Turning Points

TRANSFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

At the Turning Point
The Young Adolescent Learner

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Introduction

At the end of a hallway, twelve-year-old Nate stands looking at the plaster of Paris mask he made as a project for his humanities class. The mask hangs suspended from the ceiling on a piece of fishing line, just like all the others, floating against a background of large swatches of torn black and white paper forming a stark patchwork mosaic. The face on Nate's mask is divided in half by a vertical line. Each side of the face shows a different expression: one confident and sure, the other full of doubt.

The whole time his teacher, Ms. Cooper, was explaining that they'd be making masks for a character in the book they were reading, Scorpions *by Walter Dean Myers, Nate had been excited, but also a little anxious about the project. Even though the teacher had explained it, he never really thought much about why they were making the masks in humanities. Nate just loved the two days he spent listening to music in the cafeteria, smearing plaster of Paris over his partner's face, sculpting the features, and painting his design.*

None of his teachers had ever displayed any of Nate's work, let alone something artistic, in the team hallway before. Looking at his mask now, he wishes he had put more time into choosing colors and adding detail to the expressions. In the past, teachers always made him write a book report when he finished reading a book for school.

The mask idea was fun, but not really being artistic, Nate was glad he got to explain his ideas in the "Artist's Note." On the wall near his mask, Nate's "Artist's Note" tells why he chose the character Tito

The risks young adolescents face as they navigate this phase of life can be considerable as they make decisions and choices that will affect future decisions about their health, education, and who they will become.

to make a mask for. In the book, Tito says: "They look like they thrown-away people.... That makes me scared, because I don't want to be no thrown-away guy."

That's how Nate feels, always wondering if he's going to make it, if he can handle things. But the mask he made of Tito shows two sides of him—not just the nervous side, but the sure side, too. He didn't want the mask to make Tito out to be tough, because in the book, even though Tito acted like a tough guy, inside, he was unsure of certain things.

If there were such a thing as the *typical* young adolescent, Nate and his dual-sided mask of Tito from Walter Dean Myer's book *Scorpions* might represent it—uncertain about some things, but absolutely sure of others; looking tough on the outside, but being insecure on the inside; thinking deeply about some issues, but seeing others in black and white. Young adolescents, or children between the ages of ten and fourteen, share an array of ever-changing, diverse, and often-times perplexing qualities. Indeed, a middle school teacher will encounter seemingly grown men and women, children, and adolescents together in any given classroom at any given moment on any given day.

The developmental stage of young adolescence has been referred to as the "turning point" between childhood and adulthood (Carnegie, 1989). The risks young adolescents face as they navigate this phase of life can be considerable as they make decisions and choices that will affect future decisions about their health, education, and who they will become. The seminal *Turning Points* report (Carnegie, 1989) concentrated on the risks adolescents face and identified two critical issues that contribute to the academic failure of many adolescents:

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A mismatch between the school's organizational structure and curriculum and the intellectual, social, physical, and emotional needs of adolescents[1]

■

An unfounded assumption that middle school students are not capable of critical, complex thinking

1. See the Turning Points *Guide to School Structures That Support Learning and Collaboration* and *Benchmarks to Becoming a Turning Points School* for more on effective school structures.

These two issues are particularly acute in many urban schools that serve largely low-income students and students of color. In their organization and curriculum, such schools do not reflect the students' culture, and often hold low expectations for student achievement.

Middle schools, in every context, need to both strengthen their academic core, and establish caring, supportive environments that value the young people they serve. Above all, each and every middle school teacher needs to develop strong relationships with his or her students. Such relationships are the foundation for powerful learning.

Turning Points and the Young Adolescent Learner

Turning Points seeks to create challenging, caring, and equitable middle schools. Recognizing that each child comes with unique strengths, challenges, and needs, Turning Points teachers maintain high expectations for all their students and hold a vision that their students will leave middle school able to:

Middle schools need both to strengthen their academic core and to establish caring, supportive environments that value the young people they serve.

■

Think creatively

■

Identify and solve complex and meaningful problems

■

Know their passions, strengths, and challenges

■

Communicate and work well with others

■

Lead healthful lives

■

Be ethical and caring citizens of a diverse world

To help students achieve this vision, Turning Points middle schools commit to a multiyear, comprehensive change process.[2] While what happens in each classroom ultimately has the most direct and profound influence on a young person, a schoolwide culture that is supportive and collaborative, and also challenging and equitable, will

2. For more information about the Turning Points principles and practices, see the *Turning Points Design Overview*.

amplify the power of any individual classroom strategy. With a schoolwide emphasis on teaming and professional collaboration, Turning Points faculty work to create a learning environment that nurtures key developmental areas in each student.

A Word About Teachers

It would be wrong to go further with this guide without acknowledging the crucial role of teachers. Middle school teaching is highly complex, involving content knowledge, knowledge of young adolescent development, and dozens of interconnected skills (e.g., the ability to relate to and engage students, and to coach, present, reflect, and analyze). Teachers bring diverse knowledge, strengths, and experience to their roles. They care deeply about young people and entered teaching in the first place because of that care and concern.

Because of an array of institutional barriers—school structures that isolate, limited teacher preparation programs, poor leadership, lack of resources, and the like—many, if not most, teachers are prevented from engaging in the ongoing learning and development that will enable them to excel at teaching young adolescents. As a result, knowledge about powerful middle grades teaching and learning gained from decades of research and practice is not penetrating most schools and classrooms.

Turning Points believes that given rich and productive professional collaboration, and ongoing, school-based professional development that is directly linked to classroom practice, middle school teachers will be able to apply the best ideas and tools of powerful curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This guide is meant to be one helpful resource in a comprehensive approach to professional learning.

About This Guide

This guide is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the developmental characteristics of young adolescents Turning Points schools seek to address. Understanding the intellectual, social, physical, emotional and psychological, and moral characteristics of the early adolescent can provide the foundation for a vision of learning and teaching in the middle grades.

The second section addresses the implications these characteristics hold for teaching and learning by suggesting six areas Turning Points schools engage in to respond to the unique needs of young adolescent learners. These areas are:

■

Nurturing students' intellectual capacities

■

Differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners

■

Shaping curriculum based on the needs and interests of students

■

Developing students' leadership and voice

■

Creating a safe learning environment

■

Engaging students in the community

Section three presents ways schools can get started in developing a schoolwide approach to supporting students' learning.

Characteristics of the Young Adolescent Learner

Every now and then, seventh-grade social studies teacher, Mr. Oakes, stands back and takes a look at what's going on in his classroom. Today, in pairs or small groups, his students are working on projects. Sarah and James are poring over a stack of books from the library, writing notes on index cards. Shonese draws detailed illustrations, while Tony designs charts and graphs on the computer. Pedro is bouncing his pencil eraser on his desk and tapping his foot against the chair leg. Mr. Oakes knows this helps Pedro to stay focused on his reading. Clara is so excited about explaining her ideas to her partner that she's twirling around her braid of hair as if it were a propeller. Megan is staring out the window, watching the traffic move along the busy street that borders the school. Mr. Oakes doesn't call her back to work quite yet. He knows Megan needs this dream time to relax and allow her ideas to percolate. At the back of the classroom, good friends Percy and David are laughing and fooling around. He remembers their huge disagreement from yesterday and knows that neither can accomplish any work until the friendship is reestablished. Slowly, he heads to the back of the room, knowing that his presence alone will remind them to get back to work. Mr. Oakes notices that Mariela is finally engaged in her group's project. It took the stack of letters written by seniors at the senior center about her project to capture her imagination and inspire her research. "These kids are working hard," Mr. Oakes thinks. Only a middle school teacher would recognize that amid all these varied activities, real learning is taking place.

