

Continuing On!

Utah Middle Level Association

November 2015

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Physically Middle Grade Students:

- Experience rapid growth
- Mature at different rates
- Might exhibit lack of coordination and awkwardness
- Can be restless or listless
- Are always hungry

“Characteristics of Middle Grade Students.” *Caught in the Middle (1989)*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, pages 144-148.

President’s Message



President Georgia Wing

We all experience stress during this time of the year. The holidays are approaching and resources are stretched thin. We feel pressure at home and in the classroom to be successful. Educators must ensure that their students show growth or face pay cuts. Students and parents are experiencing stress as well. This combined stress creates a challenge for educators. If we utilize a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset our challenges change from “there is nothing I can do” to “what can I do to improve the situation.” Carol Dweck defines the growth mindset as “the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way- their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments- everyone can change and grow through application and experience.” By contrast a fixed mindset is the belief that your qualities are carved in stone and cannot be changed.

I’m reminded of the toddler who makes several attempts to walk. At first he is not successful, but his parents encourage him and

provide feedback. The toddler never feels like he should give up. He keeps trying and with encouragement and support learns something new with every attempt. He makes slight adjustments until he finally can walk. Parents never give up because they know he can do it.

Remember that not all students learn in the same way or at the same rate. What comes easy to some students will be more difficult for others. Praise student efforts, not outcomes. If we only praise outcomes, students will believe that success is getting it right the first time or the fastest. They may decide that they don’t have what it takes and give up because they have to work harder to get the right answer. By contrast the student who doesn’t have to work hard to get the right answer will struggle when they have to actually work hard to master a concept. Teachers should provide feedback on the effort a student puts into her work as often as possible and accurately show perseverance are praised. “Failure can be a painful

experience. But it doesn’t define you. It’s a problem to be faced, dealt with, and learned from.”- Carol Dweck

You have a choice. Mindsets are just beliefs. They’re powerful beliefs, but they’re just something in your mind, and you can change your mind. Children with the fixed mindset want to make sure they succeed. But for children with the growth mindset, success is about stretching themselves. Think about adjustments and changes you can make in your life and in your classroom based on the fact that mindsets and beliefs can be changed. Think about your students. How do the students in your classroom behave based on their mindsets? Which students are most likely to cheat? Which students are most likely to be crushed by setbacks and failures? Which students will view setbacks and failures as learning opportunities?

Have a Hook by Kim Campbell

One of my colleagues, struggling with classroom management, has asked me, "Why can't they just be students, do what they are supposed to do, and care about learning the way that I did?"

Well, the answer is simple: Not all kids are like he was! Not all kids value education the way he did, and not all kids have a mom and dad at home checking each night on the progress of his homework. Beyond that, not all kids learn the way that he did. And furthermore (and this is a BIG one), the world has changed. Beyond differences in learning styles and attitudes, the whole wiring of the brain is different in today's world. The culture, the tools, and the means of gaining and sharing information have changed! With these realities, educators can no longer use the teaching formats that worked for us when we were students.

I find that most students (even the reluctant learners) DO have the intrinsic desire to know new things. There is **something** that excites each student! And it is my job, I believe, to find approaches that hook my students on learning and to keep them on the line!

One of the hooks that I use

successfully in my classroom is collaboration. We know that middle and high school students love to be with their friends every moment of every day. Most kids will tell you it's the reason they come to school.

(Here all this time we thought it was our intellectual stimulation that brought them back each day!) And most teachers realize that there are great benefits to cooperative groups:

interdependence, purposeful interaction, increase in social skills, enhanced self-esteem, empowerment for students, and improved relationships. What's more, a growing body of research tells us that kids learn more when they work collaboratively. Understandings are deepened by the interaction. So why are teachers scared of groups? (I was!) Quite simply, it's because we think we can't control students in them. Some groups are not academically productive. Some groups can't settle into the work; they just want to chat. Some students do nothing and let the other group members do the work. Although we know it's a good thing for students, we often move away from collaboration because of the potential problems.

The good news is that you **can**

train middle and high school students to work well in groups. But it does take planning and deliberate effort to make sure the students are doing what the teacher intends them to do. I'll share one strategy of many that has worked for me to make groups an effective tool and not another adolescent social encounter or management problem:

Set a procedure for teacher-answered questions. I suggest that the teacher not answer questions unless all members of the group raise hands together. This forces members to rely on each other to do the task. They go to the teacher for help when the whole group decides to do this.

If you are going to keep students engaged, you cannot be afraid to try new things – to step out of your comfort zone. I tell myself and the teachers I mentor, "I am not afraid to fail. I am more afraid not to try." So, give it a go, try something new, laugh when it goes wrong, applaud yourself when it goes well. But for all your students out there, please try something!
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"We know that middle and high school students love to be with their friends every moment of every day."

Call For Presenters

UMLA is asking for presentations for our annual spring conference, to be held on Saturday, March 12, 2016. We are seeking presenters who are doing innovative programs or strategies with middle level students. One of the hallmarks of our annual conference is that it highlights the important work of teachers and administrators within our state and provides a wealth of ideas for participants to take back and use in the classroom on Monday.

