms. Johnson inspired and motivated the participants by focusing on characteristics that distinguish leaders from followers. She finished with a challenge for the middle grades student leaders. She asked them to ask their principals and student councils to hold a Mix It Up at Lunch Day, an initiative begun by the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) Teaching Tolerance Project. The SPLC found that 70% of the students they surveyed indicated that the school cafeteria is the setting where understanding diversity was a critical component of leadership.

Understanding diversity was a critical component of leadership.
“social boundaries are most clearly drawn” (Tolerance.org, 2003, ¶ 9). On Mix It Up at Lunch Day, students leave their usual friends and eat with a group of people they don’t know well. Ms. Johnson’s additional ideas for a school’s Mix It Up at Lunch Day sparked the imaginations of the eighth grade leaders. She went on to challenge the students to carefully consider how their experiences at the conference could lead to a change in their sense of responsibility.

**Integrating integrity, ethics, and openness**

Following the keynote, the middle grades student leaders were strategically placed into three groups. The 45-minute breakout sessions addressed three areas: 1. examining privilege, 2. experiencing culture-based communication styles, and 3. developing an awareness of stereotypes. After each group had a few minutes to congregate, check group membership, and meet their SAMLE-UNI facilitators, they proceeded to their first breakout session.

Nine SAMLE-UNI leaders had volunteered to lead the three different sessions, while the middle grades student participants and their SAMLE-UNI facilitators moved from session to session. The session leaders helped students process their learning as they participated in the sessions by integrating the keynote points into group discussions, reflecting on leadership, and fielding questions. Each breakout session was repeated three times to accommodate all participants.

**A cross-culture simulation.** The stages of cross-cultural adjustment are relevant in our schools, since many students enroll in a school with cultural experiences (e.g., language, social norms, food) that are varied. This adjustment is not due solely to a student moving from another country, but even geographic changes within a county may introduce cultural expectations that differ from those with which a student is familiar.

We may be able to learn about cross-cultural adjustment in schools from organizations that have long histories working to ease the transition when experiencing cultural change. For example, since 1961 the Peace Corps has assisted more than 180,000 volunteers adjust to cultural differences in more than 130 countries using the “Cycle of Adjustment” process (Peace Corps, 2007). Participants in this process typically move through five stages as they adjust to a new culture: the honeymoon, initial culture shock, initial adjustment, further culture shock, and further adjustment (see Figure 1).

Many of the middle grades students reported that the best session of the day was BaFa, BaFa: A Cross-Culture Simulation (Shirts, 2006). Many of the UNI teacher candidates had experienced for themselves the BaFa activity during a course for education majors on human relations. The SAMLE-UNI session leaders divided the small group of middle level students into two smaller groups. The facilitators then moved each group to a separate room, where they learned the rules of a “cultural” group. The game of BaFa, BaFa was simplified from its original structure to accommodate the 45-minute time frame. Each culture had a few unique language and social customs the students were to learn. One culture was relationship-oriented, while the other was highly competitive; what was considered rude in one culture was valued in the other. One middle grades participant explained her experience in the other culture: “In BaFa, BaFa, I couldn’t stop laughing when I went to the Beta Room, since they, like, stalked me!” which for the Beta community members was characterized as showing interest in all guests to your community.

Debriefing provided the opportunity for participants and teacher candidates to consider their own behaviors and attitudes toward others, examine their own biases and perceptions, and increase their personal awareness of cultural differences. The university teacher candidates discovered that many of the middle school participants actually had more real-life experiences with cultural differences than they had. This cross-cultural simulation allowed both participants and teachers to “experience” how language and cultural differences can profoundly impact people. Conducting the debriefing, then, was a learning experience for both parties. In the evaluations at the end of the conference, one student wrote, “I learned what it was like to be someone who knows a different language and does not know what to do.” Another realized “how uncomfortable new people can be” and “how it feels to be in a new community.”

**Stereotype awareness.** While it is often assumed that only bigoted people succumb to the use of stereotypes, Mahzarin Banaji, a psychology professor at Yale University, makes the point, “Our ability to categorize and evaluate is an important part of human intelligence. Without it, we couldn’t survive. But stereotypes are too much of a good thing” (Paul, 1998, ¶ 9). Humans need to feel part of a group, so one way for people to feel good about membership in a particular group is to denigrate
those who do not belong. Even if there is some truth in a stereotype, John Bargh of New York University qualifies the use of stereotyping by saying, “In a democratic society, people should be judged as individuals and not just as members of a group” (as cited in Paul, 1998).

The stereotype session began with a dictionary-based definition of the term stereotype. Participants were then asked to reflect on their personal understanding of others through the three activities planned for this session. First, participants completed a written exercise in which they were asked to complete thoughts such as, “Men are...” “Women are...” “Americans are...” “Asians are...” and so on. A discussion followed about “kernels of truth” and the need to consider each person as an individual, not just as a member of a group.

Participants were then shown a picture of an African-American male wearing a necklace and sleeveless jacket and asked to think about or write their impressions. The leaders then provided details about the person’s social, economic, or personal background—a successful financial analyst on Wall Street. Discussion followed about why people might draw the conclusions they did. This was repeated with several pictures. The leaders asked the students to share their changed perceptions if they wanted to volunteer. They also discussed experiences they have had with being stereotyped, such as being followed by security workers in retail stores as if they were teenaged shoplifters. Several students also shared times when they had stereotyped someone else and were mistaken.

In the third activity of this session, participants were given balloons. They used markers to write the personal stereotypes they wanted to eliminate in their lives on the balloons. Then they “burst” their stereotypes!

Privilege walk. Dr. Ruby Payne (2005) has worked with adults and children of all levels of socioeconomic status. Most schools and businesses operate on a middle class set of values. It can be difficult for teachers and students to understand the values of those in a different class. To help the student leaders better understand the role of class in our lives, one breakout session involved the “Privilege Walk.”

The Privilege Walk activity (See Figure 1 for Activity Outline) was held in a large room so that student participants, facilitators, and some of the chaperones could stand in a line across the center of the room, shoulder to shoulder. In this session, one of the SAMLE-UNI leaders announced an experience or circumstance such as “Someone in my household left school before high school graduation” or “Someone in my immediate family (aunt, uncle, parent, sibling) graduated from college.” An experience or circumstance of privilege or opportunity warranted a step forward, while instances of prejudice or lack of opportunity resulted in a step backward. At the end of the 30 statements, few students, facilitators, or chaperones stood shoulder to shoulder with anyone else.

The leaders led a debriefing discussion, and students shared their feelings of finding themselves in front of or behind the others. The UNI facilitators helped open the discussion by explaining how they overcame prejudice or lack of opportunity or circumstance and were able to attend college. One compassionate middle grades participant shared her feelings of embarrassment for being so far ahead, while another young participant expressed his determination to change his circumstances by going to college.

Following the Privilege Walk, facilitators and students explore the concepts of discrimination and privilege.
When the discussion ended after the Privilege Walk, the SAMLE-UNI leaders realized that the activity and subsequent discussion had only taken 15 minutes. They still had 30 minutes left! When the conference planners had participated in this activity themselves, it had lasted more than 30 minutes. The session leaders now had to make some quick decisions. They decided to use some small-group advisory activities they had learned in one of their middle level classes.

For future conferences, this session would have to be expanded. One suggestion was to read aloud and discuss the story *The Sneetches* (Seuss, 1961) and explore the concept of discrimination and prejudice. Another suggestion for a follow-up activity was explained by Keith O’Brien (2006, ¶ 4–5).

Have the students line up again and read a second set of statements ... this time, all based on choice. These second statements are all things they have conscious choice over, regardless of their starting point (privilege) in life.

It’s incredibly powerful for the students who end up in the back of the line with the first statements and end up in the front on the second set. It’s equally as awakening for the student who finished further back the second time than the first—a waking up to how they have perhaps squandered their opportunities.

**Closing activities.** Everyone involved in the leadership conference returned to the large meeting room after their third session. The closing activities were lead by Ms. Johnson, the opening keynote speaker. She summarized the day’s sessions and helped students develop a call to action for their return to their schools.

One aspect of creating an environment of respect is to seek honest feedback and advice. The middle level students, SAMLE-UNI leaders, and chaperones were all asked to complete feedback forms about the conference addressing (a) what they learned about the topics in each session, (b) how they planned to use what they had learned to be a leader at their school, (c) the overall arrangement of the conference, and (d) other ideas they might suggest for future conferences.

**A Promising Future**

Effective school leadership begins with a strong leadership team and is centered on two generalizations: 1. voluntary membership; and 2. strong operating principles and agreements (Marzano et al., 2005).

For the planning and implementation of the middle grades leadership conference, SAMLE-UNI members volunteered to chair committees and lead sessions. They developed a significant service goal to provide an important opportunity to middle grades students with leadership potential and then invited students from diverse backgrounds to enhance the experience. They planned quality experiences and learned important lessons; they took responsibility for the success of the conference; they trusted each other to do their respective jobs; and they acted openly and ethically throughout the process. Through this experience, the middle level teacher candidates are well on their way to becoming teacher leaders and making significant contributions to their future school districts, their states, and the nation.

Sponsoring a leadership conference pushed teacher candidates to reflect on their own experience as leaders. How would they function as reliable classroom teachers? How would their behavior model and encourage other leaders to develop, particularly promising students living in poverty? How could this leadership potential influence underprivileged students to recognize and strive for excellence? Could the experience of participating in the middle grades leadership conference be pivotal in young adolescents’ lives?
**Figure 1 Cycle of adjustment**

| STAGE ONE | Initial Enthusiasm: The Honeymoon | • Exposure to community and culture is limited  
• Excitement and enthusiasm abound.  
• Everything is exotic and quaint.  
• Attitude toward new community is generally positive.  
• Little is expected of you. |
|-----------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|           | “What a great place!”  
“These people are all so nice.” | |
| STAGE TWO | Initial Country & Culture Shock | • Wider exposure to community and culture means more realistic and more mixed reactions.  
• Enthusiasm is tempered with frustration. Feelings of vulnerability and dependence are common.  
• Homesickness is frequent.  
• Nothing is routine.  
• Limited language ability undermines confidence.  
• Close bonds are formed with other people in similar circumstances with similar language/culture. |
|           | “I’d give anything for a meal without rice.”  
“You call that homework?” | |
| STAGE THREE | Initial Adjustment | • Routines are re-established. Some aspects of the community and culture are now seen as normal.  
• Adjustment to the physical aspects of the new community is better.  
• New students are somewhat more self-reliant.  
• New students are more positive about their ability to function in the community.  
• Adjustment is to the culture of school as much as it is to community culture. |
|           | “I am getting used to this homework, believe it or not.”  
“This language actually makes sense once in a while.” | |
| STAGE FOUR | Further Culture Shock | • New students experience withdrawal symptoms as initial support structures are reduced.  
• New students adjusting to being on their own in the community.  
• Begin to have first experiences taking care of self in the community.  
• Begin having first encounters with the school-related aspects of culture, with initial surprises and frustrations.  
• Miss the daily contact with those who provided support during early stages and who understood your version of the local language.  
• New students are surprised at still having culture shocks. |
|           | “No one told me school would be like this.”  
“I never thought my problem would be too much free time.” | |
| STAGE FIVE | Further Adjustment | • Getting used to being on own.  
• Better able to take care of yourself.  
• Making friends in the community.  
• Able to speak the language better.  
• More effective at school because culture is better understood. |
|           | “You know, I actually prefer this kind of homework.”  
“Homesick? For what?” | |

**Source:** Adapted from Peace Corps (2007, pp. 191–193)
At the end of the day-long conference, middle grades students’ comments about their experiences were overwhelmingly positive. Select comments are listed below.

Educational!

Awesome experience!

[I liked] meeting all the people.

I learned a lot about diversity and some cool things.

Enjoyable experience that I will remember.

We got to [get] out of our shells and be ourselves.

It was great. It opened my eyes to stereotypes and other peoples’ feelings.

I learned a lot about personality and not to judge people by how they look.

We learned how everyone’s unique.

It helped me realize that you shouldn’t make fun of people based on first impressions.

We should do this again!

Did the conference make a difference? Several events took place at the school sites in addition to the more subtle changes in students’ personal understandings of diversity, social equity, and privilege. The chaperones, who were school counselors, teachers, and principals, were asked to share what the student leaders did after returning to their schools.