Understanding the breadth and variety of young adolescents' developmental characteristics can only help teachers teach and students learn.

Young adolescents are a wondrous group. Eager to learn, full of energy, curious, ready for adventure, sociable, disarmingly honest, and ready to solve the problems of the world—this group of students can be both a delight and a challenge for teachers to motivate, hold their attention, and channel their enthusiasm and energy into real learning. Young adolescents draw on a wide range of experiences when they come to school. Helping students to use their strengths in the classroom to achieve valuable learning is every teacher's challenge. Knowledge of how widely young adolescents' developmental experiences vary and what some of these varying characteristics are can only help teachers teach and students learn.

Between the ages of ten and fourteen, the young adolescent grows and develops more rapidly than during any other developmental stage except for infancy. Even then, "infants are not the conscious witnesses of their development as are young adolescents" (National Middle School Association, 1995). This means that adolescents have an acute, sometimes painful, self-awareness of their growing process. These changes, then, have enormous implications for learning.

Adolescents grow at a rapid pace, and they grow erratically in fits and starts, as well as unevenly across the different areas of development. So, while a fourteen-year-old boy may seem physically mature, he may be quite young socially or emotionally. Similarly, while cognitive skills expand during early adolescence, the "growth of these abilities is inconsistent, variable and situation-specific" (Scales, 1996, 24). For example, although in social studies class a student might do well imagining what society would be like if only wealthy, White males could vote, in a real life situation this same student might not be able to imagine the ramifications of making poor choices in taking care of his or her own health.

Understanding five key areas of young adolescent development can provide a strong foundation for meeting the needs of these learners. The National Middle School Association (1995) identifies these important areas as:

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Intellectual: Young adolescent learners are curious, motivated to achieve when challenged, and capable of critical and complex thinking.

■

Social: Young adolescent learners have an intense need to belong

and be accepted by their peers while finding their own place in the world. They are engaged in forming and questioning their identities on many different levels.

■

Physical: Young adolescent learners mature at varying rates and go through rapid and irregular physical growth, with bodily changes that can cause awkward and uncoordinated movements.

■

Emotional and Psychological: Young adolescent learners are vulnerable and self-conscious, and often experience unpredictable mood swings.

■

Moral: With their new sense of the larger world around them, young adolescent learners are idealistic and want to have an impact on making the world a better place.

Intellectual Development

While the intellectual growth of young adolescents differs from individual to individual, in general this age is characterized by a transition from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. Young adolescents are developing the ability to analyze their own and others' thinking, and to think about abstract ideas such as justice or equality. They are making the transition from thinking logically about real life experiences to reflecting on and reasoning about abstract concepts and ideas.

The transition from concrete to abstract thinking does not always take place in an orderly or predictable manner.

This transition, however, does not always take place in an orderly or predictable manner. The same student who in the morning can explain the motivation of a character in a novel cannot be convinced in the afternoon that two differently shaped containers are holding equal amounts of water. The same student who volunteers to serve food to HIV-infected children at a community center is at risk for making irresponsible decisions about his or her own sexual behavior. Some students can visualize and solve math problems in their heads, while others need to manipulate objects or draw diagrams to help them come to a solution.

The intellectual focus of the young adolescent is not primarily on academic matters, but rather on the self in relation to these topics. *"Why does this matter to me?" "How can I help or influence this situation?" "How good will I be at this?" "What are others doing and*

thinking?" "What will they think of me?" These are all questions that a young person might ask while engaging in intellectual pursuits. To teachers, such questions might seem a diversion from the pursuit of knowledge. In fact, posing these questions ultimately assists the learning process of the young adolescent.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE:

- Moving from concrete to abstract thinking

- An intense curiosity and wide range of intellectual pursuits, few of which are sustained over the long term

- High achievement when challenged and engaged

- Preferences for active over passive learning experiences

- Interest in interacting with peers during learning activities

- An ability to be self-reflective

HOW TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS:

- Differentiate instruction.

- Focus on complex thinking skills that ask students to apply their knowledge and skill to worthwhile tasks.

- Ask students to make choices and pursue their own interests.

- Provide cooperative learning opportunities, one-on-one feedback, and time for personal reflection.

■

Have regular student-teacher conferences.

■

Provide opportunities for individual projects such as Expert Studies and I-Search papers.

Social Development

If young adolescents seem egocentric and overly concerned with what others think of them, it's because they are! This is the developmental work of the young adolescent. Needing to belong to the peer group is probably the strongest single characteristic of early adolescence. Young adolescents are becoming aware of the larger world around them for the first time. They are beginning to consider themselves as individuals outside of their families. A strong sense of group identity and acceptance by one's peers can have an overriding effect on all other aspects of the young adolescent's development.

Who am I? How do I fit in? What does everyone think about me? are questions constantly running through young adolescents' heads as they experiment with their new independence and develop strong relationships with their peers—all the while avoiding embarrassment and self-exposure at any cost. It's no wonder, then, that social and emotional concerns often block out academic issues. The young adolescent's primary lens is that of social interaction: finding one's place in the social context. This is the lens through which much learning occurs in early adolescence. As the world of young adolescents expands and they begin to develop their own beliefs, attitudes, and values, the media, adults outside the family, and peers influence their decisions more and more. These conflicting influences often contribute to intense feelings of vulnerability, confusion, rebelliousness, and insecurity. As young adolescents strive to figure out how the world works and what their role in it is, sometimes they experiment with attention-getting behaviors. Learning how people respond to their actions, both positive and negative, is a challenging part of growing up. For students who are different from the dominant group—in terms of race, ethnicity, primary language, class, sexual orientation, or gender—the challenge is that much greater.

African-American students and students of other racial and ethnic groups often begin to explore questions of racial identity intensively for the first time. As Beverly Daniel Tatum writes in *Why Are All the*

Acceptance by one's peers is probably the strongest social impetus of the young adolescent.

Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? "Why do Black youths, in particular, think about themselves in terms of race? Because that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. Our self-perceptions are shaped by messages that we receive from those around us" (Tatum, 1997, 53–54). At the same time as they are entering the social turmoil of early adolescence, students of color may also be experiencing racism more intensely. The seventh grader who grew four inches over the summer may notice that store clerks follow him closely when he shops for CDs. An eighth-grade girl who is the only person of color in her class finds she is not invited to the coed dance parties in the community. Students of color will often seek peers who share these experiences and can help them form their own racial/ethnic identity (Tatum, 1997, 52–74).

For gay and lesbian students and those struggling to understand or define their sexual orientation, the early adolescent years are often a time of intense feelings of estrangement from the dominant social world. Because their difference is often invisible, gay students may be extremely isolated and are at high risk for depression as they contend with sexual identity. If they are open about their identity or are just "outside the norm" in terms of how they express masculinity or femininity, they are at risk for harassment and physical abuse. Again, support from peers and teachers will help gay students contend with their questions of identity and cope with challenging social dynamics.

