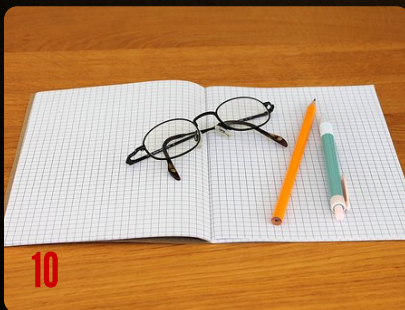


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OHIO MIDDLE LEVEL
ASSOCIATION

IN THE MIDDLE

Fall 2016-2017

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Thank you to our Business Partners for their support of middle level education!



A New School Year

One Door Closes and Another Opens



President's Message

This new school year brings about many changes for me as a middle level educator and advocate. At this year's conference I will finish my 4 year tenure as President of the Ohio Middle Level Association. This position has provided me with benefits I never saw coming. Having the opportunity to work with board members who live and breathe the middle level concept fed my professional soul. It is and has been an honor and unbelievably energizing to work alongside practicing educators who willingly give of their valuable free time to serve middle level teachers and students in Ohio. While serving as president my life has been enriched in countless ways and the relationships I have built are priceless. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as president and look forward to supporting Jay Clark, our new president.

As this school year begins I find myself walking through a new door of opportunity, a full time position at Wright State University. I am fortunate to have found something I love just as much as my 30 years in the 7th and 8th grade classroom. My new students, future middle level educators, let me know that our classrooms will be filled with talented and dedicated young teachers who will bring creativity, innovation and best practices to their students. These future teachers breathe *This We Believe* and will advocate for all that is middle level. I am inspired by their commitment to their future students.

I would like to close by sharing a quote that was shared with me a couple of weeks ago. I believe this quote represents so many of the middle level teachers and administrators I have come to know through my work with OMLA.

"The very best teachers I know, the very best I have seen, all view teaching as a calling. The very best do not see it as a job, not even as career, but as something they have been called upon to do. They see the nobility and the value of what they do, and believe that by enriching the futures of their students, even in some small way, they are leaving a mark on the world."

Dr. Bud Baker
Professor of Management
Robert J Kegerris
Distinguished Professor of Teaching
Wright State University

As your new school year begins I want to thank you for the noble work you do each and every day while enriching the lives of your students.

I hope to see you all at our conference in Cincinnati on October 27th & 28th. Check out our website for all the details.

Best wishes for a wonderful school year.

**Join OMLA at the Hyatt
Regency in downtown
Cincinnati October 27
and 28, 2016 as our
annual state conference
moves to the fall!**



Follow these links for details...

2016 Conference Registration

OMLA Conference Room Rate is \$162/night

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Thursday Keynote



Rick Wormeli is a National Board Certified Teacher and a columnist for AMLE Magazine. The winner of Disney's American Teacher Award for English in 1996, Rick is an internationally known speaker on middle-level education, innovation, and teacher professionalism. Rick offers a wealth of experience having worked as a middle grades teacher, human growth and development teacher, and staff development educator. He is also an educational consultant to National Public Radio, USA Today, and the Smithsonian Institute. Rick has presented at the White House, has appeared on Good Morning America, and has worked with school districts all across the country.

Friday Keynote



Anthony Muhammad is one of the most sought after educational consultants in North America. He served as a practitioner for nearly twenty years. Dr. Muhammad served as a middle school teacher, assistant principal, middle school principal, and high school principal. His tenure as a practitioner has earned him several awards as both a teacher and a principal. Dr. Muhammad is the author of the books *The Will to Lead and the Skill to Teach*; *Transforming Schools at Every Level* and *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division*.

Featured Speaker



Jack Berekemeyer is a nationally recognized presenter, author, and humorist. He is the author of *Managing the Madness - A Practical Guide to Middle Grades Classrooms*, *Taming of the Team - How Great Teams Work Together* and most recently published, *Deliberate Optimism - Reclaiming the Joy in Education*, co-authored with Dr. Debbie Silver and Judith Baenen. As former middle level teacher and now expert in middle level education and adolescent development, Jack shares his passion, humor, and expertise that is guaranteed to re-energize the room.

