

Betwixt & Between

Education for Young Adolescents

A Peer Reviewed Journal of Middle Level Research

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Beyond the Elevator Speech

The Pennsylvania Professors of Middle Level Education and Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education have partnered to support a peer reviewed journal focused on research in the field of middle level education. Betwixt and Between is the result of this joint venture. We are pleased to welcome you to our learning community and encourage you to submit an article in the future. In the meantime, we hope to elevate your understanding of middle level students, schools, and the issues they face in these challenging times.

—The Betwixt and Between Editorial Board.

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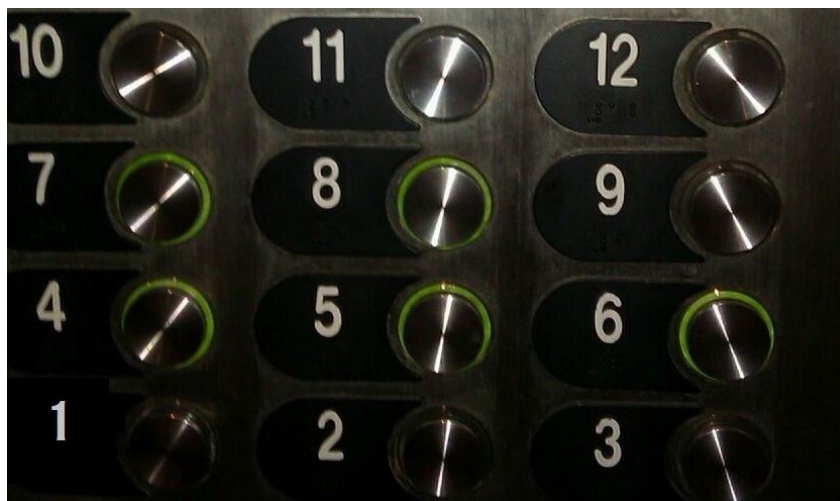
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About Our Cover Image

Joe Girard, a successful author, motivational speaker, and salesman, once said, “The elevator to success is out of order. You'll have to use the stairs... one step at a time.”

We hope that Mr. Girard is not correct. Just as elevator call buttons allow us to select a variety of locations and move between them with ease, we hope that *Betwixt and Between* will cover a variety of middle level issues and elevate our collective ability to improve middle level



education for all learners. It is our hope that becoming informed about current issues, engaging in research, and learning from others will help our middle level community move from novice to expert across many areas more quickly than going it alone. So, go ahead, take the elevator with us.

Thank you for joining us in our quest to lift up all middle level learners. We hope our journal will provide something new to enhance the professional development of each of our readers.

From the Editor's Desk

Deana Mack

Letter from the editor:

Welcome to the 2023 edition of *Betwixt and Between: Education for Young Adolescents*, The Journal of the Pennsylvania Professors of Middle Level Education.

What a time to be inspired in middle level education! Anyone who knows the specialness that exists in the field of middle level education knows that there is a need for passionate, excellent, and diligent middle level teachers, teacher educators, and teacher leaders. Be encouraged. Know that you can make a difference. Recently, I watched the "Ron Clark Story" and was instantly inspired. Why do we focus on negativity too often? Instead, be encouraged. Teachers can make a larger difference than some are willing to admit. Ron Clark demonstrated the impact teachers can have with determination, care, and fervent diligence, grit to be resilient, master problems, see successes, make a difference, inspire, and combat what statistics say is the likeliest outcome. The statistics do not have to be your result. Middle level is the sweet spot for making a difference in lifelong learning skills. The students are old enough to understand certain realities of life and routine expectations, but they are young enough to have habits remolded to assist in gaining and refining skills that lead to academic success than high schoolers.

Our editorial board is looking to expand our journal to make a bigger impact in middle level education. We would like to hear more about recent successes, needs, realities, or ideas related to middle level education in grades 4-8. If you are a middle level teacher, teacher educator, researcher, teacher candidate, student, or principal, please check out our call for manuscripts.

Sincerely,
Deana Mack Ph.D.

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Historical Accuracy: Learning from the Past or Pretending It Didn't Happen?

Abstract

How historically accurate is the information being taught to students in schools? Is it balanced to reflect a variety of perspectives? This article looks into the issue of teaching accurate, balanced history in schools and how this issue has been recently politicized and is escalating.

Historical Accuracy: Learning from the Past or Pretending It Didn't Happen?

Historically, social studies curriculum and instruction in US elementary and middle schools have been driven primarily by textbooks. The historical perspective represented by

textbook authors and publishers is often influenced by what politicians, school officials, and the community *want* students to learn as opposed to focusing on primary sources and accurate research. This perspective is very often an unbalanced and inaccurate account of people, events, and motivations throughout history (Loewen, 2018).