Many of the student leaders reflected in their journals about their experiences both before and after the conference, focusing on the ideas of diversity and leadership. In one of the schools, the student reflections were compiled and became part of the student-produced school newspaper.

Others planned, developed, promoted, and implemented Mix-It-Up Days. One principal wrote about their event. The student leaders split up the middle grades students by using a color-coding system. The students labeled each table as red, blue, green, or yellow. Colored strips of paper were placed into a hat and the students picked out a color when they entered the cafeteria. This let them know where they would sit for the day.

“The plan was a great success. We had students from 6th, 7th, and 8th grade sitting together for the first time all year. … There was a little apprehension at first, but by the end of the lunch period, most students were comfortably eating and socializing. Things went so well the first day that the student leaders decided to make “Mix-It-Up” Day an ongoing event that was held each Friday. … Students looked forward to this day and the suspense of where they would be sitting and who would be sitting by them.” (J. D. Cryer, personal communication, February 2, 2009)

Another school developed a “buddy system” for new students. Students at all grade levels were given the opportunity to volunteer to be a “buddy.” When a new student was admitted, the buddy of the same grade level would become the new student’s first friend, introducing him or her to other students, to teachers, and showing the new student around the school. The commitment lasted a week, although some of the buddies continued their friendships with the new students. One student reported that her experience from the culture simulation game had helped her realize how uncomfortable it could be in a new situation. This realization had motivated her to volunteer her services as a buddy.

In two schools, the student leaders organized an event similar to the Privilege Walk for the other eighth graders at their schools. The students developed the criteria themselves, with guidance from their counselors. The counselors described the exercise in developing the criteria as a significant learning experience for the student leaders. The task of determining social privilege and social disadvantage solicited ideas, compassion, and discretion.

Feedback from all the stakeholders—middle school students, SAMLE-UNI facilitators, and middle school chaperones—encouraged the SAMLE-UNI organization to hold another middle school leadership conference in the future, assuring the leaders that the quality strived for was achieved. One person stated, “Great idea—I hope it continues.” According to the chaperones who accompanied the participants, the eighth grade leadership conference, E Pluribus Unum: Out of Many, One, provided a context for leadership development that was beneficial because it provided a forum that crossed school boundaries and integrated students racially and across socioeconomic levels. One chaperone commented
Figure 2 Privilege Walk

**Purpose:**
To provide participants with an opportunity to understand the intricacies of privilege.

**Facilitator Notes:**
This is a powerful exercise and should be thoroughly processed. Lead participants to the exercise site silently, in a line, but inform them to be ready to introduce their names, schools, and what they want to be in the future.

1. At the site, ask participants to introduce themselves and to sit in a circle on the floor. All facilitators will introduce themselves, too.
2. Read *The Sneetches*.
3. After reading the book, instruct participants to stand shoulder to shoulder in a straight line.
4. Instruct participants to listen carefully to each sentence and take the step required if the sentence applies to them. If the participant is unsure or if the statement does not apply, he or she should just stand still.

**Sentences:** (Facilitators read each of the following sentences to the participants, allowing them time to take steps forward or backward.)

1. If your ancestors were forced to come the United States (not by choice), take one step back.
2. If your primary ethnic identity is American, take one step forward.
3. If you were ever called names because of your race, class, ethnicity, or gender, take one step back.
4. If there were people of color who worked in your household as servants, gardeners, etc., take one step forward.
5. If you were ever ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, car, or other material things, take one step back.
6. If you are/were raised in an area where there is/was high crime or drug activity, take one step back.
7. If you have ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step back.
8. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
9. If you went to school speaking a language other than English, take one step back.
10. If there were more than 50 books in your house when you were growing up, take one step forward.
11. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food when you were growing up, take one step back.
12. If you were taken to art galleries or plays by your parents, take one step forward.
13. If one of your parents were unemployed or laid off, not by choice, take one step back.
14. If you attended private school or summer camp, take one step forward.
15. If your family ever had to move because they could not afford the rent, take one step back.
16. If you were told that you were beautiful/handsome, smart, and capable by your parents, take one step forward.
17. If you were ever discouraged from academics or jobs because of race, class, ethnicity, and/or gender, take one step back.
18. If you are encouraged to attend college by your parents, take one step forward.
19. If you saw members of your race, ethnic group, or gender portrayed on television in degrading roles, take one step back.
20. If you were ever accused of cheating or lying because of your race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
21. If you were raised in a single-parent household, take one step back.
22. If your family owns/owned the house where you grew up, take one step forward.
23. If you ever inherited money or property, take one step forward.
24. If you were ever stopped or questioned by the police because of your race, ethnicity, or gender, take one step back.
25. If you were ever afraid of violence because of your race, ethnicity, or gender, take one step back.
26. If you are generally able to avoid places that are dangerous, take one step forward.
27. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, ethnicity, or gender, take one step back.
28. If you were ever the victim of violence related to your race, ethnicity, or gender, take one step back.
29. If your parents did not grow up in the United States, take one step back.
30. If your parents told you that you could be anything you want to be, take one step forward.

**Processing:**
Facilitators ask participants to remain in their positions and to look at their positions in relation to the other participants. Suggested questions for processing are:

1. What happened? * See bottom
2. Is one person any more privileged than another?
3. Do you see this in your school?
4. What were your thoughts as you did this exercise?
5. How did this experience make you feel?
6. What have you learned from this experience?
7. How can you apply this information and experience to your school or your own lives outside of school?

* If facilitators see little to no difference in the line, they should ask

Why do you think there is little or no difference in the line?
What does this tell us/about our/yourselves?
Do you believe all people are privileged in the same way(s)?

After asking these questions, they can return to question 2.

**Source:** Excerpted from McIntosh (1990).
on how the theme developed the concepts of diversity and social equity, “Other leadership things I’ve been to have all centered on cooperation and teamwork. Leadership is about tolerance and working with everyone. Good message!”

**Extensions**

1. When students move into a new school, they have to negotiate old and new ways of doing things. In what ways does your school, team, or classroom community provide scaffolding for new students?

2. The authors describe several activities used to raise students’ awareness of diversity, social equity, and privilege. How can your school use these activities to engage students and faculty in meaningful discussion of these issues?

**References**


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**Coming in March to Middle School Journal Readers**

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Despite recent attention to the literacy needs of adolescent English language learners (ELLs), 70% of eighth grade ELL students scored below basic proficiency in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) compared to only 26% of their native English-speaking peers (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2007). This gap between ELLs’ reading comprehension skills and those of their native English-speaking peers is especially evident when they read for information (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; NCES, 2007). Since the majority of reading done in the content areas requires students to read for information, the discrepancy between ELL reading achievement scores and native English speakers’ scores on the NAEP has the potential to increase even more substantially in secondary content area classes.

It is projected that by 2030 “language minority students” (students who speak a language other than English at home and who have varying levels of English proficiency) will comprise 40% of students in U.S. schools (Thomas & Collier, 2001). While a large portion of the percentage of ELLs remains in border states, such as Texas and California, it is noteworthy that states with the fastest growing rate of ELL students are not those with the traditionally largest populations of ELLs (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Colorado, Nevada, and Oregon are examples of states currently dealing with an ELL growth rate of more than 200% within a 10-year period (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2005).

Still, it is not only these states that are experiencing rapid growth in ELL populations. For example, the Latino population growth in seven packing plant towns accounted for 64% of the growth in Spanish-speaking enrollments across the state of Iowa (Frey, 2000). The western gulf states are also home to extremely rapid growth among Latino populations, with numbers in Georgia growing 300% and those in North Carolina growing 394% between 1990 and 2000 (Muñiz, 2006). Other smaller urban centers, such as Salt Lake City, Utah, now house extremely diverse refugee populations from the countries of the Sudan, Somalia, Myanmar (Burma), Afghanistan, and some former Soviet republics, among others (Lyon, 2008). These examples show that ELL populations are not confined to states or large urban centers.

This article reflects the following This We Believe characteristics: Meaningful Learning — Multiple Learning Approaches — School Environment

Naomi M. Watkins & Kristen M. Lindahl
centers typically associated with patterns of immigration, nor are only one or two languages spoken among ELL students. Therefore, teachers across the United States will likely have diverse, non-native speakers of English in their content area classrooms.

This new population paradigm requires all educators, both mainstream content area teachers and English as a second language (ESL) specialists, in every state to assume responsibility for appropriately supporting the education of ELLs (Rubinstein-Ávila & Johnson, 2008). Content area teachers may already be familiar with strategies for ELL instruction, as many of them have been used in the past for teaching reading to native speakers of English. However, content area teachers must pair instructional strategies with the knowledge that “it is no longer enough to expose children to quality language and expect that this input alone will be enough to learn a new language” (Anthony, 2008, pp. 480–481). Instead, educators must realize that diverse ELL students require more targeted instruction than their native English-speaking peers (Harper & de Jong, 2004; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

This article provides description of targeted instruction and reasons why all educators should target content area reading instruction for ELLs. Furthermore, it highlights the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, which is one way content area teachers can successfully target reading instruction.

**What is targeted instruction?**

Targeted instruction emphasizes content area literacy development with receptive (reading and listening) and expressive (writing and speaking) language skills in mind. In this case, targeted instruction operates in conjunction with the fundamental principle of sheltered instruction, which is to provide language support for ELLs as they learn academic content (Diáz-Rico & Weed, 2010). Teachers may already have lessons that make content information more accessible to students, but these lessons may not provide adequate language support for ELLs with regard to content area literacy skills. For instance, in a study on sheltered social studies classes in middle schools, Short (2001) found that the teachers stressed content information and corresponding tasks more than language. Teachers allowed only a small percentage of class interaction time for language learning, with content-related tasks motivating the actual lesson. These findings were not limited to traditional content area teachers, however; even the ESL-trained teachers spent one-fifth or less of their classroom interactions on language.

Teachers must target ELL needs, considering both language skills and those skills contributing to content area literacy, as they plan content lessons.

**Why do ELL students need targeted instruction?**

English language learners need targeted instruction largely due to their distinct learner profiles. They may come to U.S. schools with varying levels of first or native language (L1) proficiency, different degrees of formal education experience, and a distinct understanding of what school and its related routines and behaviors entail (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). In addition, it may take ELLs 5 to 10 years to acquire academic language proficiency (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981), a lengthy time span that renders the perception that adolescent ELLs should achieve a certain level of English proficiency before they can participate in content area, grade level reading and writing tasks false (Rubinstein-Ávila & Johnson, 2008). Schools must consider both...
factors—individual learner differences and the length of time necessary to develop language proficiency—when providing language support to ELLs as they learning academic subjects (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2010).

With regard to language instruction in the content areas, a distinction between layers of language proficiency must be made. Even as ELLs in content area classes may have developed high conversational fluency over time, their academic language proficiency is likely still developing. Basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) differ from cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), in that the abilities entailed in each layer of linguistic proficiency contrast, as do the time lines typical for developing each layer (Cummins, 2001). Typically, BICS are developed within the first three years that a person begins to learn a second language, while CALP development may take five to seven years (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 2001). CALP is further distinct from BICS, in that it includes knowledge of less frequent vocabulary of English, as well as mastery of the academic functions of English such as the ability to interpret and produce increasingly complex written and oral communication (Cummins, 2001).

Students’ development of academic language proficiency is also influenced by whether or not they have developed CALP in their primary or native language. According to Cummins (1981), the first language (L1) and second language (L2) share a common foundation. Thus, if a student has developed CALP in his/her L1, those fundamental cognitive and literacy skills will transfer to the L2. If a student has not developed CALP in the L1, it may be more difficult for him or her to develop it in the L2. Consequently, even though many ELLs appear to speak English fluently, they will still rely on their teachers to help them develop academic language proficiency via the content areas for several years.

However, because many teachers are themselves native speakers of English, language may sometimes be an “invisible medium” (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2010), making the explicit teaching of language problematic for content area teachers (Short & Echevarria, 1999). To remedy this, content area teachers may need to become more aware of their own language use and the language skills taught in their lessons. This notion, known as “teacher language awareness” entails teachers’ knowledge of language (their own proficiency level in a language) and teachers’ knowledge about language (their ability to teach specific aspects of the English language) (Andrews, 2008).