Teachers can provide opportunities for the social interaction necessary to navigate this phase of life, both with peers and adults, so that young people can be influenced positively at a time when they can be deeply affected by those around them. For students of diverse backgrounds and identities, effective support can come in formal and informal ways as teachers demonstrate empathy and take time to learn about and openly discuss issues facing students. Teachers themselves serve as powerful role models simply by regularly modeling academic tasks such as writing, problem solving, reading critically, and being honest and self-questioning with students. Teachers also play a critical role in modeling acceptance of differences, being willing to learn and talk about difficult issues, and confronting racism, prejudice, and homophobia whenever they occur.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE:

- Modeling behavior after that of older students, not necessarily that of parents and other adults

- Immature behavior when social skills lag behind mental and physical maturity

- Experimenting with ways of talking and acting as part of searching for a social position with peers

- Exploring questions of racial and ethnic identity and seeking peers who share the same background

- Exploring questions of sexual identity in visible or invisible ways

- Feeling intimidated or frightened by the initial middle school experience

- Liking fads, and being interested in popular culture

- Overreacting to ridicule, embarrassment, and rejection

- Seeking approval of peers and others with attention-getting behaviors

HOW TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS:

- Provide cooperative learning opportunities as well as time for large-group and one-on-one discussions.

- Require students to apply their knowledge and skills to social issues and topics of concern to young people.

- Provide positive examples from history and literature, and positive role models for different groups.

- Maintain clear expectations for social interaction.

- Create learning experiences in which students practice democracy, governance, and conflict resolution.

- Foster classroom and team identity, and provide time for regular student-led meetings to discuss issues, plan events, and make important decisions regarding the team.

- Foster opportunities for personal reflection and for students to share their concerns and feelings with teachers.

- Create structured support groups to enable students of color and gay and lesbian students to share their experiences and concerns.

- Create separate focus groups for girls and boys to explore issues of gender, body-image, relationships, health, feminine and masculine identity, etc.

- Create mixed forums (such as a "Gay-Straight Alliance") to build mutual understanding between groups and a common agenda of unity, acceptance, and antiracism.

Physical Development

Young adolescents are painfully self-conscious about the changes in their physical appearance.

Along with changes in social development, the physical development of young adolescents is probably the most striking to any onlooker. Rapid and irregular physical growth, bodily changes that cause awkward and uncoordinated movements, and varying maturity rates, especially between girls and boys, mark the young adolescent's physical growth. Girls tend to mature one and a half to two years earlier than boys, and development rates among both girls and boys vary widely, making school look more like a family reunion than classes of students of the same age group.

"Everyone's looking at me!" a young adolescent thinks as he or she walks through the halls, stands in front of the class to give a report, or dribbles a ball down the basketball court. Young adolescents are painfully self-conscious about their appearance. All they want is to blend in and look like everyone else, but the range of physical appearances found during this age group makes that impossible. Some young people seem to shoot up in height overnight, while oth-

ers grow barely an inch during the middle school years. While one boy has lost his baby fat, developed broad shoulders, and speaks with a deepened voice, his best friend since elementary school despairs at still sounding like a girl and being shorter than most of his female classmates. Some young adolescents have learned to move with ease, while others clump around school with feet that are suddenly too big and limbs that are uncoordinated and awkward. To add to the problem, young adolescents worry about what's happening to their bodies and wonder how it will all turn out.

These intense and unfamiliar changes not only affect the student physiologically, but bring a host of social and emotional issues to the fore as well. A teacher sensitive to the physical changes his or her students are experiencing can make a world of difference to a young person.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE:

■
Restlessness and fatigue due to hormonal changes

■
A need for physical activity because of increased energy

■
Developing sexual awareness, and often touching and bumping into others

■
A concern with changes in body size and shape

■
Physical vulnerability resulting from poor health habits or engaging in risky behaviors

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HOW TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS:

■
Respect and understand the physical changes that students are going through.

■
Vary instructional methods to allow for physical activity and movement.

■

Allow for open and honest discussion about issues of development, puberty, and sexuality.

■

Allow for stretch, bathroom, and snack breaks during long blocks of time.

■

Allow ample time in the school schedule for developing physical fitness.

Emotional and Psychological Development

One minute young adolescents are fretting about what to wear to school, and the next they're tackling global issues such as world hunger, pollution, and a cure for AIDS. Excitement about a topic they're studying makes them overly ambitious and creative about presentations complete with skits and costumes, slides and hand-outs; then anxiety sets in, with stomachaches and sweaty palms when the time comes to stand in front of the class. A new sense of humor brings laughs and acceptance from classmates, but those good feelings are quickly forgotten when the contents of one's lunch tray spill onto the cafeteria floor. For the middle school student, daily life is an emotional roller coaster marked by unpredictable mood swings (often due to hormonal imbalances) and changing best friends. At no other stage of development are young people more likely to encounter so many differences between themselves and their peers. This, coupled with the intense physiological changes common to early adolescence, makes most students this age vulnera-ble and self-conscious, both mentally and physically.

Young adolescents are enthusiastic and eager, angry and anxious, shy, outgoing, depressed, frustrated, proud, stressed, confident, scared—all in the same day. Feeling all these emotions at any given moment, young adolescents often don't know where to position themselves or how to get their bearings. Moody and restless, they are often frightened by a gamut of emotions they can neither name nor understand. They exaggerate seemingly small concerns and think they're the only ones in the world ever to experience these feelings. This may cause regression to more childish behavior patterns and can also translate to low self-esteem and risky behaviors.

For the middle school student, daily life is an emotional roller coaster marked by unpre-dictable mood swings and changing best friends.

By taking time to listen to students and personalize their learning, schools can help young adolescents feel safer and less vulnerable to criticism, less concerned with their changing bodies, and more aware that they are not alone with their personal problems and feelings, that these are natural and often shared experiences among people.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE:

- Mood swings marked by peaks of intensity and by unpredictability

- Needing to release energy, with sudden outbursts of activity

- A desire to become independent and to search for adult identity and acceptance

- Self-consciousness and being sensitive to personal criticism

- Concern about physical growth and maturity

- A belief that their personal problems, feelings, and experiences are unique to themselves

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HOW TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT THE EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS:

- Create opportunities for small-group discussions.

- Include reflective journal writing as part of the learning experience.

- Offer individual positive feedback.

- Vary instructional strategies to address different learning styles.

- Create peer editing, tutoring, and mentoring activities.

■

Teach students about goal setting and conflict resolution. (For more on how teachers can personalize learning, see *Teaching Literacy in the Turning Points School.*)

■

Invite experts from the community, such as nurses and counselors, to answer students' questions about their own development.

■

Provide training in peer mediation and other interpersonal skills.

Moral Development

In Susannah's eighth-grade humanities class, students are learning about human rights. When her teacher, Ms. Gaines, first asked the class what they thought their rights were, Susannah didn't really know if she'd ever heard the word "right" used that way before. But after weeks of working on a campaign for the International Conference on the Rights of the Child, Susannah could now say what her rights were, which ones were being violated, and what could be done to change things, both here in the United States and in her home country of Angola.

For this project Susannah chose to be in the "poverty" group because she wanted to do something to help kids who don't get enough to eat. Susannah knows what it means to go hungry, and she wanted to help students at her school see how they could help other kids. But how? Each group was told they had to prepare a presentation on one of the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that connected to the issue they were researching. Susannah's group chose Article 24, which describes the right to the highest attainable standard of health. As part of her research, Susannah learned how the UN and the government in her native country of Angola used traditional street theater to teach parents about nutritional foods available to them to feed their children. So, her group planned a skit focusing on Article 24 and showing kids in her school how they could help kids in poverty.