On the Verge

by Jay Clark, Principal
Van Buren Middle School
Northwest Region

After talking through an idea for a self-guided unit, a colleague states, “I had that idea once, too but I know the kids will stop doing their work and just mess around”.

You question teammates about the strict homework policy only to be sternly reminded that “this team expects all homework to be turned in by 8:30am the day it’s due or students are assigned detentions - we have high expectations unlike the other teams.”

You decided to provide pencils to those who forget them in your math class so that you don’t have to wait on students to return to their lockers. Your colleagues are upset because you are not following what the school instituted thirteen years ago in making students return to their lockers for forgotten supplies and giving them a demerit.

School districts have worked tirelessly to ensure that teachers have access to curricular resources, understand how to use formative assessment, and have the necessary data to inform instruction. In stark contrast, our knowledge of child development, executive function, motivation, and grading and feedback is very limited. For most educators, our background on these important foundational topics is often based on our own experiences, what colleagues may share, and the institutions that have stood in schools for generations. Many classrooms and entire schools are on the verge of greatness, however without letting go of ideology that is misguided or just completely inappropriate, we cannot move from good to great. Poorly-designed policies and institutions are

disrespectful to students, stifle teachers, and limit our educational potential. What if we ensure that homework is engaging, only assigned when absolutely necessary? If we believe homework is practice, then why include it in a student’s grade? What if we stand at the door and, as Jack Berckemeyer suggests, check with students as they enter your classroom to ensure they bring necessary supplies? What if we keep students engaged and efficiently utilize instructional time to ensure there are few opportunities to be off-task during class? Can we build positive relationships with students so that they don’t *want* to misbehave during our class?

Carrots and sticks, or extrinsic motivators are the easiest ways to initially make another being (human or animal) do something. In his 2009 book *Drive*, Daniel Pink surprised us about human motivation, citing seven deadly flaws of carrots and sticks:

1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation.
2. They can diminish performance.
3. They can crush creativity.
4. They can crowd out good behavior.
5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior.
6. They can become addictive.
7. They can foster short-term thinking.

Continued on page 5

Join OMLA for a monthly middle level education Twitter chat!



#OhioMLA

Second Tuesday of each Month | 8PM EST

Co-Moderators: @mjsedlak & @mjnatovich

Let me provide an example of how extrinsic motivators don't work as planned: Performance-based pay for educators. In most every performance-pay initiative in school districts across the United States, all of the seven flaws cited above are reported as outcomes. Ironically, most educators are strongly opposed to carrots and sticks for themselves, but many continue using extrinsic motivators in their classrooms every day.

To be fair, Pink does report that using rewards (or carrots) in routine tasks, especially when you can acknowledge that the task is boring and necessary, can be effective. Homework or anything instructional in our classrooms should not be routine nor should it be designed as boring.

How do you break the mold?

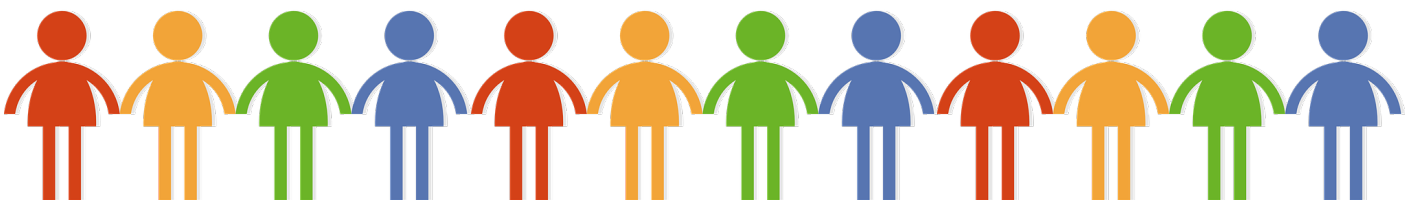
Returning to the three scenarios described earlier, what are strategies you can use to implement developmentally-appropriate practices that don't hinge on extrinsic motivation?