Teacher language awareness may also consist of the cognizance teachers possess about the different language demands their lessons pose for their students, ELL or otherwise (Dong, 2005; Fang, 2008; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Short & Echevarria, 2005). These demands may include unknown academic vocabulary, reading comprehension, the writing process, or functional language use (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010). As such, in effective content area instruction, teachers need to include ways for learners to meet the language demands of their content areas (Harper & de Jong, 2004) and involve ELL students in reading the same or similar cognitively demanding texts and participating in the same or similar contextually appropriate tasks as their native English-speaking peers. The responsibility facing content area educators, then, is not only to provide strong, targeted reading instruction for ELL students, but also to simultaneously increase both students’ content and English language knowledge and use.

Current research-supported models of instruction for ELLs stress the importance of integrating content and language instruction for students in every lesson.
What does targeted instruction look like in the content area classroom?

Multiple targeted strategies that support the language processes can be used to develop ELL students’ academic language and literacy skill development. A full list of sample targeted strategies is listed in Figure 1.

To determine which targeted strategies to incorporate into a lesson, several considerations arise. First, teachers ought to consider just how different ELLs can be at varying levels of proficiency and literacy in their L1 and their L2. In addition, content area knowledge among adolescent ELLs may vary greatly depending on their education opportunities in home or transit countries. Other factors that may affect literacy development among adolescent ELLs are expectations of the school experience, age upon arrival in the United States, their parents’ educational and linguistic backgrounds, living situations, socioeconomic status, and resources available to them outside of school (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). With these in mind, a variety of diagnostic assessments and formative assessments should be employed when planning instruction. These diagnostic or pre-assessments can provide teachers with information regarding students’ prior knowledge and skill levels, their misconceptions, learning interests, and learning style preferences (McTighe & O’Connor, 2005). While diagnostic assessments usually occur prior to planning instruction, formative assessments, such as evaluating student writing, projects, and performances, should also be employed throughout the instructional planning process (Fisher & Frey, 2007). As a means of diagnostic or formative assessment, teachers can also ask themselves the following questions when targeting instruction for ELLs:

- **What background knowledge** do my students already have? What background knowledge do my students need?
- **How can I increase my students’ motivation** to exert effort in comprehending the text?
- **What are the reading abilities of my students?** What parts of the text will cause them the most difficulty or challenges? How can I fill in those gaps to aid reading comprehension? How can I adapt or modify the activities/text to help my students access the information and read for comprehension? What scaffolding or support can I provide during reading?

Teachers must employ targeted strategies for increasing English language learners’ motivation to comprehend difficult texts.
## Figure 1 Strategies to target instruction for English language learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Student Needs</th>
<th>Questions to Ask When Planning Instruction</th>
<th>Targeted Instruction</th>
<th>Before Reading</th>
<th>During Reading</th>
<th>After Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activating &amp; Building Background Knowledge</td>
<td>What background knowledge do my students have? What background knowledge do my students need?</td>
<td>Give time for students to Think-Pair-Share prior to working independently.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporate references and connections to the L1 culture/language.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>How can I increase students’ motivation to exert effort in comprehending the text?</td>
<td>Allow students to choose which questions to answer.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group students based on interest.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporate references and connections to the L1 culture/language.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>What are the reading abilities of my students? What parts of the text will present the most difficulty or challenge? How can I fill in those gaps to aid reading comprehension? How can I adapt or modify the activities/text to help my students access the information and read for comprehension? What scaffolding or support can I provide during reading?</td>
<td>Allow students to draw their responses.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chunk longer readings.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draw attention to text structure and text features.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present questions stems during summarizing.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rephrase complicated language.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supplement text with explanatory visuals.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supply graphic organizers to organize textual information.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use flexible grouping by readiness &amp; L1.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use multiple and varied text options.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bold/underline key terms for students.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>What vocabulary do my students need to comprehend the text? Access the content? Complete the activities/assignments?</td>
<td>Post word banks and word walls.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rephrase complicated language.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allow responses in the L1.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Fluency</td>
<td>How can I provide students with opportunities to develop oral fluency while discussing content?</td>
<td>Place students with partners to read.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present question or sentence stems.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide pictures for students to arrange and retell the text.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What vocabulary do my students need to be able to comprehend the text? Access the content? Complete the planned activities/assignments?

How can I provide my students with opportunities to develop oral fluency while discussing content?

How can I facilitate my students’ responses to text through writing, when they are unable to compose in the L2?

Teachers’ responses to these questions will help them to discern which targeted strategies to incorporate into their existing content area literacy instruction. Bolded portions of the questions highlight the particular needs ELL students may exhibit.

To explicitly show how content area teachers can target content area literacy instruction, the incorporation of these teacher-implemented strategies will be discussed through the context of a teacher think-aloud. Since the Before-During-After (B-D-A) reading lesson framework is widely known and often recommended to content area teachers (Ogle, 2007; Vacca & Vacca, 2008), a seventh grade social studies lesson organized according to this B-D-A framework will be used. This example social studies lesson, a lesson within a larger unit on ancient civilizations, uses a selection from the social studies textbook and focuses on the ancient Grecian cities of Athens and Sparta.

This think-aloud is provided in hopes that content area teachers will see possibilities for how to target their own instruction to provide appropriate learning and reading opportunities fitting the specialized needs of their ELL students. After explaining each phase of the lesson, targeted strategies from Figure 1 will be incorporated into the lesson based on potential needs of ELL students. Not all targeted strategies should be or will be used at each phase of a lesson or throughout an entire lesson. Rather, teachers need to determine the most pressing needs of their ELL students and identify the areas of a lesson that will best allow them to actively participate and have opportunities to develop content knowledge and language skills. Lessons should then be targeted accordingly.

**Before-reading phase**

In this “before-reading” phase, students will first complete a journal prompt that asks them to respond to the following questions: If you had a time machine and were able to visit the future, what would you tell the people about daily life in our city? What do people do for work? Where do they shop? What do they do in their free time? What other things about life in our city would you tell people living in the future? Then, the teacher will set the purpose for reading, asking students to think about: 1. how life in their city compares to life in ancient Greece, 2. how life differed for the people in Athens versus Sparta, and 3. how life was similar.
Targeted before reading for ELLs

Before-reading activities are important for preparing all students to comprehend text (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000); however, doing so for ELL students is particularly vital, as the resources that second language readers bring to the task may greatly vary from their peers (Peregoy & Boyle, 2010). This next section illustrates how teachers may choose to target the before-reading portion of the social studies lesson for ELL students.

**Activating & building background knowledge.** While the main purpose of before-reading activities is to activate and build students’ background knowledge, targeting the building of background knowledge for ELLs may provide them background knowledge in areas where there may be cultural gaps or where their previous education differed from the U.S. system and core curricula. Thus, teachers may need to provide ELL students more content-specific information or more experiences interacting with peers prior to reading as ways to build and activate background knowledge. In regard to the lesson example, a teacher may choose to allow students time to participate in a think-pair-share prior to completing the journal entry, thereby providing ELL students with more opportunities to converse about academic content in English.

Additionally, including occasions for ELLs, particularly newcomers, to integrate knowledge from their L1 culture not only draws on students’ background knowledge but also acknowledges and validates this knowledge (Amanti, 2005). Rather than asking students to write about everyday life in their current city, teachers may choose to have ELLs write about everyday life in their L1 culture, which not only provides them opportunities to draw on known information but also allows them to use this information later in the lesson in comparisons to the cultures of Sparta and Athens.

**Writing process.** Students who may not have the necessary English writing skills to complete the journal entry may be allowed to respond in their L1 or create visual responses that illustrate a typical day in the city (Auerbach, 1993). However, even ELL students who have substantial English writing skills may need additional help with the writing process, particularly regarding necessary sentence structure. Thus, a teacher may want to provide sentence frames (Ávila-Rubinstein & Johnson, 2008; Dong, 2005) such as “In our city, people shop at...” or “In our city, people spend their free time...” Sentence frames give ELLs the functional language necessary to succeed at this journal writing task.

**Vocabulary.** If students need instruction that provides vocabulary support during the journal entry, teachers may provide ELL students with a categorized word bank highlighting vocabulary options to reference as they write. One word bank may focus on jobs, while another word bank may include information on hobbies/pastimes. By making word banks accessible to students, teachers reinforce vocabulary and provide students a starting point for writing (Peregoy & Boyle, 2010).

During-reading phase

After students receive their purpose for reading, they will read the text in pairs and summarize the text as they read. One student will be designated as the “reader” and the other as the “coach.” Both students will read the first paragraph silently. Then, the reader will summarize the paragraph aloud to the coach. The coach will ask clarifying questions of the reader about the summary. Students will reverse roles for each subsequent paragraph and continue with this process until they have completed the selection (Billmeyer & Barton, 1998). When finished, both students will cooperatively summarize the main idea of the text, particularly focusing on the purpose-setting questions that were provided prior to reading.

“Teachers need to determine the most pressing needs of their ELL students and identify the areas of a lesson that will best allow them to actively participate and have opportunities to develop content knowledge and language skills.”
Targeted during reading for ELLs
Since the during-reading activity focuses on oral reading, teachers need to be aware that reading aloud may be intimidating to students from various L1 backgrounds, because they may feel self-conscious about pronunciation, foreign-accented speech, and whether or not they will be able to recognize the words in a passage. Lowering ELL students’ affective filter (Krashen & Terrell, 1984) by reducing outside stressors and allowing students to focus on language learning is key; therefore, during-reading activities must be carefully structured. This next section details how to target instruction for ELLs in the during-reading phase of the example lesson.

Reading comprehension. Since the example during-reading activity involves a paired reading activity, teachers must think carefully about how to group students in pairs, with special consideration given to using collaborative and cooperative structures. One such consideration should be whether teachers feel that their ELL students will benefit more from working with fellow ELLs, or if heterogeneous pairs of native speakers and ELLs may be more effective. Either way, allowing students to work in small groups encourages authentic communication among peers and may present less affective stress for ELLs than reading in front of an entire class or the teacher. Students may also feel more comfortable taking linguistic “risks” in small groups, such as asking questions, requesting content clarifications, and venturing guesses (Lee & Van Patten, 2003; Rossen & Sasser, 1997).

Teachers might also chunk the larger reading into smaller sections for ELLs to read or use an alternative text through the use of pictures that portray the cultures of Athens and Sparta. These pictures should be carefully selected to ensure that they represent and capture the content contained in the original text.

Vocabulary. Teachers of English language learners need to frequently assess comprehension during reading.
ask students to brainstorm related words. Vocabulary graphic organizers that incorporate semantic or definition mapping may further promote word study skills and vocabulary acquisition (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000). The above targeting strategies provide teachers with formative means of assessing how much ELLs actually understand about the text before moving on to the “after-reading” phase of the lesson.

**After-reading phase**
In this phase of the lesson, students will complete a three-circle Venn Diagram to compare life in Athens to life in Sparta to life in their own city after reading and summarizing the text in pairs. Once completed, students will share their responses with the class.

**Targeted after reading for ELLs**
The final phase of the lesson uses a graphic organizer to help students organize information from the text, a targeted strategy listed in Figure 1. Graphic organizers are sound instruction for all students (NICHD, 2000), but they are particularly helpful for ELL students because they employ both visual and spatial modalities and are easy for students to learn and share (Northcutt & Watson, 1986). This last section of the lesson example shows how teachers may decide to target the after-reading phase for ELLs.

**Vocabulary.** Expanding on the more general word banks that teachers may have presented in the during-reading phase of the lesson, teachers can reinforce content vocabulary by posting terms specific to Athens and Sparta on a classroom Word Wall (Dong, 2005). These terms could then be used by students as they complete the Venn Diagram, particularly comparing the two cities in relation to these specified terms.

**Activating and building background knowledge.**
While activating and building background knowledge is not commonly the focus of after-reading activities, permitting and encouraging responses about students’ L1 culture in the “Our City” circle of the Venn diagram again draws on what ELLs already know. Teachers may even add a fourth circle to the Venn diagram in which students can include words describing their L1 culture and comparing it to the culture of Athens, Sparta, and their current city. Students are able to participate in the after-reading portion of the lesson, regardless of the length of time they have lived in their current city.

**Oral fluency.** Numerous opportunities should be provided for ELLs to orally discuss content and readings with their peers, especially in social studies contexts in which concepts, generalizations, and understandings of the past are not immediately available for contextual viewing or experience (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). However, students may need to be provided the functional language necessary to fully participate in the class discussion regarding the Venn Diagram. Teachers may provide students with appropriate sentence frames centering on the discourse of compare/contrast such as, “The similarities between Athens and Sparta are …” or “The _______ in Athens is different than the _______ in Sparta.”