Do you have a philosophy or technique that you can share with

your peers? Do you know someone you have seen or heard at a state conference or in-service whom you think should present at the UMLA conference? If you present, you get an additional 6 hours of relicensure credit, in addition to the 6 you receive for attending the conference. Plus your conference registration is only \$40, instead of \$65.

Some of the topics that we are looking for are:

- Multi-Tiered Instructional Supports
- Creating and Implementing Common Assessments
- Computer Instructional Ideas, such as

the "Flipped Classroom"

- Engaging ideas for implementing the Core
- PLC's
- Engaging Core Related Math Strategies
- "Encore" subject areas Engaging Lessons and Activities
- Standards Based Grading

If you are interested in being a presenter, please send a paragraph describing your presentation by December 1 to the Utah Middle Level Association at utahmla@gmail.com

School Spotlight – Kearns Junior High School

Kearns Junior High School, located in Kearns, Utah, has been central to its community since 1956. It currently serves 540 students in grades 7 & 8. It is a “minority majority” school with 63% of its students of various ethnic minorities. Over 17 different languages are spoken and 75% of the students are on free or reduced lunch. The faculty and administration of this highly impacted school have adopted the “Success is Your Only Option” philosophy, which serves as the cornerstone to all

practices and programs within the school. The school’s five-period schedule provides extended time daily in math, language arts, or science. Working with partners such as the United Way, Salt Lake Youth Services and the University of Utah, the school is a Community Learning Center with classes for parents and community members, and a thriving after-school and summer program for students.

Through the dedicated efforts of teachers, counselors, and

administrators, students have demonstrated tremendous academic achievement with 53% of students carrying a 3.0 or higher GPA and with the school passing AYP every year since 2008. Kearns Jr. had the highest growth in Granite School District in Math, Science, and English Language Arts for 2015 as measured by SAGE.

To learn more about what’s working to bring about such results, contact Principal Kandace Barber at klbarber@graniteschools.org.



Manage Your Classroom AND Keep Your Sanity by Jack C. Berckemeyer

Classroom management is about trial and error; it comes through practice, patience, teamwork, flexibility, quality mentoring, willingness to seek help, and a huge dose of humor. There is no one solution for every classroom management problem. Try new ideas, take time to listen to your students, trust your instincts, and have fun along the way.

Engage them

Young adolescents will move, with or without permission. Our goal is to get them to move with purpose. The next time you realize your students have been sitting more than 20 minutes, find a productive reason for them to move. Allowing students to move keeps them engaged and alert, and it can help you keep your sanity. Look for ways to incorporate movement when you are making your lesson plans.

Show them you care

Adolescents want attention—positive or negative. Understand that sometimes students who are familiar only with negative attention will naturally seek negative attention. Try not to give them negative attention but find reasons to give them positive attention.

Humor is another way to show your students you care. Sharing a laugh builds positive energy and shows students you enjoy being around them.

Design the environment

Update your classroom as often as possible. Make sure it is inviting to students, meets everyone's seating needs, and reflects at least some student interests. (It may be time to ditch the old "Hang in there" kitty poster.) Incorporate popular culture and put your students' creativity to use by allowing them to help. This gives them a sense of belonging and ownership.

Keep up with technology

This is probably one of the most difficult challenges today's classroom teachers face. The next iSomething is always just around the corner, even though we adults are just getting comfortable with the current model. But keeping up with students in this area is essential if we are to adequately prepare them for their future. And if we don't allow them to use their favorite technologies in productive ways in the classroom, they will likely find unproductive and disruptive ways of using them. If your school does not have a set of rules governing students' personal technology, make your own rules and teach students what it means to be a responsible digital citizen.

Channel adolescent power

Young adolescents want more autonomy, and sometimes they go about it in ways that drive us crazy. Refusing

to do their work and procrastinating are common ways they try to exert their power. To gain control before these issues start, own the room. Remaining at your desk or standing at the front of the room allows students to avoid work and create distractions. If you roam the room while they are working, stopping to ask and answer questions, they will know that you are in control. Hold them accountable for assignments, offering incentives for getting their work done before leaving class.

Discipline proactively

Planning ahead carefully can help cut down on classroom chaos. Make sure all required materials for a lesson are ready to go at the start of class. Set clear expectations for the activity and try to anticipate areas where students may get off track. When a situation arises, deal with it as quickly and simply as possible. If a situation warrants a longer conversation with a particular student, hold that student after class rather than wasting valuable class time. Always reserve principal's office referrals for the most serious offenses.

Remember, one of the best ways to avoid discipline issues is to keep students actively engaged in positive ways.

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Navigating the Middle Years



The UMLA Board Members

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The mission of UMLA is to address the unique needs of young adolescents by providing leadership and support to educators and families and to promote effective practices and programs that improve middle level education. We can serve to strengthen your position as an advocate for middle level reform and enhance your professional learning and practices. The role of UMLA is to advocate for and assist in giving the best possible education to all young adolescents in the state of Utah.

