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Connecting with Social Concerns

At no other time in my life can I remember feeling as intensely about injustices and unfairness as I did in middle school (actually my school was a junior high, both in name and philosophy). Concerns I was keenly aware of—and I know this will date me—including saving baby seals, stopping acid rain, combatting AIDS, and fighting “the war on drugs.” And a few years later, we sang the song that raised funds for African famine relief when “We Are the World” became an international rally cry.

While I reacted emotionally and intellectually to these social concerns, I had minimal opportunities or support to take action, to make a difference. Social responsibility wasn’t embedded in my classes, school clubs were seldom about a cause, and service-learning wasn’t yet a thing. There were light-hearted ways to participate like fundraising with bake sales and car washes and collecting and submitting UPC symbols cut from product boxes, but attending to social issues by actually connecting to the problems, the facts, and the people affected, wasn’t woven through my school day or after-school activities in any meaningful way. I think I really missed out.

I am, however, encouraged by the submissions for this month’s cover story theme. It’s clear that social responsibility as a component of learning and school culture, is top of mind for many educators. You’ll read about schools that are accomplishing this through whole-school, classroom, and interdisciplinary activities.

Successful schools use existing curriculum and instructional strategies to encourage our middle schoolers to explore and take action on causes and concerns that have meaning for them. We owe it to our students—and certainly to society—now more than ever, to foster student awareness and interest in social responsibility. If your school isn’t helping students make these important connections, what are you waiting for?

April Tibbles, Editor
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