Embracing idealism—having a desire to make the world a better place—and wanting to be socially useful is how one might characterize the young adolescent's moral development. In making the transition from a focus on one's own needs and interests to considering

the feelings and rights of others, young people have a profound ability to feel compassion and concern, and to act boldly on moral grounds. Because young adolescents are also developing keener intellectual abilities, they are more apt to notice and be concerned about the inconsistencies between what they are taught (i.e., the values and morals espoused by adults) and the conditions they actually see and experience in society. Young adolescents are moving away from simply accepting at face value the moral judgments of adults. By reflecting on values, motives, and right and wrong, they are experiencing, for the first time, what it means to form their own independent personal values. Adults can capitalize on this when designing learning experiences for young people.

Young adolescents have a profound ability to feel compassion and concern, and to act boldly on moral grounds.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT MORAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE:

- An understanding of the complexity of moral issues, and not seeing everything in "black and white"

- Being capable of and interested in participating in democracy

- Impatience with the pace of change, and underestimating how difficult it is to make social changes

- Needing and being influenced by adult role models who will listen and be trustworthy

- Relying on parents and important adults for advice, but wanting to make their own decisions

- Judging others quickly, but acknowledging one's own faults slowly

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HOW TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT STUDENTS:

- Create learning experiences that are focused on complex and real problems.

■

Allow students to facilitate text-based discussions on topics of interest.

■

Involve community leaders and other adults in authentic projects.

■

Engage students in the community.

■

Provide equitable access to learning opportunities for all students.

■

Encourage students to identify and pursue their own interests, passions, and strengths.

■

Allow students to work at their own pace, make choices about their learning, and take responsibility for important tasks and decisions.

■

Structure learning experiences that utilize democratic processes—debate, discussion, and giving voice to diverse perspectives.

Responding to the Needs of Young Adolescent Learners

> He was old as a basket
> and he carried more
> than a basket carries.
>
> Where he was going
> tasted green and sweet
> as the inside of a melon
> that sleeps for days
> in the sun….
>
> —Naomi Shihab Nye, "Tío Pete"

Twelve-year-old Marguerite listened as her teacher, Mr. Morales, read a poem to the class. Mmmmmm. It felt good to think of home. Marguerite loved Haiti. Every day as she walked to the bus stop and went to school, she left a piece of herself in the apartment with her mother and grandmother. And every day when she came home, it returned to her, as if the ocean breeze itself greeted her at the door.

After reading the poem, Mr. Morales asked his students to write about an important memory as part of their Oral Histories unit. Marguerite knew instantly that she would write about her grandfather's mango tree. It was only a homework assignment, but she couldn't stop herself from writing and writing and writing. Oh, how she missed him. When he died, Marguerite, her mother, and grandmother came to live in New York. Now, this poem has brought her back to Haiti and the lingering smell of mangoes close by. She remembers the stories Grandfather told of how his mango tree helped Grandmother to fall in love with him, and how it was the

only part of his farm that survived the revolution, and of what happens to a mango pit when you place it under a steppingstone in the river.

Marguerite wrote down all these memories and more. And Mr. Morales wrote back. Now home doesn't feel so far away when she's at school.

A teacher never knows what will inspire a student's imagination or motivation, or what will connect teacher to child, or child to school. Effective teachers know that no single topic or activity will draw every student in or meet every student's learning needs. But recognizing that each student comes to school with a host of memories, experiences, relationships, and skills can be reassuring to teachers who know they can use these to help students make important connections. This is an especially important consideration in poor urban schools, where too often the students are seen solely as "deprived" and the assets they bring to school are ignored.

To create a learning environment that motivates and engages young adolescents, Turning Points schools and teachers look to their students for ideas. *What important themes and issues interest my students? What experiences have they had that we can build on in this unit? What teaching strategy can I use to get more kids thinking at a higher level? What responsibilities can students take on in this project?* Enabling students to succeed in middle school means drawing on all their developmental qualities to create a dynamic and personalized place for students to push themselves, and allow others to push them, to learn at high levels. In the end, creating such a responsive environment will enable schools to achieve the twin goals of equity and excellence in education and provide all students with a safe place to grow and succeed.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENT LEARNERS: SIX AREAS

Turning Points teachers and schools can support their students on their oftentimes tumultuous and challenging journeys through young adolescence by responding to their unique developmental needs in the following six areas. The model presented in the following pages is based on the belief that young adolescents bring many assets to the middle school. Teachers need to meet learners where they are in all aspects of their development.

1

Developing students' intellectual capacities

2

Differentiating instruction to meet students' diverse learning styles, languages, and cultures

3

Shaping the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of students

4

Developing students' leadership and voice

5

Creating a safe and challenging learning environment

6

Engaging students in the community

2. Differentiating Instruction to Meet Students' Diverse Learning Styles, Languages, and Cultures

KEY STRATEGIES:

■

Understanding Students' Learning Styles

■

Differentiating Instruction

Ms. Santiago's sixth-grade class is holding Literature Circles to talk about the book they're reading. One group is trying to make sense of J. T., a main character from a novel they've read.

"J. T. reminds me of my brother," says James. "It's not like he's a liar. He just kind of tells stories to cover his tracks because he's in a hurry all the time. My brother's not bad, but he's always getting in trouble with my parents, just like J. T."

"That's ridiculous. Everybody knows J. T.'s a liar," Sarah says. "Look in the book how he lied to get out of school!"

"But that wasn't a lie to J. T.," says James.

"A lie's a lie," Sarah says, her voice rising.

"Stop it, you two. I have another question," says Miguel. "Why's Stacey hanging out with J. T. anyway? He's nothing but trouble and Stacey knows it."

Alicia interrupts. "Wait, I drew a picture of J. T. arguing with his dad. You can't really see it, but J. T. looks scared. His dad's yelling and holding up his arm like he's about to swing at him. J. T.'s scared. That's what I think."

Alicia is Group Observer this time, and she's having trouble keeping track of things, mostly because she likes to think and talk about the book more than worry about how the conversation is going. Her idea to draw a picture of J. T. to show the group what she meant pulled her even further from her role of observer.

Ms. Santiago can see the group is getting aggravated, and she can hear Sarah's impatient tone with James. She steps away from her individual conference with another student to check in. "Who's the observer today?" she asks. "And how's it going?"

Nothing reveals differences in students' learning styles more than a group conversation. James relates J. T. to someone in his own life, his brother, to try to get a handle on the character. Sarah refers to one of J. T.'s actions in the book to form her opinion of him. Miguel wasn't sure about J. T. until he heard the others talking about him, and that helped him remember the character Stacey and what she said. To reach her understanding of J. T., Alicia's been drawing a picture of him with his father.

Ms. Santiago chose to use Literature Circles, a cooperative learning group strategy, to help her students write character analyses of different characters in the novel they're reading. She knows that the many different opinions her students have and the way they arrive at them collectively will enhance the group project and bring a deeper understanding about the characters to her students. In this way she is using what she knows about her individual students and how they learn to the benefit of all learners.

Teachers continuously make decisions about how to structure learning activities to match instruction with students' diverse learning styles, posing questions such as:

■

Who should meet in pairs and who works better independently?

■

Should everyone read the same article, or do I need to create reading groups with texts at different levels for each group?

■

Should I set up work stations?

■

Should students read silently or should we have a "read aloud"?

Selecting teaching strategies and structuring learning activities effectively are some of the most challenging aspects of teaching. Given the rapidly changing nature of the young adolescent's intellectual readiness, developing an awareness of the learning differences among their students is a particular challenge to middle school teachers. However, despite the challenge, "evidence suggests that when instructional methods and students' primary learning styles mesh, students have more positive attitudes toward school and learn more, improving their chances of success" (Jackson and Davis, 2000, 77). In order to understand students' different learning styles, it is

important to recognize how students' culture, language, race, class, ethnicity, and intelligence preferences influence how they learn.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLES

Understanding Student Diversity

> To find one's racial or ethnic identity, one must deal with negative stereotypes, resist internalizing negative self-perceptions, and affirm the meaning of ethnicity for oneself. If educators and parents wish to foster these positive psychological outcomes for the children in our care, we must hear their voices and affirm their identities at school and at home. And we must interrupt the racism that places them at risk (Tatum, 1997, 165).