**Writing process.** Lastly, teachers may allow students to draw pictures on their Venn diagrams in addition to writing words, enabling students to represent ideas and concepts in a manner other than writing. To extend this final portion of the lesson, teachers could also choose to have students use the graphic organizer as a starting point for writing a compare/contrast essay.

**Concluding thoughts**
Providing ELL students with appropriate, targeted instruction not only allows them to participate in literacy activities within the context of the regular content area classroom with their native English-speaking peers, it also provides them with opportunities to develop the language and skills necessary to access the content.

Targeted instruction for ELL students may place additional time, planning, and classroom management burdens on mainstream content area teachers. However, such instruction does not minimize or detract from solid instruction provided to native English speakers. Rather, specifically and appropriately targeting best practices in content area classrooms will ultimately result in less student and teacher frustration and increased academic language learning in the content areas for every student.

**Extensions**
Reflect on your current instructional practices and consider the following questions.

1. Which aspects of targeted instruction do you already implement in your classroom? Which ones might you add to your instructional repertoire?
2. How do the targeted strategies discussed in this article differ from more traditional approaches to content area reading instruction?
As teachers, we are always looking for creative ways to engage our students. We start the school year determined to bring to the classroom creative projects that generate student interest and foster critical thinking skills. Think back to your school days. What is the one learning experience you remember the most? What was it about this experience that makes you remember it today? Was it the teacher, the topic, the way the material was presented? As you look back on that memorable experience, you are likely to find that it appealed to your emotions. You learned because you connected to it. You remember because you were engaged.

Reaching today’s Gen M (millennial) student is challenging and changing the way we teach. Children now spend, on average, 14 hours per week watching TV and 2.75 hours per week using home computers (Swanbrow, 2004). A Harrison group study reports teens spend more than 72 hours per week using electronic media. They spend their free time listening to iPods, networking, downloading, uploading, and instant messaging (IM), and one-third of teens report owning an Apple iPod (Olson, 2006). Teens report their number one choice of “must-have” tech gadgets is a computer, followed by the cellular phone and the iPod/MP3 player (Pechacek, 2007). Added to this mix of ubiquitous high-tech gadgetry is the tendency for Gen M students to “display an increased proficiency in multi tasking” as well as “attention problems and an inability to delay gratification,” (Tucker, 2006). It is no wonder students in the classroom often seem bored.

All of these factors can make it quite daunting for teachers to create memorable learning experiences for today’s digital natives. One technique with some promise involves incorporating technology that most Gen M teenagers own and frequently use—the iPod or MP3 player. These devices store music, which is the perfect medium to deliver a powerful emotional impact.

The idea of using music to teach academic content is well-established. David B. McCall, president of an advertising agency, noticed that his son was having trouble remembering his multiplication tables, but he could recite all the song lyrics from his favorite band, The Rolling Stones. McCall wondered what would happen if he put the multiplication table to music. He
used this as his inspiration for Schoolhouse Rock, the television program that successfully used music to teach children history, math, and grammar from 1973 to 1985 (quoted in Yohe & Newall, 1996).

More recently, the American Political Science Association discussed the advantages of using the iPod to link popular music to learning objectives at its 2006 Annual Teaching and Learning Conference in Washington, DC. Sharp (2006) described a political science seminar he conducted in 2003 at the University of Central Oklahoma. In this one-credit course, he selected songs and then had students listen to them, discuss their reactions in class, and write essays. He found that students’ familiarity with the popular music led to new levels of understanding. He also found that after paying close attention to songs, the students found it hard not to recall the project when they heard the songs in the future.

Over the past 20 years, a number of studies and publications indicate a strong link between emotion and the teenage brain. In *Secrets of the Teenage Brain*, Feinstein (2004) noted that instruction including emotional experience leads students to learn more information and retain it longer. Similarly, Berry, Schmied, and Schrock (2008) investigated the use of imagery to stimulate emotions and concluded that incorporating emotions into instruction produces learning that is deeper and longer lasting. They noted, based on their research, that “emotional events create more vivid memories” (p. 439). McGlynn (2005) noted that active learning facilitates long-term memory. By using examples to which students could relate and then asking them to create meaning between their life experiences and the material being taught, she found she could gain students’ active participation and improve learning.

## A great idea

Could the iPod, a technology favored by students, assist in teaching the concept of *theme* in language arts? The teachers involved considered theme to be one of the most important, yet difficult, elements of literature for students to grasp. The author’s theme is the foundation of a book; its underlying central idea. Theme expresses the author’s message and raises questions for the reader. Sometimes it is clearly stated; more often, theme is implied or suggested through other elements. This ambiguity is what makes the concept of theme so difficult for students to grasp.

The instructors had read Marcus’s (2008) description of how he used iPods in his classroom to have students make connections between lyrics and literature. His students selected a song from their iPod, examined the lyrics, and connected them to a piece of literature. He had them present their projects to the class in the form of a speech. Over time, he switched to an analytical writing format instead of oral presentations.

For the teachers, the appeal of an iPod-based project lay in its critical thinking components, flexibility, and use of technology. Because students used iPods on a daily basis, a project allowing students to use them in school had definite Gen M appeal. Because every song on a student’s iPod was handpicked, the project had an emotional and very personal appeal, helping students connect on a personal level to the literature they were examining.

## Laying the groundwork

Four honors classes participated in the iPod project. These eighth grade students had just finished reading *The Outsiders*, by S. E. Hinton. In the story, the author explored several themes, including social status, street

*Students wrote essays relating self-selected song lyrics to elements of a novel read in class.* Photo by Alen Colle
gang dynamics, building bridges between rich and poor, unfairness in life, and a search for self identity.

Theme identification had proven in the past to be difficult for students. The instructors hoped an iPod project would help students draw theme connections between different forms of expression. They selected a project designed to reinforce the concept by allowing students to add not only a musical component but material reflecting their own interests as well. This was the beginning of a memorable learning experience!

Step one involved getting the principal to allow students to bring iPods to school. An iPod in school is usually frowned upon, because it is often a distraction. After hearing the proposal, the principal responded with, “How soon can you start?” Next, permission slips went to parents explaining the project and asking permission for students to bring their iPods to school. The letters stated the project objectives, rules about iPod use at school, and rules for music selection. Students unable to bring an iPod to class could select a song from music located on the school server. If a child chose a song with inappropriate lyrics, a teacher-selected song would be assigned to the student.

The students loved the idea. The iPod was a big selling point. They readily accepted the rules about song choice and how they would use and store their iPods at school. There was no grumbling about this assignment. During the days leading up to the project, the teachers went over expectations, student presentation requirements, and grading. A grading rubric provided the details.

The teachers modeled a sample presentation using an unfamiliar song. This circumvented any temptation for students to copy the example. A “think aloud” session let the students hear ideas about how to choose songs and match them with a particular scene from The Outsiders. After discussing the pros and cons of several songs, the group narrowed the choice down to one. With the selection of the song accomplished, the students answered essay questions. The instructors concluded by demonstrating how to display song lyrics and play the music, and then they presented the essay question answers.

The students thought they were ready to go, but they were not. Before they could begin, they needed to demonstrate through classroom discussions their understanding of literary elements and analysis. Theme is often revealed through literary elements. One way to determine theme involves looking closely at other literary elements involved; characterization, setting, events, point of view, tone, irony, and imagery bring together the resolution of the story. This discussion was an essential prerequisite. They also had to learn the ins and outs of poetic and literary devices and how to annotate a song and connect it to literature. As Marcus (2008) observed, a certain amount of “sweat equity” on the part of teachers and students is required when getting prepared for an activity like this.

The project

The instructors created a list of selected scenes from The Outsiders that showed rising action, introduction of new characters, climax, and falling action for students to evaluate. These were the most relevant scenes from the book, and they went well with music. The students selected two scenes from the list and matched the themes of these events to songs on their iPods or on the school’s server. After picking their songs, the students listened to the lyrics of their song and wrote them down or printed them out.

The students then moved on to the essay questions to tie their music choice to the scene they selected. They addressed the following prompts.

1. Analyze the lyrics. Why did the lyricist write this song?
2. Review the scene. What do you think the author meant when she wrote this scene?
3. Describe what theme ties the song and the scene together. Do not just write the name of the theme.

Since students used iPods on a daily basis, a project allowing students to use them in school had definite Gen M appeal.
4. Did you discover any literary or poetic devices? If so, give examples and discuss why they are important. Explain what they mean and how they connect the two pieces of writing (Marcus, 2008).

5. How does the song complement the scene?

The big day
The big day finally arrived, but we were apprehensive. How will the students work? Will there be a call from an administrator complaining about inappropriate iPod use? Will a parent call complaining about a lost or broken iPod? Will appropriate music be used? Will this work?

The media center was reserved for the project. This allowed students to research song writers if they did not know anything about them or the song they had chosen, and students who didn’t have an iPod could use the computers to access music on the student drive. Up to this point, students had not shared the music they intended to use for this project. The students now began revealing their individual approaches to the project.

The first thing the instructors noticed was how quiet the room was. Students were busily scrolling through their iPods, listening to music, writing down the lyrics to their chosen songs, or answering the essay questions. Compared to previous lessons on theme, the students were more actively engaged and on task. Each student brought something they liked to this project, and it showed in the intensity of their work. In general, every class has at least one student who does not want to be there. This is a challenge faced by every teacher—how to include and encourage all students to gain something from the project. The students now began revealing their individual approaches to the project.

The following class period, the students presented their essays. They displayed the lyrics they had selected using a data projector. iPod music played in the background while the students spoke. The administrative preparations had already generated a certain amount of interest in the front office, and the principal stopped by to observe the presentations. The first presenter appeared nervous and self-conscious. However, as the class progressed, students became more comfortable. The audience displayed genuine interest, and there was a cooperative atmosphere. In several instances when songs did not play properly, other students with the same songs on their iPods offered to support the presenter.

For their part, the other class participants, whether they had already presented or were yet to present, appeared genuinely interested in their fellow students’ presentations. Those who had selected the same passages for analysis were hearing different music linked to the same text. Those who chose the same songs heard how that music could also apply to another passage. Interestingly, no two presenters linked the same music to the same scene from the novel. Participants gained insights not only into the project, but also into their peers’ likes, dislikes, and thinking processes. Many were surprised to learn that others shared their interest in music. The project was a huge success with students and teachers—one that the school would definitely use again.

The instructors hoped an iPod project would help students draw theme connections between different forms of expression.

The payoff
Overall, the quality of work submitted by the students who participated in the iPod project was higher than the work of previous classes. Comparing Brief Constructed Responses (BCRs) written immediately after the iPod project, the instructors noted that, proportionally, more of the students scored at the mastery level after this exercise. In previous years, students learned to identify theme by reading and comparing various pieces of text. They normally needed to do this three to four times before mastery of theme became evident in their BCRs.
Instructors noticed that in lessons subsequent to the iPod project, students were able to quickly identify theme in the texts they were studying. Moreover, they seemed to be having fun while doing it. Several times, students were heard telling a neighbor what song might go well with the text they were reading.

In addition to quickly identifying the theme, the students displayed greater sophistication in their analyses when compared to previous classes. Using literary devices like allegory and allusions, they expressed how the selected scene, linked with music, affected their understanding of and reaction to the author’s theme. It is difficult for students to employ these devices for theme analysis until they truly understand the concept of theme. Symbolism turned out to be the literary device the students chose most often. One student connected Green Day’s song “Wake Me Up When September Ends” to the scene of Johnny on his deathbed. Words the songwriter used to mourn a father lost at an early age struck an emotional chord with the student, who applied them to the character Johnny, also dying before his time. It was evident that careful thought had been put into this analysis.

During discussions about the outcome, another teaching opportunity presented itself. It occurred to the teachers that many of the students were lacking in oral presentation skills. Inviting the school enrichment teacher to present to the class a mini activity on public speaking could address this shortfall and easily be incorporated into the project plan.

