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Know Your Students

So, you’ve been spending the last weeks or days of summer break getting organized and ready for your students. You’ve spent time designing the learning environment, planning your classroom management approach, attending to differentiating instruction, and looking at ways to collaborate with colleagues.

But you know it all boils down to focusing on the learner and learning. And sometimes doing what’s best for the learner isn’t easy to plan ahead of time; it takes awareness, understanding, and a good measure of flexibility.

Our authors share important insights in this issue; some focused on project-based learning whether directly or indirectly, and others on approaches to engaging learners. What rings true in every article is the importance of knowing your student. From Seth Weitzman’s article encouraging students to explore a subject of their own choosing through Capstone projects; to Julie Adams’ article on focusing on relationships, reflection, and retakes; to Phyllis Fagell’s article on helping students build collaboration skills with a focus on process, not product, you’ll find that understanding learner needs is paramount.

Rick Wormeli examines the tenets of grit and growth mindset with a cautious lens. While it’s appropriate to help students develop grit and growth mindset, he poses that this must be done with full awareness and sensitivity to your students’ lives and circumstances as well as the cultural narratives. Again, we focus on the learner.

Amber Chandler asks us to recommit to the goal of helping students succeed. Everything we do should be with the intent of helping students learn. Let’s forget the gotchas such as deducting points for minor errors and counting poorly written test questions. Doing the right thing for students often means taking the harder path—choosing to do the right thing and not necessarily the easy thing—and accepting your own fallibility.

Here’s to a successful, productive, and rewarding year as the mentors, heroes, and advocates of our middle school students!

April Tibbles, Editor
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