The young adolescent's newly forming awareness of his or her own identity and place in the world makes the middle school years a crucial period for both students and their teachers to understand how a student's background shapes his or her concerns, interests, and learning style. Cultural background, language, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation are powerful influences on learning, and can be viewed both by the teacher and the learner as strengths or deficits. How these traits are viewed effectively defines the learning experience for students, and also determines future learning opportunities.

Teachers need to understand how their own backgrounds influence their teaching and interactions with students. For example, a White, middle-class female teacher may bring with her a set of assumptions about students' backgrounds and how people learn based on her own background and membership in a majority group. In a classroom with a diverse student body, these assumptions do not always serve students well. "The dilemma is not really in the debate over instructional methodology, but rather in communicating across cultures and in addressing the more fundamental issue of power, of whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of color" (Delpit, 1995, 46). Schools are reflections of society at large and of the dominant culture. Delpit calls on educators to openly address the issues of power that are enacted in classrooms, including the power of the teacher over the students, and the power of one group to determine another's intelligence or "normalcy" (Delpit, 1995, 24). Such power makes the acquisition of the culture of those who are in power a prerequisite for student success. Yet students frequently

are not given the tools and skills to achieve success as defined by the "other." In fact, in ways both subtle and obvious, schools prevent some students from achieving at high levels by denying that students' backgrounds profoundly affect their learning needs, and by labeling those backgrounds as lacking or deficient.

Incorrect preconceptions about students' backgrounds can hamper student learning. If one uses the deficit lens, a student's culture, language, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender can negatively bias teacher expectations, both in terms of academic performance and behavior. Low teacher expectations based on race, for example, have greatly contributed to the academic achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students. Low expectations affect teachers' decisions and choices on the level of academic challenge of the curriculum, work assignments, and class participation. In *Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit points out that teachers often make assumptions about students' academic weaknesses (a student's inability to write a five-point essay, for example), attributing their weaknesses to their cultural background. An African-American student's inability to write "standard English," for example, is perceived as a deficit without acknowledging the language skills the student does bring to the classroom and which he might display in a variety of literary forms both oral and written—stories, poems, songs, letters, and the like. Too often, teachers then "excuse" a student's perceived inability with lowered expectations (*"Lamar didn't have proper literacy training in the home. This is the best he can do."*), rather than building on each student's assets to push him or her to the next level. By ignoring those strengths students do bring to the classroom, and by having lower expectations of students based on their background, teachers often become gatekeepers, preventing students from passing to the next level (Delpit, 1995).

In addition, stereotyping a group's lack of ability in certain areas— girls do poorly at math; African-Americans' overall academic achievement is low; boys have trouble learning languages; urban students don't understand the natural world; the limited English proficiency of students whose first language is not English means they can't achieve high levels of literacy; students who live in poverty can't achieve at high levels—often causes students in these groups not to invest themselves in their own education. Poor performance, then, may be more a measure of a group's lack of interest in a subject, or its detachment from school, rather than a sign of its inability

to master that subject (Singham, 1998). The teacher's job is to hold high standards for all students and to find ways to help students reach them.

As discussed earlier ("Social Development"), the early adolescent years are when many students of color begin to intensely explore their racial or ethnic identity, and to become more aware of racism and discrimination. Schools often stand in the way of students' developing a positive sense of their identity. Perceiving the implicit and explicit negative messages of teachers and the society at large, students who are different from the dominant group often assume an oppositional stance (Herb Kohl captured this stance with the title "I Won't Learn from You"), pushing away adults and seeking support only from peers.

Another path is possible. In mixed schools, students of diverse backgrounds and identities can benefit greatly from explicit support from teachers and from programmatic structures that bring peer groups together in positive ways. For example, a voluntary desegregation program known as the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) buses students of color from Boston to mostly White suburban schools. One middle school began a mandatory daily class for Boston students that brought them together to discuss social issues, racism, homework, and other concerns. It was found that these students were much more successful academically and socially than similar groups in schools without such structured support (Tatum, 1997, 71–74). It is easy to see how such programmatic structures would benefit students of any background that is different from the dominant group.

When teachers acknowledge, understand, and value the differences among their students, the backgrounds and attributes of students become strengths upon which to build the culture and curriculum of the classroom. A second language learner, for example, may have weak English language skills, but a flexibility of thinking and ability to go back and forth between primary and secondary languages and cultures that, when viewed as an asset, can be tapped into to assist learning. Cultural background, language, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender all influence how students learn and how adults perceive how they learn. These factors also affect teacher expectations of students and how students interact with each other. Do students see time as fixed and rigid, or flexible and fluid? Are they more effusive or reserved in expressing emotions? Do students

prefer to learn material that is more contextual and personal, or impersonal? Do they value creativity or conformity more (Tomlinson, 2001, 60–63)? While these factors may be culturally based, there are also great variations within cultures. Within each group, therefore, variations in learning styles exist. The goal is to "come to understand the great range of learning preferences that will exist in any group of people and to create a classroom flexible enough to invite individuals to work in ways they find most productive" (Tomlinson, 2001, 62).

SAMPLE WAYS TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT STUDENT DIVERSITY

Middle schools that are successful in creating a culture that embraces the diversity within their schools tackle questions relating to student diversity head-on, putting equity at the forefront of their discussions about improving teaching and learning. The following suggestions have been adapted from "A Common Intent to Understand: Boston Pilot School Directors Talk About Diversity: Summary of Findings" (Center for Collaborative Education, 2002).

■

Know thyself. Become aware of biases and assumptions you have about different groups and how these affect your teaching.

■

Talk about it. Do not avoid talking about sensitive topics associated with race, culture, class, sexual orientation, and gender. Silencing conversations and student concerns about these topics is detrimental to student success. Provide students and teachers with ways to deal with these issues safely and openly. Encourage conversations that go beyond defining diversity to arrive at deeper understandings of diversity.

■

Set norms of respect. All reflections and conversations about one's own and other people's cultures should be grounded in respect.

■

Ask for help. Honest discourse about diversity often does not come easily to groups who are not used to such conversations. Professional development can help students and staff members examine cultural differences in structured ways.

■

Examine ways of knowing each other. Examine cultural differences that exist in communication and values, including what it means for people of one culture to be educating people of another.

■

Develop curriculum that is culturally sensitive. Make sure curriculum reflects the backgrounds and histories of the students.

■

Choose effective teaching strategies. Students perceived as weak academically can narrow the achievement gap with challenging and interesting problems to work on that are relevant to their lives, instead of traditional remedial instruction (Singham, 1998). Use active learning strategies where students solve complex and challenging problems through their own efforts.

■

Assess interactions with students. Continually practice and reflect on treating students equitably. Make sure all student voices are heard.

■

Learn with your students. Model curiosity and open-mindedness by learning with your students about diverse backgrounds and their effects on learning.

Intelligence Preferences and Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

"Intelligence preferences" refers to brain-based predispositions for learning. Howard Gardner expanded the limiting notion of intelligence that suggested, for example, that some students have strengths in the sciences while others are good at languages, to a theory of multiple intelligences that recognizes that people can have strengths and talents in many areas. Gardner's theory names eight such intelligences, or "frames of mind," inherent in every person (1983, 1991, 1993). Gardner defines intelligence as an "ability to solve genuine problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings" (Stevenson, 1992, 102). While all humans possess these intelligences, each person has his/her own particular blend or combination of intelligences.