- After talking through an idea for a self-guided unit, a colleague states, "I had that idea once, too but I know the kids will stop doing their work and just mess around". **Tell the colleague that you are determined to give it a try. Taking a risk, making adjustments, and learning from mistakes are all good life skills you can teach your students. Return to the colleague to share successes of how you were able to make it work and encourage him to give it another shot.**
- You question teammates about the strict homework policy only to be sternly reminded that "this team expects all homework to be turned in by 8:30am the day it's due or students are assigned detentions - we have high expectations... unlike the other teams." **A discussion about this insane homework policy with your administrator would be a good place to start. If you don't absolutely need to assign homework, don't! Jumping on the "team" bandwagon to mask poor practice happens too often when teams lack trust and open communication. While teams should provide commonalities between classrooms, if you have a moral objection to a rule, you should make that clear.**
- You decided to provide pencils to those who forget them in your math class so that you don't have to wait on students to return to their lockers. Your colleagues are upset because you are not following what the school instituted thirteen years ago in making students return to their lockers for forgotten supplies and giving them a demerit. **It's only rational to avoid wasting instructional time on a pencil. Stand your ground and others will follow.**

This shift in philosophy takes courageous leadership - both from the teacher and the administrators. Administrators always want to back good teachers and make decisions collaboratively. However, there are occasions when administrators need to make tough decisions that may not be popular at the time, especially with the loudest staff members.

Inspire yourself to do what's best for our students by expanding your professional network - attend a workshop or conference, read, and follow your educational superheroes using social media. To support your daily work, find a colleague in your building that shares your ideas. Your students deserve to be engaged and treated with respect - we all have bad days, we all forget things from time to time.

Humans are more complex and students deserve better than extrinsic motivation. Leave the carrots and sticks to the horse trainers!



North Ridgeville Middle School's 7th Grade Gold Team is

"All in!"

by Amy Peck, Principal
North Ridgeville Middle School
North Central Region

Kudos to Cioffoletti, O'Donnell, Bellomy, Miller, DiMarco and Mike Belpulsi for exemplifying the meaning of Team and being "All in," for their students. You won't regret taking a few minutes to witness their greatness at: <https://youtu.be/sQyOFVC729Q>.

In June of 2016, the Cleveland Cavaliers brought a championship of epic proportions to Northeast Ohio. The victory was hard won and embraced by all in the Cleveland metropolitan area as not only an athletic accomplishment, but a reawakening for our great city. Everyone was a champion, and the city swelled with great pride. That championship was earned through perseverance, and by living, breathing, sleeping and dreaming the mantra "All In."

The Cavs victory epitomized teamwork in every sense. The 7th Grade Gold Team at North Ridgeville Middle School witnessed the power of "All in" and spent countless hours meeting over the summer brainstorming how they might bring that spirit to their students this school year. Teachers Brittany Cioffoletti, Donna O'Donnell, Bridget Bellomy, Kaily Miller, Anthony DiMarco and Mike Belpulsi embraced the win of the Cavs with gusto. As students entered their Gold Team hallway on the first day of school, they were greeted by banners which read "hard work," "together," and "all in," which hang above a bulletin board featuring the teachers and LeBron James' viral message of "nothing is given; everything is earned."

Over the summer months, the group tirelessly organized six team building stations for their one-hundred sixty students to rotate through on the first Friday of the school year. Each station focused on the importance of trust, relationships and support. Students participated in a Rock Paper Scissors Competition to emphasize good sportsmanship. A Silent Lineup taught the value of reading visual cues and nonverbal communication. The Beach Ball Toss had students hitting the ball in the air around a circle as many times as they could without it hitting the ground enabling the need for each team member to be a cooperative participant to rack up the highest number of hits. Students that were once near strangers united in the Hula Hoop Pass as they joined hands to work a hula hoop around the circle without releasing their neighbor's grip. The Spider Web created an interconnectedness with team members as they tossed yarn across a circle to each other, each time sharing an interest with their classmates.

Once students rotated through all of the stations, the 7th Grade Gold Team teachers turned on their magic. Students came together as one large group encircled by the comfort of six amazing educators. Social Studies teacher, Mike Belpulsi, addressed the group and shared that each and every one of the Gold Team students will be successful if they remember that learning is about three Ps: "process, prepare, and perform." He told students they are "proud champions," just like the Cavs. He then turned his attention to his colleagues to state, "These are our kids! We have to work hard—give them everything all year. That defines what we are about."

