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I recently had the honor of participating in the Remaking Middle School Summit, a convening of 145 thought leaders engaged in efforts to transform the learning experiences and outcomes for all middle school youth. The event kicked off with a question and answer session with several middle school students who shared their middle school experiences. This proved to be a critical means of focusing the participants and setting the tone for the next day and a half of discussion. We were moved by their comments and it became quite clear that all discussions during this event should focus on planning for the benefit of our students, not us.

The students were open and honest, funny and serious. They expressed that they want teachers to know and understand them. They don’t want to be passive learners; they want to be able to get up and move and interact with others. When one young man stated that he came to school—and to his after-school program—because of the chance to create art, I knew he had acknowledged something about his own engagement in school that many adults have trouble understanding.

Henry Winkler stated in his keynote presentation at the 2011 AMLE conference in Louisville that the opportunity to engage in theatre and performing arts in school was the only thing that kept him there. As he dealt with dyslexia at a time when dyslexia was not on educators’ radar, reading difficulties made core academic subjects a struggle for Winkler. The arts gave him a creative outlet, improved his motivation and self-esteem, and kept him in school.

Hundreds of studies point to the benefits of arts in school including increased reading and writing proficiency, improved attendance, civic engagement, and reduced disciplinary infractions (see 10 Salient Studies on Arts in Education at https://www.onlinecolleges.net/10-salient-studies-on-the-arts-in-education/).

Our students come to us as creators and deserve curriculum that is rich in opportunities to explore and express ideas using the arts, not just in arts classes, but in every class. Art is a critical part of the well-rounded education we want and expect for our students. I hope you find in this issue of AMLE Magazine some inspiration for infusing arts throughout your school.

April Tibbles, Editor

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