The eighth grade classes involved in the iPod project were all honor students performing above grade level; however, by differentiating the process and product components of the project, it could be adapted for use with all levels of students. There are endless possibilities teachers could use to differentiate the processing part of the project. For a merit class, the teacher could use more direct instruction and demonstration to reinforce the teaching points during the preparation phase. During the activity itself, the teacher might present a smaller list of scenes for the students to choose from and have a classroom discussion on the theme of each scene. Each student could then select a scene to study. The instructor could then group the students by the scene they chose. Each group would select a song for comparison to a scene.

A Venn diagram could be used to connect the song and scene together instead of essay questions. One circle could represent a scene and another could represent song lyrics. Group members could select important scene events and write in the circle why they thought they were important, noting the possible interpretations, and then follow the same procedure for the lyrics circle. Next, students could compare their findings. The overlapping portion of the diagram would contain the connections students identified between the scene and the song. Overhead transparencies would work well for displaying the Venn diagrams, and each student should have a required role in the group presentation.

Allowing for choice in the final product is another good way to differentiate the project. There are several possibilities. Rather than presenting a speech, students could present a Microsoft Photo Story or PowerPoint presentation, a video recording of their speech, podcast, or a radio broadcast. Teachers could even have students act out scenes to the music they have chosen.

**Conclusion**

By all accounts, the project achieved its goals. It met the learning objectives, and both students and teachers received it enthusiastically. The lesson outcomes were
consistent with research findings that stress the power of active learning, giving students choices, and using multimedia to achieve the emotional impact needed to reach the Gen M students. Using these strategies, teachers noticed a markedly deeper understanding of theme in the students’ insightful presentations and BCR scores. Permitting our students to select songs from their iPods allowed them to approach the project at a personal, emotional level. The favorable reactions of the students indicated that a memorable learning experience was achieved; students shifted gears from “iBored” to “I understand, and I remember.”

References

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The Power of Independent, Self-Selected Reading in the Middle Grades

Andrea J. Stairs & Sara Stairs Burgos

*If we want our students to grow to appreciate literature, we need to give them a say in decisions about the literature they will read.* (Atwell, 1998, p. 36)

Now, more than ever, teachers are challenged to negotiate multiple and contradictory demands on their time. Across the nation, schools have been required to raise their standards for student achievement and make “adequate yearly progress.” This is just a sample of the abundant evidence that the complex work of teaching described two decades ago by Apple (1986) has intensified. Teachers have had to adopt curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques that undermine their ability to conduct authentic, engaging activities and contradict their professional beliefs about effective teaching, learning, and schooling. Pressured to comply with state and district mandates, teachers may follow scripted, back-to-basics lessons and, as a result, feel frustrated about the assaults on their professionalism and the prevalence of “test-prep pedagogy” (McNeil, 2000).

As they experience relentless pressure to improve test scores, teachers face a constant challenge to maintain their commitment to student-centered pedagogy—though we do not suggest the two are mutually exclusive and lack correlation (e.g., Tatum, 2006). Our main argument in this paper is that, despite the aforementioned challenges, literacy educators should keep independent, self-selected reading at the center of the middle grades language arts curriculum. We believe that a literacy-rich classroom environment grounded in student-centered pedagogy offers possibilities for engaging all learners and encouraging them to be lifelong readers. After outlining a rationale for independent reading in a reading workshop classroom environment, we describe how these practices were enacted in an eighth-grade classroom in Maine. We share students’ reactions to these practices, which remind us how influential books can be when students are given the opportunity to choose what they read in a classroom environment that values reading.

A rationale for independent, self-selected reading

Independent, self-selected reading is widely supported in the empirical and practitioner-oriented literature, as summarized in the annotated bibliography in Figure 1. In a recent review of the literature, Morrow (2003)
concluded that the amount of time children spend leisure reading is correlated with reading achievement, that teachers play a critical role in influencing students’ attitudes toward reading, and that immediate access to books and an inviting atmosphere are important in promoting reading. Similarly, Flood, Lapp, and Fisher (2003) reported that “the effectiveness of voluntary reading programs, in which classrooms were filled with high-quality trade books, reported success in overall reading comprehension as well as improved attitudes toward reading” (p. 938). Studies that have focused specifically on middle school students further support independent, self-selected reading (Broaddus & Ivey, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004), and studies that have focused on increasing boys’ motivation to read and improving attitudes about reading also support choice and in-school time for reading (Horton, 2005; Weih, 2008). Even a study of graduate students who were allowed to choose their reading revealed 95% felt selecting their reading was more meaningful than being assigned reading by the instructor (Ho & Choie, 2005). It is clear that independent, self-selected reading is a research-based practice beneficial for all students.

Independent reading in a reading workshop classroom

At Saco Middle School (SMS), a public middle school near Portland, Maine, more than 700 predominantly White, working- to middle-class students who speak English as a first language attend separate, heterogeneous grouped reading and English classes every day for 50 minutes each. The second author, an eighth-grade reading teacher at this school, conducts a reading workshop classroom inspired by Atwell’s (1998) revised theory of the purposes and procedures of a workshop curriculum. If you were to walk by her classroom on most days, you would see the students choosing books for independent reading and actually reading during class time; the teacher leading lessons as needed, using whole-class texts; and the teacher and students dialoguing with each other about books in reading journals and in one-on-one conferences. On other days, you would see her teaching the required curriculum, albeit in student-centered, authentic ways that support the literacy skills taught in reading workshop. For example, the literary elements mandated in the standards are reinforced through book club meetings in which students have selected novels to

Figure 1 Annotated bibliography of independent, self-selected reading resources

  The author describes numerous strategies for implementing independent reading.

  This book contains an entire chapter devoted to students’ choosing independent reading texts.

  This is the seminal text for reading and writing workshop curriculum in the middle grades.

  This article explains how to create a café atmosphere in school to promote independent reading.

  The author explains how to help boys choose books through website he created: guysread.com.

  The authors describe a strategy for helping all students find the “just right” book.

  This edited volume includes several essays on student choice.
be discussed in small groups. Recently, students were allowed to choose between two required whole-class novels and completed double-entry reading logs as they read. She even prepared students for the state’s standardized tests by having students complete a few practice questions once a week and by facilitating discussions in which students must provide evidence for their answer choices. In this way, literacy activities on non-workshop days were in line with the school’s required curriculum and taught in meaningful ways valuing student choice.

Allowing student choice of reading material does not mean that teachers cannot “cover” the standards addressed on the state’s standardized assessment. The fact that students are actually reading only enhances the teacher’s ability to teach the standards, as students are engaged with practicing the tested skills. This approach to curriculum and instruction ensures the Maine English Language Arts standards related to reading are met in direct ways. For example, Standard A, Process of Reading, states: “Students will use the skills and strategies of the reading process to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate what they have read.” This standard holds teachers accountable for helping students meet numerous objectives, such as questioning while reading, reflecting on what has been discovered while reading, identifying the author’s purpose and point of view, and summarizing whole texts and passages from texts. These are exactly the kinds of skills that are taught during lessons in this teacher’s classroom and reinforced when students read and respond to texts of their choosing. One notable objective listed under Standard A is that students will be able to “read for a variety of purposes” including “to enjoy,” one of the intended outcomes of independent, self-selected reading.

Standard B, Literature and Culture, states: “Students will use reading, listening, and viewing strategies to experience, understand, and appreciate literature and culture.” The objectives of this standard focus on making and justifying conclusions, demonstrating awareness of culture pertinent to texts they read, understanding and appreciating the actions of others, and sharing responses to quality literature with peers. The teacher ensures that these objectives are met in much the same way as Standard A—through lessons and reading and responding to texts. Students also meet this standard by reading a variety of materials in the classroom library, sharing their reading experiences through book talks to the whole class, and analyzing culture and the human condition through dialogue journals and conferences with the teacher. Independent, self-selected reading creates a classroom culture where reading and student choice are valued and the standards are met by employing meaningful pedagogy.

Atwell shared what her students taught her about independent reading in a workshop classroom:

My students taught me that they loved to read. They showed me that in-school reading, like in-school writing, could actually do something for them; that the ability to read for pleasure and personal meaning, like writing ability, is not a gift or talent. It comes with the ability to choose, books to choose among, time to read, and a teacher who is a reader. Finally, I learned that selecting one’s own books and reading them in school is not a luxury. It is the wellspring of student literacy and literary appreciation. (p. 34)

We agree with Atwell that independent choice of texts in school should not be a luxury but a norm, particularly in middle grades classrooms where students are transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn. In earlier grades, when students are learning to read, they often choose their texts, but in later grades when the purpose of reading shifts to content literacy, the texts are mostly teacher (or district) selected, leaving students with less voice in the direction of their school reading. The middle grades time frame is critical to fostering ability and interest in reading, which reading workshop affords.
for directing further investigation into this topic, we asked the students to write a regular reading workshop journal entry about a favorite book. The students’ reflections about a book that changed or influenced their lives are at the center of this article, as they revealed a great deal about students’ reading perceptions and practices. Above all, their writing shows how important self-selected books are for encouraging deep personal connections to texts. And, the simple process of having students journal about favorite books could easily be replicated in other language arts classrooms and provides rich data for teachers to consider when making curricular and instructional decisions, especially in support of independent reading.

With student and parent permission, we told students that we would like to share their thoughts about books with the larger educational community so that others might learn from them. In the middle of the year, the teacher asked all 53 of her students to respond in their reading journals to the following questions:

1. What is the best book that you have read in class or own your own?
2. How did it change your life or influence your thinking?
3. Who else would like this book and why?

All students in all three classes wrote for a full 20 minutes, reinforcing the motivating factor of an authentic writing task. The teacher had made clear the audience—other reading and English teachers and researchers—and the students never asked how long their entries should be or if they were going to be graded. They cared about having a larger community of readers hear their voices, reminding all of us to incorporate authentic writing tasks into the language arts curriculum.

We both read through the journal entries several times, first simply charting the book titles and number of times each was recommended by a student, but then we were drawn to re-reading because of how the students talked about their choices. Though a few book choices were not surprising to either of us, the way students articulated their deep personal connections with texts led us to reflect further upon the notion of independent reading. In the next section, we will provide the results of the tally. Then, we will look more closely at what we learned about adolescents’ reading through their writing about their favorite books.

Students’ responses and the importance of self-selection

The 26 boys and 27 girls who wrote journal entries about their favorite books revealed varied reading interests. They recommended 37 books or book series, and they only mentioned seven books more than once (see Figure 2). We recognize that not all of their recommendations would be considered young adult literature in the traditional sense—books specifically written for or about young adults—but we believe this in no way diminishes their choices. In fact, Donelson and Nilsen (1989) argued that young adult literature is any text a teenager freely chooses to read. The variety of students’ recommendations reminds us that we need to provide access to young adult literature as well as other texts that may appeal to young adult readers depending on individual interests (e.g., Band of Brothers, Curse of the Bambino, Great Expectations).

As we read and re-read students’ journal entries, three distinct categories emerged in the way that students talked about their most influential books. First, we noticed that some students thought reading their favorite book led to altered views of themselves and their personal decision making. These students suggested...
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<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
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<td>Barry Lyga</td>
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<td>Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler’s Eagle Nest</td>
<td>Stephen E. Ambrose</td>
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<td>Car, The</td>
<td>Gary Paulsen</td>
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<td>Child Called It, A</td>
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<td>Cirque du Freak series</td>
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<td>Clique series</td>
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<td>Gossip Girl</td>
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<td>Great Expectations</td>
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<td>Harry Potter series</td>
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<td>Bethany Hamilton</td>
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<td>Speak</td>
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<td>Sweep series</td>
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<td>TTYL (Talk to You Later)</td>
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<td>Uglies Trilogy</td>
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<td>Without You: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and the Musical Rent</td>
<td>Anthony Rapp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wounded Spirit, The</td>
<td>Frank E. Peretti</td>
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that books can foster a sense of personal agency about future choices and direction in life. Books that fell into this category included *Monster*, *Go Ask Alice*, *The First Part Last*, *The Wounded Spirit*, and *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl*. For example, one of the two boys who cited *Monster* as his most influential book stated:

> This book influenced the way I make decisions, like the decisions they made in the book about stealing cigarettes from the drug store and murdering the owner. This makes me think about the decisions I make and think about the consequences before I make them. I think that kids my age that get into trouble should read this book, because it would be interesting to them and it might change how they live and what they do.

Through examining the consequences of fictionalized characters' actions—not those of real people—this student has learned important lessons about his agency and ownership in the choices that he makes in his own life, a positive outcome of connecting with a book.