The positivity continued as each teacher pledged their devotion to their students with messages around the circle: O'Donnell stated, "We've got to give them everything we've got!" Miller said, "You're going to count on us, so we're going to be there for you!" Bellomy continued with "We know we have to do this for them because they are special, they deserve it, and they are going to be the ones to change this world."

Cioffoletti carried the message on as she stated, "Everybody, the whole Gold Team in the 7th grade; that's what this year is all about." DiMarco stated, "It's time to bring them something special. It's time to make it happen. So, let's go! Everybody bring it in," as he directed the students full circle back to Belpulsi as they huddled as one unit. Students were told that every Gold Team class would begin with "hard work on three" and each would end with "all in!"

Their dedication has paid off in volumes already. They have fostered an atmosphere of trust among their students that is unrivaled. During this year's Open House, they shared their message and video with all of their parents. They left in awe! Megan McLeod, parent of 7th grade Gold Team student Colin shared with the team in an email of thanks, "your positivity, your comradery, your enthusiasm are contagious. We couldn't be happier to send our 7th grader to such a wonderful learning environment during a very formative, and often challenging time in life."

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Teaming:

A Slam Dunk Approach to Teaching Middle School Students

by Joanie Gedeon, Chris Keating, & Megan O'Hara
Northeast Region

Our team at Shiloh Middle School meets daily to discuss kids, curriculum, and professional development. Even though it's not even 10:00 in the morning, we are breaking out the bag of M&Ms to get our meeting started. This helps us "sweeten" up our workload for the day. Teams at our school consist of a language arts teacher, a math teacher, a science and social studies teacher, an intervention specialist, and in our case, a gifted teacher. Our district decided to make teaming a high priority when we consolidated buildings four years ago. Within our teams, we created belief statements about middle school learners. We believe that every young adolescent has the right to learn in a caring and engaging environment with the support of an adult advocate. We also believe that every young adolescent needs to feel a sense of belonging. In addition, we believe that every young adolescent should experience a curriculum that empowers them to achieve their dreams and make a difference in the world. These beliefs are best met through teaming.

We want our middle level students to feel a sense of belonging; therefore, each child is placed on a specific team that has its own identity. For example, in fifth grade, our team is not only known as Team 5Z, but we are also known as Team Cavs. Just like the Cleveland Cavaliers, we stress to our students the importance of working together as a team with the motto "All for one and one for all." At the beginning of the year, our team of students and teachers develop common expectations, rules, and policies through a shared discussion.

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Throughout the year, we involve students in team-building activities such as building the tallest spaghetti tower or tie dyeing team t-shirts. We also recognize student achievement and growth with quarterly socials, game days, and award assemblies. Our team ensures that every child has an adult advocate to support his or her academic and personal development. We use Jack Berckemeyer's Index Card Activity to make certain that our team members build relationships with every student. With all of these strategies in place, every child on our team feels like they belong to a school family.

Effective teams integrate curricular areas seamlessly into daily lessons and unit plans. Our team of interdisciplinary teachers meets once a week, in addition to our regular team meetings, to discuss strengths and weaknesses of our shared student caseload. We use pre-assessment data to determine intervention and enrichment activities for each student. These opportunities include time for students to receive individualized instruction which incorporates varied learning strategies into the lessons, and will often times focus on building students' writing abilities throughout all content areas. After the intervention and enrichment opportunities, the students complete a post-assessment. We then meet again to analyze the post-assessment data and decide on the next necessary steps for our students to succeed. During future meetings, we share strategies and techniques which have been helping our students show growth and increased student achievement in our specific area of curriculum. Often times, lesson ideas and assessment opportunities will be discussed and planned for future interdisciplinary units. The strength of teaming at the middle level is a solid team of teachers with one

common goal every day. That goal is to show students a lifelong love of learning.

"There is no 'I' in team." Families, students, teachers, and administrators all benefit when working together to create a school culture and environment which focuses on student success. At the start of the year, the students develop "Ready to Learn" expectations to follow that will help them be successful in the classroom. This allows them to feel that their ideas are valued. Another way in which we promote a positive school culture is through student-led conferences. Students feel empowered when they discuss their strengths and weaknesses with their parents. In addition, parents have spoken highly of this format and have embraced the connection between home and school. To extend our teaming to the community, we invite parents and community members to share their

expertise at our annual career day. We have also involved local businesses to promote the importance of education. Last year we implemented "One Book, One School", a reading program in which everyone read and discussed the same book to encourage a sense of community and promote reading. The children went to local businesses and spoke with them about the book to earn prizes. This bonding experience brought the community, staff, and students closer together.