During early adolescence, students continue to acquire and build upon these intelligences. Teachers of young adolescents can apply Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences by recognizing the intelligences in their students and finding ways to further develop and support all intelligences through specific classroom strategies and materials. The chart that follows gives some examples.

RECOGNIZING AND SUPPORTING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES IN THE CLASSROOM

Purpose: The following chart defines each intelligence, describes some propensities of students who exhibit this intelligence, and provides sample materials and strategies that support and help develop that intelligence. Teachers should use this chart to become aware of the intelligences their students exhibit and to find ways to support and develop all intelligences for all students. (See Appendix 1 for more tools related to multiple intelligences.)

DEFINITION OF INTELLIGENCE[a]	STUDENTS WHO EXHIBIT THIS INTELLIGENCE...	MATERIALS AND STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT INTELLIGENCE
Linguistic intelligence allows individuals to communicate and make sense of the world through language.	Enjoy playing with rhymes Always have a story to tell Quickly acquire other languages	Books, tape recorders, computers, storytelling, tape-recorded books, writing, discussions, debates, public speaking. **Sample task:** Tell or tape a story.
Musical intelligence allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound.	Are drawn to birds singing outside the classroom window Tap out intricate rhythms on the desk with their pencils	Percussion; metronomes; computerized sound systems; recorded music; instruments to strum, tap, pluck, and blow into; singing; sounds of nature. **Sample task:** Compose a piece of music.
Logical-mathematical intelligence enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relationships.	Love baseball statistics Analyze the components of problems—either personal or school-related—before systematically testing solutions	Strategy games such as chess and checkers, logic puzzles, science kits, computer programming software, brainteasers, detective games, Cuisenaire rods. **Sample task:** Formulate a timeline or design a puzzle.
Spatial intelligence makes it possible for people to perceive visual or spatial information, to transform this information, and to recreate visual images from memory. (Note: Although usually tied to the visual modality, spatial intelligence can also be developed to a high level in individuals who are visually impaired.)	Turn first to the graphs, charts, and pictures in their textbooks Like to "web" their ideas before writing a paper Fill the blank space around their notes with intricate patterns	Films, slides, videos, diagrams, charts, maps, art materials, cameras, telescopes, microscopes, graphic design software, building supplies, optical illusions, machines, drama, video games. **Sample task:** Create a poster.
Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence allows individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems.	Enjoy gym class and school dances Prefer to carry out class projects by making models rather than writing reports Toss crumpled paper with frequency and accuracy into wastebaskets from across the room	Playgrounds, obstacle courses, hiking, swimming, gymnasiums, model building, arts, crafts, woodcarving, modeling clay, animals, carpentry, machines, drama, video games. **Sample task:** Create a model.

RECOGNIZING AND SUPPORTING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES IN THE CLASSROOM (CONTINUED)

Interpersonal intelligence enables individuals to recognize and make distinctions about others' feelings and intentions.	Thrive on small-group work Notice and react to the moods of their friends and classmates	Clubs, committees, after-school programs, social events, cooperative learning, interactive software, group games, discussions, group projects, simulations, drama, competitive and noncompetitive sports, peer teaching, tutoring, and mentoring. **Sample task:** Organize a tour.
Intrapersonal intelligence helps individuals to distinguish among their own feelings, to build accurate mental models of themselves, and to draw on these models to make decisions about their lives.	Capitalize on their strengths Recognize their weaknesses Consider carefully the decisions and choices they make	Self-paced instruction, individualized projects, solo games and sports, lofts and other "private" spaces, diaries, journals, meditation, reflection, self-esteem activities. **Sample task:** Write an I-Search paper. (See Appendix 2.)
Naturalist intelligence allows people to distinguish among, classify, and use features of the environment.	Can name and describe the features of every make of car around them Enjoy classifying and cataloging information Have extensive collections (of rocks, stamps, CDs, for example)	Classroom collections of articles from nature; field trips to local zoo to categorize animal families; classroom garden with student journals to document plant growth. **Sample task:** Organize websites as resources for a research project.

a: Adapted from http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sumit/MISUMIT.HTM, accessed 7/29/02

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION

Students are as different in the way they learn
as they are in the way they look

—Trudy Knowles and Dave Brown,
What Every Middle School Teacher Should Know

**Differentiating instruction
employs:**

Flexible groupings of students

Varied learning and assessment
activities

Varied learning environments

Opportunities for student choice

Teachers can apply their understanding of their students' learning styles, languages, and cultures by differentiating their instruction, or varying instructional strategies to meet the needs of the different types of learners. Teachers have a wide variety of strategies to pick from to help foster student creativity, exploration of themes and subject areas, curiosity, and development of social skills. By creating flexible groupings of students, using an array of learning and assessment activities, setting up varied learning environments, and providing opportunities for student choice, teachers can effectively differentiate instruction. This doesn't mean teachers are creating individual lesson plans for each student. Rather, as Tomlinson puts it, "differentiated instruction offers several avenues to learning, [but] it does not assume a separate level for each learner" (2001, 2).

Flexible groupings of students

Teachers group students according to their learning needs and the requirements of the content or activity presented. Flexible groupings of students include whole class, small group, and individual instruction. These groupings are predominantly heterogeneous, reflecting the learning characteristics of all students, including learning style, academic achievement, personal interests, and prior knowledge. A visiting writer might address the whole class about how he or she writes a novel. Small groups could work cooperatively to create a story and assign different scenes to each student. A teacher might work with an individual student to revise his or her piece as needed. At times it is also appropriate to form short-term groups of students for specific purposes such as building a particular numeracy or literacy skill. (See Turning Points guide *School Structures That Support Learning and Collaboration* for more information about student groupings.)

Cooperative Learning Groups are one of the most common flexible groupings middle school teachers use to engage all learners. Cooperative learning typically refers to a process in which small groups of students work together on a project or task to construct new knowledge. It involves the highly structured orchestration of a number of different activities that teachers must build step-by-step before students understand their responsibilities and how to work together effectively. No doubt learning to manage small-group work is as hard as mastering any other teaching strategy, but because cooperative learning strategies are versatile and adaptable to so many learning situations, and because they can address so many of the learning needs of the young adolescent, finding ways to incorporate cooperative learning into the classroom is worth the effort.

There are a number of considerations to be made any time students work in cooperative learning groups: *Why form cooperative learning groups for this task? How big should the groups be? How long should the groups stay together? How will tasks be divided up and will there be assigned roles? How will students be assessed, individually or as a group or both?* All of these factors, and others, play a part in how effective the groups are.

Group Roles and Descriptions: Assign complementary and interconnected roles to group members to ensure interdependence and accountability (Johnson, 1984).

Summarizer: Ensures that everyone in the group understands what is being learned/taught.

Runner/Researcher: Retrieves needed materials for the group and communicates with the other groups and the teacher.

Recorder: Writes down the group's decisions and edits the group's report.

Encourager: Reinforces members' contributions.

Observer: Keeps track of how well the group is collaborating.