A second category we noticed in journal entries related to developing and sustaining healthy interpersonal relationships. The books noted in this category led students to appreciate family, friends, and/or society in general, books like *A Child Called It*, *Speak*, *The Giver*, *The Time Capsule*, *Gossip Girl*, *Crash*, and *Crispin*. One girl said of Pelzer’s *A Child Called It*:

> It changed my life because it showed me how grateful I am to have a loving family. I mean, this kid had no one that loved him. He had no family, no friends. He had no one. He got picked on at school and at home. I will never make fun of anyone again because of that book.

Books that function to encourage students’ reflection upon their relationships were clearly important to some students.

A third category we noticed in students’ writing about influential books was a shift in views about reading. Some students noted their extreme dislike for reading changing to greater interest in, and frequency and enjoyment of, reading. Shan’s *Cirque du Freak* book series was written about most frequently—by six students, all boys—and served as the strongest example of books altering views of reading. One boy wrote, “I have never liked to read. I just thought it was a waste of time, but with the *Cirque du Freak* books I like to read and enjoy it.” Similarly, another boy stated, “This book made me have a different view on reading. I’ve never liked reading for as long as I can remember. Because of these books I enjoy it now.” The boys who wrote about *Cirque du Freak* noted reading up to 50 pages every night and even an entire book in one day. Other books that inspired interest in reading included *The Demonata* book series (also authored by Shan), *The Harry Potter* book series, *Sweep*, and *Silent to the Bone*.

What is common among the 37 books and book series recommended is the element of choice. Only one—*The Giver*—was taught as a whole-class novel by the teacher that year, and it was recommended by four students. This means that 49 of 53 students, or 92% of the class, cited a self-selected text as their most influential book. The context and climate of a reading workshop classroom cannot be underestimated. When students were provided time in school to choose books, read them, and reflect on them, they became more interested in reading and connected characters and themes in their favorite texts to their own lives in meaningful ways.

> When students were provided time in school to choose books, read them, and reflect on them, they became more interested in reading and connected characters and themes in their favorite texts to their own lives in meaningful ways.

Student outcomes in this reading workshop classroom where student choice was valued went beyond self-reported perceptions and practices. Year-end standardized test data for this teacher’s classroom revealed that nearly three-fourths of these students met (49%) or exceeded (24%) the state standards for English language arts. Only 19% partially met the standards, and 8% did not meet the standards. These results were typical for this teacher’s classroom and the school as a whole, where all reading teachers were implementing reading workshop strategies, including independent, self-selected reading. Though there was
room for improvement to have all students meet or exceed standards, the evidence from these scores, and the students themselves lent credence to the benefits of independent, self-selected reading.

Creating a literacy-rich classroom
We urge English language arts teachers to keep independent, self-selected reading at the center of the middle grades English language arts curriculum. We believe that students must be allowed choice in what they read and time in school to read to learn what real reading is, the kind of reading that encourages students to become lifelong readers. When teachers know their students’ interests, they can put the “just right” books in their hands. One way to do this is to administer a simple reading inventory at the beginning of the year; teachers will further learn students’ interests through classroom interactions, particularly one-on-one conferences and reading journal dialogues. In addition, it is important for teachers to stay current with young adult literature published each year and continually build their classroom libraries. We argue that students are better served by district money being spent on trade books rather than on textbooks. Anthologies just do not invite students to curl up in a quiet, comfortable corner of the classroom to read, and research supports the use of trade books in classrooms (Galda & Cullinan, 2003). Teachers can remain informed about the newest young adult literature by attending professional conferences, checking resources through the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English websites, and reading book reviews published online or in journals like Language Arts, Voices from the Middle, and SIGNAL. Teachers can then build classroom libraries and showcase popular books in teacher- or student-led book talks that need last only a minute or two but allow students to see and hear about easily accessible texts in the classroom library. Creating literacy-rich environments in middle grades classrooms, which students are accustomed to from their elementary school experiences, further signifies the importance of reading.

Conclusion
We conclude by sharing some real occurrences witnessed at Saco Middle School that serve as evidence that implementing reading workshop and independent, self-selected reading with eighth graders is successful in promoting literacy and creating lifelong readers.

- They are reading their self-selected books in the hall at 7:00 a.m. while waiting for homeroom.
- They are reading their self-selected books in other core classes.
- They sign additional books out of the classroom library on Fridays because they know they will finish their books over the weekend and will want to begin reading others.
- They are recommending books to each other and asking questions such as, “Is that a good book? Do you think I’d like it?”
- They recommend their independent reading books to adults, and they sound so good that we read them.

Atwell contended, “This is the kind of evidence that begins to convince doubting administrators and parents: Students read more, comprehend better, and value books and reading to a greater degree when we make time in school for them to read” (p. 96). If teachers are given the
professional authority to combat prescriptive curricula and test preparation materials that are currently invading their classrooms and implement independent, self-selected reading in the context of reading workshop, the result may be students who are lifelong readers and highly literate human beings.

1 Editor’s Note: To read more about the relationship between test preparation and appropriate pedagogy, see the article “Ethical and Appropriate High-Stakes Test Preparation in Middle School: Five Methods That Matter,” by Steven L. Turner, in the September 2009 issue of *Middle School Journal*.

2 Author’s Note: We cite the Maine English Language Arts Standards in effect at the time of our study.

**Extensions**
The authors discuss numerous benefits of independent, self-selected reading in the middle grades.

1. How can you incorporate elements of choice and independence in your reading instruction?
2. How can you make your classroom more “literacy rich,” as described in this article?

**References**


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Editor’s note: Renewing the Middle School is a special three-part series in which Paul George, an eminent scholar in the field of middle grades education, offers his view on the current status of middle grades education and its prospects for the future. In the final installment of the series, Dr. George draws wisdom from the story of Hansel and Gretel to recommend a path forward and to call us all to action in the critical work of educating every young adolescent.

I believe that middle school educators can learn an important lesson about survival during difficult times from the classic German fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel, two young adolescents who faced great difficulty. Fairy tales like this one have been popular with generation after generation of children and families because they deal with hopes and fears that every child and every adult deals with, regardless of time or place.

Hansel and Gretel are the children of a kind and loving woodcutter, living in a forest home with a hateful and selfish stepmother during very difficult times. Things get so bad, with starvation a real possibility, that the hateful stepmother finally persuades Hansel and Gretel’s father to do the unthinkable and abandon the children in the woods. So, one night the heartbroken father leads his children deep into the woods and abandons them there. Unbeknownst to the father and stepmother, however, Hansel overhears them planning and gathers up a pocketful of bright, white stones that, reflecting the moonlight, will lead them back home even in the dark of night. And they do find their way back home.

It is not long, however, before the selfish and hateful stepmother convinces their father to once again lead them even deeper into the dark forest and abandon them there. Without the shiny white pebbles to guide them, Hansel is left to gather some bread crumbs that he sprinkles along the trail, hoping that they will be able to find them and come home. As we know, however, this does not happen. The birds and creatures of the woods eat the bread crumbs, leaving Hansel and Gretel lost in the deep, dark, and dangerous woods. The story continues by describing an encounter with a terribly wicked witch.

I think that the power of this fairy tale lies in its essence as a metaphor for the predicament that all of us occasionally find ourselves in: lost in the dark woods and needing to find our way home. The important lesson for middle school educators and researchers, I think, comes

This article reflects the following This We Believe characteristics: Shared Vision — Committed Leaders — Courageous & Collaborative Leaders
from understanding the two different ways in which Hansel tried to find his way home after being abandoned. One way was to create a path of durable, shiny pebbles that almost glowed in the dark, and the other way was to lay a trail of bread crumbs that were quickly consumed by the animals and left the children lost and alone. We can choose either the shiny pebbles that we can see even in the dark woods, or we can rely on bread crumbs that may seem to work but, ultimately, leave us lost and alone. To find our way home, we need to know the difference between bread crumbs and white, shiny pebbles. What are the pebbles that will lead us out of the dark and dangerous woods? What are the pebbles that can light our way? Which is the pathway home? Here are some of the pebbles I believe need to be in the pockets of middle grades educators—pebbles that will still be there when the moon shines.

- Our historic commitment to a developmentally appropriate education for young adolescents.
- A common curriculum that grows from the needs and interests of students and their teachers that is guided by standards, not strangled by them.
- Meaningful, close, and long-term relationships between and among students and their teachers, understanding that teacher-student alignment should have as high a priority as curriculum alignment.
- Strong support for the arrangements that encourage strong student-teacher relationships: interdisciplinary teaming, advisory groups, flexible scheduling, active learning, and other strategies for making big schools feel smaller and more effective.
- The power of trust among educators as a core requirement for continuous school improvement.
- Infusing each of these values into the operation of every middle grades program: freedom, democracy, empowerment, equity, optimism, teamwork, shared decision making, parental involvement, local control, celebration of diversity, management of complexity and ambiguity, tolerance, and humane and reasonable assessment strategies.

These six shining pebbles—permanent, trustworthy guides to home and safety in the education of young adolescents—light a path to the middle school paradigm. In the modern middle school movement, we can identify people like John Lounsbury, James Beane, William Alexander, and dozens of others who have believed and acted on the assumption that human beings are basically good and, given a proper education and appropriate developmental experiences—given a real chance to do the right thing—can grow up to become adults who are wise and good, loving and kind. We believe that real opportunity for this kind of an education is the birthright of every American child. We dream of the day when every child has access to that experience, when every child is given the pebbles that will help them find their way. These are the shining stones that will guide us home. Benjamin Mays, former president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, summed up our circumstances more lyrically, perhaps, than the tale of Hansel and Gretel:

It must be borne in mind that the tragedy of life doesn’t lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn’t a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it is a disaster to have no ideal to capture. It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim, is sin.

Educators of young adolescents in the U.S. and throughout the world have never aimed low. Our aim has always been to provide authentic educational success with every child. Every child, not just some children. Every child, not just those with influential parents. Every child, not just those with powerful advocates. Every child, not just those with the right clothes, right skin color, right last name, or the right language. Every child, including those whose hair is dirty and matted. Every child, including those whose clothes are torn and smelly. Every child, including those whose parents never come to school. Every child, including those who move three or four times a year. Every child, including those who...
are silent and those who shout. Every child, even when we are criticized for what we do and blamed for all the shortcomings of schools.

Idealistic as this may sound, our profession has always been driven by aims and dreams like these. We do need to help weak schools get stronger; we do need to promote high standards for all; and we do need to demand the very best from all educators. But we also need to celebrate even small gains made against long odds. We need to acknowledge the dedication and the commitment of those who keep pursuing their dreams for young adolescents. Most important, we all need to keep our eyes fixed on the shining stones that will lead us safely home.

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Extensions
The author identifies six values, beliefs, and practices that “light a path to the middle school paradigm.” Use these as a framework for team or school-wide strategic planning and goal setting, or use them to guide individual reflection and goal setting.

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This We Believe: 
Keys to Educating Young Adolescents

John H. Lounsbury

Every day, millions of diverse, rapidly changing 10- to 15-year-olds make critical and complex life choices and form the attitudes, values, and dispositions that will direct their behavior as adults. They deserve an education that will enhance their healthy growth as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient individuals who are optimistic about the future and prepared to succeed in our ever-changing world.

The release of This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents comes at a propitious time. Many major decisions about how public education will be organized and operated will be made in the months and years ahead as misguided “accountability by testing” reforms lose steam. It is critical for those of us committed to the education of young adolescents to embrace the vision of education set forth in This We Believe, fully understand its precepts, and proactively join discussions at the local, state, national, and international levels about the future of public education.

The efforts of National Middle School Association (NMSA) and its membership over the last four decades have been part of a larger, progressive, child-centered educational movement that is nearly a century old. During the first 50 years, this movement focused on the junior high school, while the focus in recent decades has been on creating and supporting more developmentally appropriate middle schools. This movement has been guided by NMSA’s position paper, This We Believe.

Since 1982, each version of This We Believe has reflected both the maturation of the middle school concept, as it has been put into practice in thousands of schools, and the growth and development of NMSA. The newest edition is the best, current, and most forward-thinking expression of the enduring, timeless ideals that have been—and must continue to be—the driving force behind all we do to advance the education and well-being of young adolescents. Like those that preceded it, the current edition also communicates the special spirit inherent in our vision, which ignites the passion so evident in our advocacy. The middle school movement has been advanced not so much by the logic of what it advocates (although such logic certainly does exist) or by the findings of research (although research does, indeed, support our advocacy); it has been driven by the moral imperative to do what is best for young adolescents.