Although the middle school years can be a challenging time for students, we believe that a team approach can help them develop academically and socially during these critical years. By creating a positive school culture with a sense of belonging, students' individual needs can be met. Similar to the Cleveland Cavaliers our goal is to go ALL IN— and we do EVERY single day for EVERY single student.



From left to right: Jena Patton, Megan O'Hara, Joanie Gedeon, Michelle Giles, and Chris Keating make-up a team at Shiloh Middle School; their dedication and reflective practices support their students not only academically but also socially and emotionally.

Tips for a More Successful Co-Teaching Experience

by Tracey Kramer
Wright State University
West Region

Co-Teaching is defined as the collaborative efforts, with respect to planning, organization, delivery, and assessment of instruction, between two or more teachers, typically in a shared physical space. It is most commonly practiced with a general educator and an intervention specialist. However, many Ohio teacher preparation institutions advocate for co-teaching between a cooperating teacher and a student teacher. In today's age of accountability, co-teaching allows the cooperating teacher, the teacher of record, to remain very involved in the classroom, while also providing the novice student teacher with the modeling and support needed. Co-teaching gives middle level teachers more options for delivering instruction and meeting student needs. Successful co-teaching does not happen without effort. The tips below are based on my own twenty years of co-teaching experience.

Tip 1: Take the time and care to get to know your co-teacher(s) and build a relationship.

Whether you meet at a local restaurant to chat or take more formal personality profiles and discuss results, it is essential that you get to know your co-teacher's personality and professional dispositions. Following the Platinum Rule, treat others how THEY like to be treated.

Tip 2: Communicate clearly and often with your co-teacher(s). Be reflective of your practice.

Take time to design goals for the year. Schedule weekly time to reflect on your progress. Ensure you have talked about student needs, classroom grading policies, homework policies, class rules, parent communication, and schedules in advance.

Tip 3: Share responsibilities with planning, instruction, and assessment.

Co-planning creates a clear vision for all involved. How will you find time to co-plan? My partners and I met weekly and, if needed, on our own time. Students need to see both of you as equals. How will you ensure that you do not create a teacher leader and helper situation? My partners and I did not only rely on the one teach-one assist model. With purpose, we used a variety of approaches so there was not a clearly defined leader. We always team taught the first week of classes. Substantive feedback on student work is good practice. How will you ensure you are "on the same page" when assessing work? In addition to creating rubrics and assessment together, my partners and I reviewed the first few completed assignments of any major project together.

Tip 4: Utilize multiple instructional options to maximize student learning.

1.) One teach one assist- While one teacher serves as the primary instructor, the other addresses student behavior concerns, provides immediate feedback on in-class assignments, and helps students with their work.

2.) One teach, one observe- While one teacher serves as the primary instructor, the other teacher observes students and the primary teacher to inform teaching practices.

3.) Station teaching- The content is divided into two or more stations. Students are divided into groups, each group spending an equivalent amount of time at each station, rotating as directed by the teachers. Depending on the number of stations, students may rotate or the teachers may rotate. Use of a timer is valuable.

4.) Parallel teaching- Each teacher instructs half the students. The teachers are addressing the same content and using the same instructional strategies. This provides smaller groups per teacher and may enhance student discussion and engagement. Instruction may take place in the same room or in different locations to lessen distractions.

5.) Alternative teaching- Co-teachers work with different groups of students (teacher-selected or student-selected) for a host of reasons. Intentional grouping of students may occur for the following reasons: extension; enrichment; remediation; re-teaching; review; tiered lessons by readiness level, interests, or learning preferences with differentiation of content, process, and/or product.

6.) Team teaching- Co-teachers are simultaneously and equally involved in a lesson, reflecting invisible flow and transition. From a student's perspective, there is no clearly defined leader.

Continued on page 10

Tip 5: Accept that there will be conflict and discuss how you will handle conflict ahead of time.