Varied learning and assessment activities

Two ways teachers can differentiate instruction are through process and product. To differentiate by process, teachers select different materials and activities to help students make sense of what they are learning. To differentiate by product, teachers provide several opportunities for students to demonstrate and show evidence of what they have learned. In differentiating process, for example, the teacher keeps the content and product consistent for all students, but the activities that lead to completion of the task will vary, depending on the learner. A teacher might assign all students the same product—for example, writing a children's story—but the process students use to create the story will differ. Some students may have an individual conference, some may meet in groups to peer critique each others'

drafts, and others may work in a small group with the special education teacher on a storyboard template that helps them develop their plot ideas. In assessing students' stories, the same assessment criteria is used for all students. Knowing students well allows teachers to create the varied instruction that helps all students achieve at high levels.

Varied learning environments

Elements of the physical learning environment of a classroom include the noise level in the room, whether student activities are static or mobile, and how the room is furnished and arranged. Obviously, teachers can't create individual learning environments for each student. They can, however, create learning stations or portion the room into sections with different looks, have students work sometimes in groups and sometimes independently, and provide a variety of learning and assessment activities.

Opportunities for student choice

Offering students choice not only is a powerful way to meet their varied learning needs, but it also helps motivate them to learn. When learning goals are clearly defined, it is easier to determine whether students should have a free choice, a guided choice, or no choice (see chart on the next page) in their learning experiences. For instance, a teacher may allow students who have already developed videography or PowerPoint presentation skills to demonstrate their understanding of new concepts using one of these mediums. In this example of guided choice, students are responsible for learning the stated concepts and skills of the unit. The teacher isn't focusing instruction and assessment on the videography or technology skills, however, as these have already been assessed as part of another unit. In another example, students may conduct individual research projects in which it is an explicit learning goal that they define their own research questions about a topic in which they are personally interested. (See Appendix 2 for Independent Student Projects: Expert Studies and I-Search Reports.)

See Appendix 1: Multiple Intelligences

■

Multiple Intelligences Sample Lesson-Planning Form

■

Multiple Intelligences Self-Test and Score Sheet

See Appendix 2: Differentiating Instruction

■

Guidelines for Differentiating Instruction

■

Independent Student Projects: Expert Studies and I-Search Reports

Getting Started

Developing a Schoolwide Approach to Supporting Students' Learning

So many complex strategies have been touched on in this guide that it may be daunting to imagine where to begin. The following entry points are meant to complement the data-based inquiry and decision-making process engaged in by all Turning Points schools.

1. SUGGESTIONS FOR TEAMS AND WHOLE FACULTIES

■

Read *At the Turning Point: The Young Adolescent Learner* and discuss it in academic teams. Consider the following questions:

■

How well do we know our students?

■

How can we strengthen a culture of trust and respect among students on our team?

■

In what ways do our curriculum and instruction reflect the needs of the young adolescent?

■

What gaps can we identify?

■

What strategies would we like to experiment with?

■

Form a study group—include student members—focused on increasing student voice and leadership. Examine all aspects of the school's organization and culture (e.g., governance, curriculum, community involvement, etc.) Consider the following activities:

　■

　Read and discuss this guide using the same questions as above.

　■

　Create, administer, and analyze the responses of student surveys.

　■

　Have adult members shadow student members for a day and debrief the experience as a study group.

　■

　Conduct mutual interviews between teachers and students.

　■

　Ask students to conduct "community tours" of their neighborhoods for faculty members.

　■

　Create a proposed action plan for increasing student voice and leadership, and present it to the full faculty for feedback.

2. SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS

■

Read this guide and use the team discussion questions (above) as a starting point for personal reflection about one's own curriculum and instruction.

■

Take time, using a survey or more informal approach, to get to know students better: what they are most passionate about, how they think they learn best, who their greatest influences are, and the like.

■

Select one area to explore further (e.g., cooperative learning, using reflection to build students' metacognition skills, etc.).

■

With a colleague, develop an "action research question" to pursue (e.g., What difference will giving students input into a curriculum project have on their performance?). Document the results and share with the team or larger faculty.

3. TOOLS/ACTIVITIES

■

Concentric Circles

A variety of structures or protocols can help foster good conversation between adults and students. "Concentric circles" is a good introductory activity for a large group meeting. Form two concentric circles with equal numbers of teachers or students on the outside and the other group on the inside. Every teacher should face a student. The designated facilitator will read the group a question or prompt and the pairs should talk for a minute or so. The facilitator will call time and everyone will rotate to find a new partner. Continue sharing and moving until everyone has had the chance to talk with several different people.

Sample questions/prompts:

■

What's your favorite activity outside of school?

■

What do you think is the greatest strength of our school? Biggest weakness?

■

Describe a teacher you found helpful in elementary school. What made them a good teacher for you?

■

If you could change one thing about school, what would it be?

■

Take a Walk in Each Other's Shoes

Windsor Middle School in Colorado developed this activity in response to a newspaper column that was full of negative stereotypes about adolescents. Teachers and students created and then shared lists of things they wanted each other to know, writing the lists on cutouts of shoes: "Ten Things Students Should Know About Teachers" and "Ten Things Teachers Should Know About Students." The shoes were hung on banners around the school for Family Night.

From the teachers:

■

It's OK to talk to us when you see us in public. We like that.

■

We were once teenagers too.

■

We love what we do.

■

We are real people too!

From the students:

■

I don't like pressure.

■

Don't embarrass me.

■

I don't want to grow up too fast.

■

TV is not my life.

■

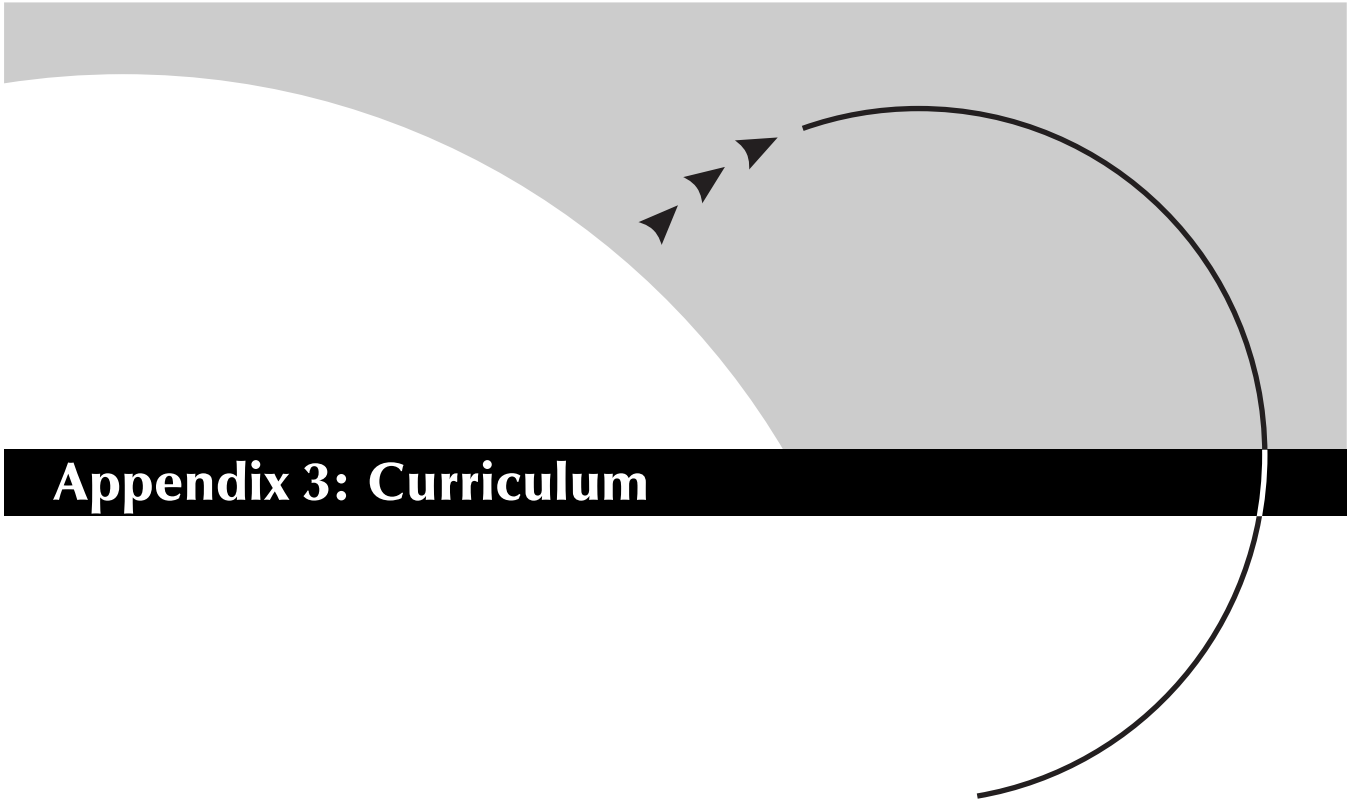We listen to your advice about drinking, drugs, etc.