The chart on the opposite page provides a quick overview of This We Believe, including the four essential attributes and the 16 defining characteristics of successful middle level schools; but all of us must read, understand, and internalize the entire document. Key components of This We Believe not in the chart include a newly developed list of major goals of middle level education; a section summarizing recent research supporting This We Believe; an authoritative call to action; and, most appropriate, an extensive listing of the characteristics of young adolescents.

Middle level educators must be secure in what we believe, but we also must be able to articulate those beliefs to others. We must, then, become thoroughly familiar with this new edition of This We Believe. For some of us, studying it will renew our commitment to the high ideals of the middle school concept; for others, reading and reflecting on it will provide the knowledge and understanding we need to become committed to the cause.

The importance of middle level education can never be overestimated. The future of individuals and, indeed, that of society is largely determined by the nature of the educational experiences of young adolescents during these formative years.

This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents, p. 3
This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents, p. 43
This We Believe
Keys to Educating Young Adolescents

16 Characteristics

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them. (Value Young Adolescents)
- Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning. (Active Learning)
- Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant. (Challenging Curriculum)
- Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches. (Multiple Learning Approaches)
- Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it. (Varied Assessments)

Leadership and Organization
- A shared vision developed by all stakeholders guides every decision. (Shared Vision)
- Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices. (Committed Leaders)
- Leaders demonstrate courage and collaboration. (Courageous & Collaborative Leaders)
- Ongoing professional development reflects best educational practices. (Professional Development)
- Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships. (Organizational Structures)

Culture and Community
- The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all. (School Environment)
- Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate. (Adult Advocate)
- Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents. (Guidance Services)
- Health and wellness are supported in curricula, school-wide programs, and related policies. (Health & Wellness)
- The school actively involves families in the education of their children. (Family Involvement)
- The school includes community and business partners. (Community & Business)

Essential Attributes
- An education for young adolescents must be Developmentally Responsive, using the nature of young adolescents as the foundation on which all decisions are made.
- Challenging, recognizing that every student can learn and everyone is held to high expectations.
- Empowering, providing all students with the knowledge and skills they need to take control of their lives.
- Equitable, advocating for every student's right to learn and providing challenging and relevant learning opportunities.

This chart is based on This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents (NMSA 2010). For more information visit us at, www.nmsa.org
When I was in school, we referred to America as the “melting pot” because of the array of immigrants living here. Today we use various words like, “multiculturalism” or “cultural diversity” are used. Whatever terminology we use, we live in a society that is diverse, and everyone needs a basic understanding of that diversity.

In a hallway conversation I had with a New Jersey seventh grader, he shared that the United States would not be fighting a war if the people who were in charge would talk to one another and respect the differences between them; wise words from someone so young. I wondered when and where this young man had learned such a valuable lesson.

The conversation reminded me of two teachers who had shared a lesson from their immigration unit with me, which I then used on numerous occasions. One of those occasions was after 9/11 in a school where tensions were high, and the teachers were looking for a way to defuse the situation. It is one of those lessons that is applicable in any classroom anywhere. I would like to share this lesson with you and thank Jen and Cindy for sharing it with me. I do not know the origin of the lesson.

“Best of Both Worlds”

1. Cut two hearts from oak tag.
2. Decorate one heart with stars and stripes, symbolizing the American flag. (You can substitute another country and its flag.) On this heart draw pictures of things you think represent the best in America (or any other country where you live).
3. For the other heart, choose a country from your own cultural background and draw pictures representing the cultural heritage that your family shares as part of its background. Examples include food, holidays, customs, language, music, etc. Decorate this heart using colors and symbols represented in the flag of this country.
4. Cut one heart from the top to the midpoint; cut the other from the bottom to the midpoint and punch a hole in the top of this one. Interlock the hearts together. Thread a string through the hole and hang the mobiles for display.

Not only does this make a colorful display, it provides an opportunity for students to share their heritage.
Edwards Resigns as Executive Director

NMSA Executive Director Betty Edwards has resigned after leading the association for the past two and a half years. Dr. Edwards worked to forge new relationships with business and organization partners, served on several national boards, and spoke at conferences and events throughout the United States. President Cathie Thibodeau commented that the board accepted her resignation and commended her for her years of visionary leadership and progress.

Thibodeau appointed a transition team, led by Pete Lorain, to bridge the time between Dr. Edwards’ departure and the identification of a new executive director. A search committee chaired by Pete Lorain and Santina Pino was formed and has begun to identify the process of searching for the next leader of National Middle School Association. More information on the Transition Team and Search Committee are available on the NMSA website. www.nmsa.org/edsearch

Fogartie Honored at NMSA Conference

At the NMSA Annual Conference and Exhibit in Indianapolis, Elizabeth Fogartie received NMSA’s Distinguished Educator Award. Launched in 2003, this award recognizes outstanding practitioners in middle level education—those who have made a significant impact on the lives of young adolescents through leadership, vision, and advocacy. Principal of Webb Bridge Middle School, Alpharetta, Georgia, Elizabeth is an exceptional leader who has, through visionary leadership, propelled her school to state and national prominence. The epitome of a lifelong learner, Elizabeth Fogartie reaches out to mentor other schools while improving practices at her own school. Local and state representatives and senators are frequent visitors to Webb Bridge, and they have come to know Elizabeth as an example of excellence in leadership at the middle level. Extremely knowledgeable about every aspect of middle level education, Elizabeth has a dynamic personality, boundless energy, an eternally optimistic outlook, and the ability to guide others in doing what is best for students.

Free Resource to Share with Families

Your NMSA membership gives you free access to a quarterly resource you can share with parents and caregivers of your students. The Family Connection, edited by Judith Baenen, is a double-sided newsletter that’s easy to read and a great informational resource. The issues are available to print and distribute exactly as-is, or you can cut and paste articles for use in your school newsletter. More than 33 issues are available at www.nmsa.org/familyconnection

Teammate of the Year Award Developed for Youth

The Ripken name is synonymous with character, integrity, and perseverance, which form the cornerstone concepts in the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation’s (CRSF) youth programming efforts. Through the Healthy Choices, Healthy Children (HCHC) character education curriculum, CRSF strives to honor the memory of Cal, Sr. A consummate teacher and leader, Cal, Sr. was never happier than when he was working with kids.

The Teammate of the Year Award, presented by the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation, will honor deserving youth that have made positive choices, inspired others to act, and become positive leaders in their communities. Each year, CRSF, in conjunction with National Middle School Association (NMSA), will honor a deserving youth who truly exemplifies the traits of Cal, Sr. The first Teammate of the Year Award will be presented at the 2010 NMSA Annual Conference in Baltimore, MD. Any school implementing the HCHC program will be eligible to nominate one youth for the Teammate of the Year Award. Visit ripkenfoundation.org for award criteria, eligibility requirements, and application process details. Nomination materials will be available April 30, 2010, and nominations will be accepted through June 1, 2010.

Call for Editor

National Middle School Association is seeking an editor for the peer-reviewed journal, Research in Middle Level Education Online (RMLE Online). You can find more details about this position and application materials at www.nmsa.org/rmleonlineditor
Classroom Management and Discipline: Responding to the Needs of Young Adolescents

Katherine Evans & Jessica Lester

When the middle school concept was initiated in the mid-1960s, it was a call for educators to acknowledge the unique developmental needs of students between the ages of 10 and 14 as they transition from childhood to adolescence (Anfara, 2001). Some researchers have suggested that many middle schools, however, are missing some of the key components of the middle school concept, resulting in middle schools that look very similar to traditional junior high schools (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). This lack of attention to the developmental needs of the students has, in many instances, created a mismatch between young adolescents and their school environment. This mismatch has resulted in many middle school teachers reporting that student discipline problems are becoming increasingly prevalent (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Dupper, 1998). Concern is also raised by the fact that elementary and middle school teachers are twice as likely to report discipline issues compared to secondary school teachers (Check, 2001).

In a study examining 345 teachers’ beliefs about their readiness to address behavior challenges, middle and secondary school teachers reported being significantly less able and ready to manage challenging student behaviors than primary school teachers (Baker, 2005). Lack of preparation and the ensuing frustration with student misbehavior often lead teachers to become disillusioned with teaching and more prone to burnout and attrition. With student misbehavior cited as one of the top reasons teachers leave the field (Grayson & Alvarez, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001), there is a growing need to identify effective approaches to classroom management. While many teachers may feel competent in their ability to carry out routine classroom management procedures, they may not be as comfortable addressing discipline issues.

In this article, we begin by exploring the literature around discipline, including the use of suspension and other interventions. We then describe several comprehensive classroom management approaches that have been studied within middle schools. Finally, we present the essential features of classroom management as delineated by the National Middle School Association (2010), highlighting the supporting research on discipline and classroom management.

Discipline Interventions

According to one study, middle school students are four times more likely to be suspended than elementary students (Arca, 2007), and middle school teachers are more likely to use corporal punishment than elementary or high school teachers (Check, 2001). Suspension and expulsion rates in middle schools have dramatically risen (Skiba, 2000). Some researchers suggest that misbehavior increases for middle school students due to difficulties with the transition from elementary school (Dupper, 1998; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Other researchers attribute this increase in discipline problems to home or family characteristics (Check; Christle et al., 2004).
to the effects of years of academic failure (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001), or to school characteristics such as discipline policies, teacher beliefs, or middle school implementation models (Arcia).

Despite the increase in discipline issues at the middle school level, little research has explored the experiences of students who are suspended or expelled. Some studies have suggested that many students perceive suspension as “an officially sanctioned school holiday” (Rossow & Parkinson, 1999, p. 39), while other studies indicated that students feel legitimately punished by school suspension (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison, 2001; Sekaya, 2001).

According to research related to suspension rates, middle school males are more likely to be suspended than females (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001). Further, researchers report a strong correlation between students’ GPA and the rate of suspension (Christle et al., 2004; Dupper, 1998; Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001). African-American males are suspended three times more often, proportionately, than the rest of the population (Townsend, 2000). In one study within an urban school district, African-American middle school students received more office referrals and school suspensions than other minority groups (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Such research calls for teachers to be ever aware of culturally responsive approaches to classroom management (Monroe & Obidah, 2004).

Morrison, Anthony, Storino, and Dillon (2001) suggested that in spite of school-wide or even district-wide policies that are intended to create consistent disciplinary protocols across schools, there remains a capriciousness to the disciplinary process that often results in the inconsistent application of these protocols and the inequitable enforcement of consequences for certain types of students, including minority students, males, and students with disabilities. To examine the reasons for referrals, subsequent disciplinary actions, and rates of student suspension, Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) collected office referrals within two different school contexts, one urban and the other suburban. At the urban sites, the researchers collected the disciplinary referrals of 11,001 middle school students across 19 middle schools. At the second site, disciplinary referrals of 610 middle school students from a suburban middle school were collected. For both populations, an overrepresentation of low SES, males, and disability was identified. At the first school site, 41.1% of all students had at least one referral, with 38.2% of all students at the second site having a referral. The students were primarily referred due to behaviors perceived by teachers as non-compliant or insubordinate. Within the urban setting, 33% of all referrals resulted in suspension, while in the suburban setting only 6% of referrals led to suspensions.

Although teachers often consider suspension or other exclusionary practices as appropriate consequences for more serious behaviors, research consistently has shown that this is not always the case. According to Mendez and Knoff (2003), 74% of middle school suspensions in their study were the result of disobedience, while only 1% was for serious offenses. Dupper (1998) agreed that too often suspension is applied to “preventable, minor offenses” and therefore, is “unjustified, ineffective, and contributes to the school failure of many students” (p. 354). In fact, research related to middle school suspensions suggests that suspensions have a negative impact on academic achievement (Arcia, 2007).