Many compare co-teaching to an arranged marriage. Conflict is inevitable. How will you address conflict when it arises? What is your co-teacher's preferred method for this discussion?

Tip 6: Keep students at the heart of every decision you make.

Remaining student centered and focused on their needs, instead of your own, helps to create better co-teaching environment for all.

References

Patel, N. H., & Kramer, T. A. (June, 2013). Modeling collaboration for middle level pre-service educators through co-teaching. *The Teacher Educator*.



Letting Go of the Berries

by Tom Burton
Southwest Region

Almost twenty years ago, I met one of the most extraordinary middle level students I have known as an educator. I knew Justin primarily from coaching him in football but I did have the pleasure of teaching him as well. By most ordinary measures, Justin was not remarkable. He was an average student with average athletic ability and a typical social life for a young adolescent.

Justin was the definition of a student in the middle. Some things about Justin made him stand out a bit from his peers. He never missed school, he had a very positive attitude, and he always had a smile. According to all of his teachers, he came to class prepared every single day. He always completed his homework and turned it in on time. On the football field, he practiced hard and worked to make himself better.

One day I learned what made Justin truly remarkable. For several weeks, Justin had been living by himself. We knew his mother was in jail, but we did not learn immediately that his father had been taken to a rehabilitation facility. This incredible student cared for himself and came to school on his own each day. To feed himself, he earned money by carrying grocery bags out to shoppers' cars. He even spoke to bill collectors to get additional time to pay the bills. I've often wondered how a student like Justin was able to overcome all of the obstacles placed in front of him and still succeed at school when so many other middle level students need a major push just to come to school each day prepared to learn.

At about the same time I had Justin as a student, I also had Chad. Chad was the complete opposite of Justin. Where Justin could make a day better because of his work ethic and attitude, Chad could make any day worse, sometimes without even trying. He rarely did any work and he was one of those students who seemed to bring out the worst in his classmates. Chad knew exactly where the line was and he crossed it every single day— and flaunted it.

As the year went on, he had bad days and worse days, but he was never absent. Like Justin, Chad had perfect attendance. Did you ever have a Chad? Think back to those students whose absences you longed for; the students who drove you absolutely crazy and made those around them miserable. You know, the student who had the unique ability to find your last nerve . . . then stomp on it. How often was that student absent? In my experience, that student is rarely absent from school, and I wondered why.

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At first blush glance, Chad and Justin seem completely different. Closer examination reveals that Chad and Justin (and the students like them) have a core commonality. The reason students like Chad and Justin are always at school is that they need a place to belong. The student who is your most difficult disciplinary case is also the one who needs the structure provided by your high expectations. The student with the most difficult home life needs your consistency and compassion.

The toughest students in the classroom are the ones who most need to be there. We need to accept the challenges the Justins and Chads of the world bring to our schools. When we accept those challenges and strive to create an environment where each student belongs, we have made a difference in the world.

Students like Chad sometimes make us wonder why we chose to work with middle level students, yet we need to do the same things for him that we do naturally for the less-needy students. If we make learning relevant for them, if we challenge them, and if we make learning exploratory in nature, we can make sure all of our Chads feel like they belong. Performing at a higher level and behaving appropriately are valid and attainable goals for this group of students.

Monkeys and Coconuts

I recently heard a story about a way primitive hunters trap monkeys. Monkeys are very intelligent, yet they fall for this simple trap. The hunter takes a coconut and drills a hole through the top. The hole is just large enough for a monkey to reach his paw into the hole. The hunter then attaches the coconut to a tree and puts some nuts and berries inside the coconut. When the monkey smells the nuts and berries inside the coconut, it tries to get them out by reaching inside. The monkey gets the berries, but he is unable to get his fist back out of the hole. He's trapped.

Of course, all the monkey has to do to escape the trap is to let go of the nuts and berries. However, he wants to get the berries and nuts so much that the simple act of letting go does not occur to him and he remains trapped.