■

We are real people too!

■

Data in a Day

Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) developed a tool for a one-day investigation of data that is carried out collaboratively by students and teachers. A design team (or leadership team) coordinates the day and forms teams of students, teachers, and community members to serve as researchers. After selecting key themes that they will examine during the day, adult and student pairs conduct informal observations in classes and other areas of the school. Each team records examples of observations that illustrate the themes.

Team members regroup at lunch to analyze the notes from the observations and summarize their findings about the theme. The groups report back to all staff at the end of the school day. Each team writes up a short report of their findings, and the design team (or leadership team) collects them and plans ways to use the data in ongoing data-based inquiry at the school.

For more information, see the following page on NWREL's website: http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/diad.shtml

Appendix 3: Curriculum

Purpose: *Use this chart to determine where your school's curriculum lies on the continuum of options. While other delineations exist, the following three categories cover a wide spectrum of possibilities, from the least to the most integrated approaches. Using the chart will help teachers and other curriculum designers to consider a wide range of options and to move toward developing a more integrated curriculum.*

	DISCIPLINE-BASED	INTERDISCIPLINARY	INTEGRATED
Characteristics	Each subject is taught independently in separate time blocks. Content and skills are presented separately without showing the relationships between them.	Each subject is taught independently and in separate time blocks. Unit topics or lessons are sequenced to correspond to topics or lessons in other disciplines. Content doesn't change, only order. Teachers may or may not emphasize the links between the subjects.	Related disciplines are brought together to explore a theme. Deliberate connections are made between disciplines. Links are deliberately taught. Higher-order thinking skills are required to understand the linkages.
Advantages	This is the most common and familiar. This approach coincides with how curriculum frameworks are organized. Often, teachers' expertise parallels this approach.	Planning is easy. This can feel like a "first step" toward integration. Schedules do not have to be rearranged.	The full array of discipline-based perspectives is used. Scheduling flexibility to meet student needs and unit goals is encouraged. Natural connections between disciplines can be drawn. Higher-order thinking skills are developed.
Disadvantages	This fragmented approach doesn't allow students to practice the higher-order thinking skills of making connections and seeing relationships. This approach does not reflect the reality of life outside of school. Scheduling is rigid and doesn't allow flexibility of time and integration to meet needs.	There is no deliberate connection of themes, skills, and content across fields. Students often are left to find linkages themselves. Scheduling is rigid and doesn't allow flexibility of time and integration to meet needs.	Students and teachers need to reconsider their traditional view of curriculum. Effort and change are required. The making of false or difficult linkages between disciplines is possible.

Source: Heidi H. Jacobs, *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K–12* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1997).

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

There are almost as many examples of integrated curriculum units as there are curriculum units. The number of subject areas included in a study, and which disciplines are included, also vary widely. This list is simply meant as a sampling of possibilities.

UNIT TOPIC	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	CULMINATING ASSESSMENT	SUBJECT AREAS INCLUDED
War	What's worth fighting for?	Political rally	Social Studies, English, Art
Bioethics	What's your genetic future?	Debate	Science, Social Studies
Science Fiction	Where's the science in fiction?	Short story	Science, English
Ancient Greece or the Nazi Holocaust	How do ideas spread? Who are the faces of courage?	Panel discussion/ talk show	Social Studies, English
Space Travel	What's summer like on Mars?	PowerPoint presentation	Science, Math, Technology
Evolution	How did we get here? Could humans grow a third eye? Will genetic engineering change our evolutionary future? Should it?	Write and perform a play	Science, Social Studies, English, Music, Art
Forensics, Human Biology	"Who done it?"	Solve a murder mystery	Science, Math, Social Studies, English
Human Rights	What's your right?	Host a conference	English, Social Studies, Art
Migration	Is it really better up north? Why do birds fly south?	Scientific study report	English, Science, Technology
Statistics	What are the odds of something happening? I dare you: What would you do?	Oral presentation of report at a public hearing	Math, Social Studies, Health
The American Dream: the 1920s and 1930s; Immigration	Whose dream is it, anyway? What motivates people to immigrate?	Living history museum	Social Studies, English, Art
Civil Rights	What does it mean to be free?	Poetry anthology, diary/scrapbook, mural	Social Studies, English, Art
Rocketry	Why do objects fall? Why do balloons float? How do I get to the moon?	Design, build and launch a rocket	Science, Math
Anthropology, Prehistory	Where did everybody go?	Anthropological dig and study	Science, Math, Social Studies, English

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATED CURRICULUM (CONTINUED)

UNIT TOPIC	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	CULMINATING ASSESSMENT	SUBJECT AREAS INCLUDED
Poetry	How do I say so much with so little?	Poetry anthology, performance poetry	English, Technology, Drama, Art, Music
World History/ Literature	How is culture apparent to us? How does it affect who we are?	Multicultural fair	Social Studies, English, Art, Music

THEMES AND ISSUES IMPORTANT TO YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

Purpose: This chart gives examples of themes, personal and global issues, and concerns of particular interest to young adolescents.[5] Creating interdisciplinary thematic connections with students enhances learning in a number of ways. Cognitively, young adolescent learners are able and need to make connections across traditional academic boundaries, and between themselves and the content, in order to understand complex concepts. Encouraging students to make personal connections with the subject matter compels them to draw upon their background knowledge, thus enhancing comprehension and motivation.

Global Issues and Concerns:

Power	Change	Other cultures and religions
Fairness and justice	Growth	Wealth and poverty
Beauty	Fear	War and peace
Compassion	Oppression	Caring and volunteering
Love	Transition	
Courage	Movement	
Loyalty	Prejudice and privilege	
Faith	Race and gender	
Independence and interdependence	Environment	

Personal Issues and Concerns:

Knowledge of self and one's identity	The future
Physical growth	Mortality
Relationships	Sex and health
Pressure and stress	Family
Belief systems	Transitions and change

5: List is adapted from Vars and Raknow, 1993; Scales, 1996, and Beane, J.A. 1993

Bibliography

Turning Points Guides (See www.turningpts.org for prices and more information.)

Benchmarks to Becoming a Turning Points School

Design Overview

Guide to Collaborative Culture and Shared Leadership

Guide to Curriculum Development

Guide to Data-Based Inquiry and Decision Making

Looking Collaboratively at Student and Teacher Work

School Structures That Support Learning and Collaboration

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