Researchers have investigated alternative approaches to suspension for misbehaving students. For example, Morrison, Anthony, Storino, and Dillon (2001) collected data related to the disciplinary histories, personal-social characteristics, and educational success of 85 middle school students who had been recommended for a one day in-school suspension program. The program included opportunities for students to reflect on offenses, set goals for the future, and consider possible alternatives for their behavior. The students completed questionnaires related to family climate, academic optimism, social responsibility and susceptibility to peer
Morrison and colleagues found that students who had been previously suspended were more likely to be suspended again. Further, repeated suspensions were often for attitude offenses, rather than serious offenses, suggesting that students with suspension histories are perhaps more closely watched for future misbehavior. The authors also suggested that students with a lower optimistic outlook, higher levels of family conflict, and lower academic success often develop a negative discipline trajectory. They insisted however, that this trajectory can be disrupted if students are provided with opportunities to develop social responsibility, academic success, and a more optimistic outlook.

The negative discipline trajectory proposed by Morrison, Anthony, Storino, and Dillon (2001) is consistent with what Christle and associates (2004) referred to as a failure cycle. Christle and associates suggested this cycle begins with academic frustrations and increased behavior problems due to those frustrations. Exclusion from academic instruction due to suspensions or other exclusionary practices culminates in further academic frustration, continuing the cycle until the student either drops out of school or ends up in juvenile delinquency. They agreed that the cycle can be broken if schools help students develop protective factors, such as positive academic competence and social behavior.

Christle and associates (2004) compared 20 schools with the highest suspension rates in a school district with 20 schools with the lowest suspension rates in that district. They based their comparison on 13 variables, including student demographics, academic achievement, enrollment, attendance, gender, dropout rate, per pupil expenditure, student/teacher ratio, and teacher salary. Based on their findings, they recommended that schools hold high expectations for students and provide adequate support to help students experience academic and social success. This might include extracurricular activities that promote a sense of community or advisor/advisee programs where students can establish meaningful connections with school staff. They also recommended alternatives to suspension and other exclusionary practices, such as Saturday school, or early morning detention where students do not miss academic time in the classroom.

These studies reflect a growing body of research calling for alternatives to exclusionary and punitive approaches to discipline. Jackson and Davis (2000) called for comprehensive school-wide approaches to classroom management that seek to prevent misbehavior and create a positive school climate. The following section reviews the research related to several school-wide programs. These programs vary in their focus, ranging from those which are more behaviorally oriented to those which are more democratic in their approach.

**Comprehensive School-Wide Approaches to Classroom Management**

Positive behavior support (PBS) is a school-wide prevention approach to discipline grounded in applied behavioral analysis (Colvin, Sugai, & Kameenui, 1994). This approach is defined by teaching behavioral expectations and rewarding positive behaviors (Warren, Bohanan-Edmonson, Turnbull, Sailor, Wickham, Griggs, & Beech, 2006). Through didactic instruction and opportunities to practice the expected behaviors, this behaviorally-oriented approach has been shown to effectively decrease behavior problems (Colvin et al., 1994). To reinforce the expected behaviors, praise and token systems are often incorporated (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). In a case study examining the application of PBS in an inner-city middle school with 737 students, students and teachers in successful middle grades schools feel connected to a larger community of learners.
significant decreases in discipline issues and office referrals resulted over a two-year period (Warren et al., 2006). Despite some teachers, principals, and parents indicating their support of PBS, some teachers expressed resistance to having “one more thing” to do within their classroom (p. 194). Further, with its emphasis on reward systems, as well as minimal input from students, the PBS approach may undermine teachers’ attempts to foster “students’ own understanding of what is fair and just” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 171).

Freiberg’s Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline (CMCD) program is aimed at “problem prevention rather than problem solving, thus reducing the need for intervention” (Freiberg, Connell, & Lorentz, 2001, p. 251). This program emphasizes student self-discipline in a caring, cooperative classroom environment, requiring unquestioning compliance to an imposed set of rules (Freiberg, Prokosch, Treister, Stein, & Opuni, 1989). Studies, including some at the middle school level, indicated that when CMCD was consistently applied there was an increase in student and teacher attendance, as well as fewer disciplinary referrals (Freiberg et al., 1989; Freiberg et al., 2001). While the program dissuades schools from being rigid with their use of reinforcement, the motivation for appropriate behavior is often extrinsic in nature (Freiberg et al., 2001). Despite incorporating classroom practices in which teachers and students jointly participate, this program’s idea of “unquestioning compliance” may thwart students’ ability and willingness to cooperatively interact and think independently (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

The Child Development Project (CDP) is a school-wide approach that addresses the cognitive, social, and ethical needs of students. CDP assumes that students have basic psychological needs, including a need to feel in control of the environment, a sense of belonging and community, and a feeling of competence. To fulfill these basic needs, schools applying CDP follow four guiding principles: 1. foster stable relationships between teachers and students; 2. acknowledge the unique cognitive, affective, and ethical dimensions of each student; 3. promote intrinsic motivation; and 4. incorporate instructional practices that result in students actively constructing meaning. The classroom management practices within CDP are considered developmentally appropriate, with student involvement and conflict resolution viewed as essential. Through this democratic approach, middle school students’ engagement levels were reported to increase, while their ability to resolve conflict also improved (Developmental Studies Center, 1998).

The Responsive Classroom is another approach that aims to promote student responsibility and choice (Crawford & Wood, 1998). Key components of this approach include morning meetings focused on problem solving and conflict resolution, collaborative development of rules, logical consequences, and student choice within academic learning. These components are intended to influence not only classroom management, but classroom organization and instructional practices as well. Evaluation data indicated that students’ social skills improved, while problem behaviors decreased (Elliot, 1995). Within the middle school setting, this approach responds to students’ desire for respect, individual responsibility, and freedom.

Other researched approaches that are consistent with this more democratic classroom structure include the Peaceable Schools Movement (Bodine, Crawford, & Schrumpf, 1995), Positive Discipline in the Classroom (Nelson, Lott, & Glenn, 2000), and the Resolving Middle grades schools can help meet young adolescents’ basic needs by fostering stable relationships between teachers and students.

Middle grades schools can help meet young adolescents’ basic needs by fostering stable relationships between teachers and students.
Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) (DeJong, 1993). RCCP, a comprehensive conflict resolution program, teaches students skills that assist them in solving conflicts, such as active listening and negotiation. Additionally, teachers, parents, and administrators are trained in negotiation and meditational strategies. See Figure 1 for a summary of these comprehensive school-wide approaches to classroom management.

Patti and Tobin (2001) specifically explored the experience of principals within seven inner-city schools using RCCP, with one site being a middle school. They conducted a descriptive case study over a three-year period, interviewing and observing principals within their schools. Their findings suggested that principals were essential players in shifting a school toward a more democratic discipline style, acting to model the related behaviors with students and staff. All of the participating principals valued the social and emotional development of the students, not simply their academic learning.

While they may not have been thoroughly researched, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that two other approaches hold potential as effective school-wide approaches to classroom management. Restitution (Gossen, 2001), based on ideas from Glasser’s (1998) Reality Therapy, focuses on strengthening the student, socially, emotionally, and cognitively, and providing an opportunity for the student to repair any harm resulting from the offense committed. Restorative Justice (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006), also provides opportunities for students to repair harm. By involving stakeholders (i.e., victim, offender, family, and community) in the process, Restorative Justice seeks to maintain the offending student’s connection to his school and community. Through these two approaches, teachers support students as the students learn from their own mistakes and develop social responsibility.

Some research has shown that students prefer this type of democratic approach. For example, in one study, a 15-item survey focused on research-based, bullying intervention strategies was administered to 286 middle school students from a small town in Pennsylvania (Crothers, Kolbert, & Barker, 2006). Results indicated that the students preferred prevention strategies in which teachers focused on managing their classrooms, thereby deterring bullying behaviors. However, if

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**Figure 1** Comprehensive school-wide approaches to classroom management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Behavior Support (PBS)</th>
<th>Consistency Management &amp; Cooperative Discipline (CMCD)</th>
<th>Child Development Project (CDP)</th>
<th>The Responsive Classroom (RC)</th>
<th>Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

School-wide discipline programs: Moving toward more democratic classrooms
bullying occurred, students desired for teachers to take a proactive role, assisting them in problem-solving and resolving conflicts.

In an ethnographic study of the educational experiences of six immigrant middle school students, Curtin (2006) explored the perceptions of the students and their teachers related to instructional practices. Her findings suggested that students preferred a classroom discipline style that was democratic in scope, whereby teachers sought student input and promoted choice. In comparison to the teachers who used a more autocratic classroom management style, teachers who maintained democratic management styles experienced fewer student discipline issues.

When students experience these types of democratic classrooms, it not only serves to improve classroom management, it also creates a climate of safety and trust in which instruction thrives. More research needs to be conducted into approaches that help students develop the social, emotional, and cognitive skills to experience academic and social-emotional success.

**Essential Features of Classroom Management in the Middle Grades**

Studies like those conducted by Crothers and associates (2006) and Curtin (2006) serve to support and reinforce the philosophical beliefs of the middle school concept as articulated in *This We Believe* (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010) and in *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000). In *Turning Points 2000*, Jackson and Davis suggested several factors that are essential in promoting effective classroom management in middle grades. In this section, we discuss four of these factors and present research that supports their inclusion. These factors should be used as a guide for structuring classroom management and discipline approaches.

First, students must feel connected to and respected by their school community, with behavioral expectations and consequences clearly stated. *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) states that a successful school is one that “is an inviting, supporting, and safe place, a joyful community” where all understand that “they are part of a community where differences are respected and celebrated” (pp. 33–34). Students who attend schools that facilitate a caring community experience positive outcomes, such as increases in social skills, motivation, and academic achievement (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). Further, it has been well documented that students are more engaged in learning when they feel that their teachers care about and are responsive to their needs (Noddings, 2006; Osterman, 2000).

Second, to create a sense of personal responsibility and intrinsic motivation, students should be active participants in shaping the behavioral norms within the school. Research suggests that students who are actively involved in developing classroom practices are more apt to follow the classroom guidelines (Good & Brophy, 2003; Lewis, 2001), while also feeling a greater sense of autonomy and motivation (Brophy, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Further, having an orientation toward personal responsibility may positively impact students’ moral and ethical development (Berk, 2006).

Third, classroom management approaches must take into account the unique social, behavioral, and cognitive characteristics of middle school students. *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) provides a thorough description of the physical, cognitive-intellectual, moral, psychological, and social-emotional characteristics of young adolescents. Because middle school students are undergoing transitions in each of these areas, teachers must be aware of these characteristics and be adequately prepared to meet the challenges that accompany these developmental changes. According to Noddings (2005) both teachers and students must be allowed to act as “whole persons” (p. 13), resisting “the temptation to describe the whole in terms of collective parts” (p. 12). Thus, in applying classroom management approaches, teachers must holistically respond to the unique developmental needs of middle school students.

Finally, the selected classroom management approach should be implemented school-wide, with administrative and teacher roles clearly delineated. According to Jones (1991), school-wide implementation
is essential for maintaining consistent expectations throughout the school setting. Further, by taking an ecological approach (Nelson, Martella, & Garland, 1998), teachers, administrators, staff, and students participate together in ensuring a safe and positive environment. School-wide implementation promotes consistent expectations and greater investment by all stakeholders; however, in order to be successful, it is important that teachers, administrators and school staff receive adequate professional development related to classroom management policies.

Conclusion

In a longitudinal study of the transition from middle school to high school, Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge (2000) found that a history of discipline problems in the seventh grade was the strongest discriminating factor for ninth graders becoming at-risk for dropping out of school. The need for middle school teachers to provide effective classroom management for their students is great and the consequences of not doing so are grave.

In countless middle schools across the nation, teachers are implementing classroom management practices aligned with the essential features stated above. In such classrooms, teachers capitalize on the unique strengths of their students, recognizing that each student reaches developmental milestones in their own time. These teachers provide opportunities for social interaction, acknowledging the need for young adolescents to be socially engaged. These teachers move beyond focusing solely on external behaviors, instead recognizing the needs that lie beneath those behaviors. In these democratic classrooms, teachers know that regardless of the type of classroom management system implemented, acquiring the input of their students is an essential component of building a sense of moral responsibility.

These types of practices are a vital part of the middle school vision on which effective classroom management and discipline rely. It is critical that we provide teachers with the supports necessary to implement such a vision, among them the resources and professional development needed to create positive learning environments for all students.

Extensions

1. Examine data for discipline referrals and suspensions for your school or team. Do the data reveal any of the patterns described by the authors? How do you ensure that discipline policies are enforced fairly and equitably?

2. Does your school have a comprehensive, school-wide plan for classroom management and discipline, as the authors recommend? If not, which of the models described by the authors might work best in your school?

References


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