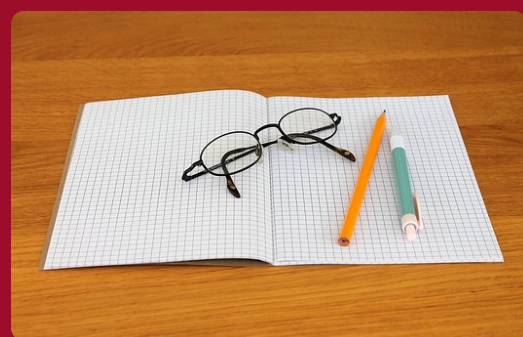
Sometimes middle level educators are like the monkey. We know what we ought to do, but we refuse to let go of something that we desire or think will work, even if letting go would be beneficial. We want to help all our students succeed, so sometimes we hold onto things that we have done in the past. Sometimes, even though we know what we should do to help students succeed, we cling to practices that were once successful, or that we think would be successful. When we cling to a way of doing something that doesn't work, we act just like the monkeys.

We know what can motivate kids and what works best. We need to make sure that we take into account our experience and research of what effective, middle-level practices are such as making learning relevant and exciting while allowing students to feel part of a team— giving them a place to belong.

Middle level education will always be about making connections with our students. When we are able to let go practices we should release, we will be able to develop true, authentic relationships with students, thus leading to an environment where students are motivated to come to school because they know they are part of something special. As Ralph Waldo Emerson so aptly put it more than one-hundred fifty years ago, "The man who can make hard things easy is an

Extending our thinking:

What are some practices you use that you want to let go of? Create a list. Critically examine the list and make a commitment to what needs to stay and jettison what needs to go. Are there reasons to use some practices and ignore others? What do your colleagues do? What does the literature base say? What evidence do you have from your own practice about the effectiveness (or



This excerpt was taken out of Mark of Leadership: Strategies for Leading with Purpose, Plans, and Passion.

Redefining Failure

by Kristen Lavric

New Lexington Middle School
Southeast Region

Grit is one of the many buzzwords to fill conversations in staff meetings, teacher's lounges, and education circles in recent years. Many teachers worry that students do not know or understand how to effectively work when learning is difficult. A seventh grade team at New Lexington Middle School wanted to address the issue with students at the start of a new school year. While working together over the summer, the team determined that students would benefit from examples of celebrities who had famously struggled before experiencing significant success. As a result of these meetings, the team put together a day-long activity to help students redefine failure.

Prior to students arriving, the team met to develop its "Redefining Failure" plans. The team decided to do the activity on the first Friday of the school year in order to set a collaborative and cohesive tone. The ultimate goal of the activity was for students to reexamine what it means to fail by researching the challenges faced by successful people. Students were asked to choose a name of a well-known athlete, entrepreneur, musician, scientist, etc. and research obstacles that preceded immense success. Teachers provided a list of more than 50 names from which to choose, but allowed students to identify success stories not listed. Students then used iPads, laptops, and computers to research their persons. As they completed their research, students identified the obstacles faced, how they were overcome, and the ultimate success. Finally, students reflected on what

their research taught them about failure. Upon completion of the research, students were asked to examine a time when they themselves had struggled. The intent was to have students reflect on how their success came as a result of overcoming difficult situations. The team ended the day in the cafeteria as students participated in a version of "speed sharing." Students partnered up for



two minutes at a time, with each partner sharing research highlights for one minute. Likewise, each student recorded something learned at each "speed" round.

At the conclusion of the day-long activity, students and teachers had a chance to debrief about the lessons learned. Teachers valued the activity for identifying students with strong (or weak) research, writing, collaboration, and

independent-learning skills. Teachers could identify these skills in ways that paper and pencil tests might not show. Regarding the actual plans behind the activity, the team did recognize a need to provide enrichment for students working considerably faster than their peers. Additionally, students were also asked to share their thoughts on the day. Many students described the importance of never giving up, even when work is difficult. A few were a bit anxious about the speed rounds at the end of the day; while others felt more comfortable sharing in a one-on-one situation compared to standing in front of an entire class.

Although the members of the seventh grade team had little experience planning a team-wide lesson, they were able to help students recognize what failure is and is not. The lesson left the team with numerous ideas on how to improve the activity and collaboration in the future. Unfortunately, the lesson did not embody true content integration. However, it will likely serve as a springboard for future efforts. In helping students recognize that success often comes after many struggles and obstacles, a sense of community and security was established. With at least a year of regular, common planning time and shared students, the seventh grade team is excited to continue exploring ways to collaborate in and out of the classroom.

Wait, What?

by Michael Kauffeld
Principal
Teays Valley West Middle School
Central Region

Mason, a fifteen year-old 8th grader, had created an identity for himself that allowed him to simply slide by in school. He figured out if he did not disrupt class, he would not have to do his work and the teachers would give him a zero and move on with the next lesson. This had worked for Mason and he was determined to continue his ways, academically anonymous. But then one day, a few modest words threatened his identity.

“Mason, You have not completed your assignment and you plagiarized what you did do,” the teacher said with a sense of sadness in her voice.

Mason was not engaged in the conversation as he had been there many times before.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Mason, I know you are better than this. We have talked about this in class and you provided an angle that most students couldn’t even imagine.” The teacher looked him in the eyes as Mason tried to keep his head down. “I was so looking forward to see what you had to say about this in your project and you gave me someone else’s ideas. Mason, I believe in you and I am interested in what you have to say.”

“Wait, what?” Mason thought to himself as he looked up at his teacher. It had been a long time since he had heard any teacher say they believed in him let alone told him, they were interested in what he had to say. Mason went back to his seat and began working to revise his project. His teacher had triggered a personal response in Mason and he did not want to disappoint her.

Years later, Mason returned to the middle school. He was preparing to graduate college and felt compelled to tell his former teacher, “Thank you” for believing in him. Many times since that one moment in middle school Mason had reflected on what his teacher told him that day. When times were hard or he felt overwhelmed, Mason persevered. He knew he had something to offer.

Mason’s visit with his teacher was a brief one although it was a very important moment for him. He was very proud of his accomplishments and an opportunity to thank a key person in his reclaiming of his academic identity was the right thing to do, he thought.

As Mason left that day, his teacher sat in her room. “Wait, what?” she thought to herself both humbled and distraught. She was so proud of Mason and remembered when he was quite a bit shorter in middle school. The part that troubled her was the fact she could not remember the moment Mason mentioned to her. She smiled and nodded when Mason explained what a pivotal point it was in his life, but for her it escaped her memories. How could a moment so profound in a young man’s life be a moment she could not recall? As educators, our abilities and opportunities to positively impact our students are, possibly, beyond our comprehension. The fact we have that kind of power is indescribable and it stems from educators who take the time to get to know their students, their needs, their background, their fears, their goals and their motivations. Each day our words, actions, and even our body language impacts our students. Mason’s moment was because a teacher took the time, understood his academic and personal needs and responded accordingly. The telling of this story was inspired by the Ted Talk video titled *Everyday Leadership* by Drew Dudley (The Lollipop Moment); take a moment a watch the six-minute video and be reminded what Marianne Williamson said, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us.”

Be the light that provides warmth, guidance, and security— the light that makes students feel safe, valued, and loved.

WHY CAMP?

by Jeremy Evans
Dover Middle School
East Region

Dover Middle School has a long tradition of outdoor education and sixth grade camp. That tradition has lasted for 56 years. Last year a change in the camping venue forced us to reexamine a few aspects of camp and analyze the *why* behind our sixth grade camp. We now go in the fall and we leave on the fourth day of school in two different groups, Monday-Wednesday and Wednesday-Friday.

Relationships

Our students come from three different elementary buildings. The relationships that are built at camp can last all the way through their Senior year and beyond. Teachers build relationships with the students. We can learn so much from our students by just observing them interacting with others. Students can see teachers doing things that they normally wouldn't see the teachers doing in the building. Camp dates are assigned by teams and the teams can grow together.

Team Building

Throughout our week at camp, groups of students and teachers are asked to participate in various team-building activities. Students learn that communication is the key to



working together. It is hard to stand and watch students in groups struggle to solve a problem. That is the point, the students are challenged to work together to solve a problem and work through the struggle.

Learning Outside of the Four Walls

Students and teachers are inspired to take learning outside of the classroom. It's not just about nature, take the learning outside if you can. Think outside of the classroom box. Students and teachers both can be empowered by thinking beyond the four walls of the classroom.

When we moved camp to a new location and a new season, it was a big change. Change is not always easy, sometimes it is worth it. Why do we go to camp? Because it is worth it.

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