This trend is perpetuated by communities who are comfortable with these historical myths, misrepresentations, and omissions. The accurate stories of US history are often lost or adjusted in order to represent historical figures and events in a more positive light. State social studies standards are often vague as to exactly what information is required to be taught to students (Loewen, 2018).

In the prevailing era of standardized tests driving curriculum and instructional decision-making, social studies has become markedly diminished and devalued as a content area in schools (Brown, 2012). Literacy and mathematics absorb the bulk of instructional time as

schools focus on student success in standardized assessments such as the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSA) and Keystone tests in PA (Bickford, 2013). Because social studies is typically not assessed at all with any comparative tool, the content area is increasingly being afforded considerably less (if any) instructional time in classrooms. This lack of priority and value of history compounds the inaccuracy of social studies and history curricula.

Many times, particularly in recent years, these disconnects become attached to heated political debates. The recent trend of nationalism further affects the perspective from which we perceive and communicate stories from the past. Many issues such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), have become politicized stratifying perspectives and overshadowing any priority for accurate factual information and balance of multiple perspectives (Ankeney, 1995). The teaching of controversial people and events such as Columbus, Helen Keller, slavery, the Holocaust, and the treatment of Indigenous Peoples is being debated in many contexts (Bickford, 2013; Puk, 1994).

School districts across the country have had to deal with initiatives to ban books, limit discussions about slavery and Indigenous Peoples, and even outlaw Hispanic culture and history. Some states have passed legislation to control how teachers teach certain topics in history at both the K-12 level as well as higher education settings (World Population Review, 2023). Critical Race Theory and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have been attacked by individuals and agencies whose understanding of these concepts is significantly misguided and inaccurate. As the 2024 presidential election begins to gear up, it is likely that these issues will escalate. One presidential candidate has already declared that “woke ideology” is a form of Marxism, and his state is where this effort toward equity and inclusion can “go to die” (WION, 2023). This puts teachers and administrators in an untenable position as they struggle to try to teach students to think from multiple perspectives and support *all* students to the best of their ability.

So how can we support teachers to be able to teach the accurate truth of history, and to develop the capacity to see and understand multiple perspectives? Become informed on these issues, support an accurate and balanced social studies curriculum, and advocate for teachers to be able to teach it. Some resources are listed below to get you started:

A People's History of the United States	by Howard Zinn
Lies My Teacher Told Me	by James Loewen
White Fragility	by Robin DeAngelo
Critical Race Theory in Education	by Gloria Ladson-Billings
Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America	by Ibram X. Kendi
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee	by Dee Brown
The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War	by Daniel Ellsberg
Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States	by Fernandez-Armesto

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Respecting and Protecting All Young Adolescents: Justice for Students Who Are LGBTQIA+

Abstract

The author briefly describes how the principles of social justice and equity guide current effective middle level school philosophies and actions. An absence of applying justice to the needs of young adolescent LGBTQIA+ students is noted. The author suggests that many middle level educators may be unaware of how students who are LGBTQIA+ are either ignored, bullied and harassed, or unsupported while at school. A brief description of an interview study conducted with 11 young adolescent LGBTQIA+ students at two middle level schools is provided with general findings reported. Respondents describe dismissive teacher behaviors, educators ignoring verbal harassment and bullying, and a general disregard by teachers of the needs of the queer community in these two middle level schools. Suggestions for actions to support the LGBTQIA+ community that need to be initiated by teachers are provided by study participants. The author

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suggests initial collaborative processes required of middle level school faculty and administrators to fully support justice for students who are LGBTQIA+.

Respecting and Protecting All Young Adolescents

Justice for Students Who Are LGBTQIA+

Just: Defined as “morally or legally right,” and *justice* is “the administration of what is just” (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2016, p. 395). Researchers in the past few years have provided educators with a distinct roadmap for how to create more just and equitable opportunities, classrooms, and learning communities for all students (Mascareñaz, 2022; Paris & Alim, 2017). Teaching requires extensive ethical and moral character among educators who are expected to deliver fair and just communities of care, equity, and respect for all students.

Educators who engender culturally sustaining pedagogy provide critical elements of equity and social and racial justice for students; but there’s a persistent *injustice* for some students for which many teachers are unaware. Gender identity and sexual orientation justice are perhaps seldom realized or considered by school personnel yet are at the forefront of thoughts for many middle level students (Downing, 2019; Miller, 2018). Young adolescents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus other gender and sexual identities (LGBTQIA+) exist at all middle level schools. Young adolescents who are LGBTQIA+ aren’t readily identifiable, but they’re in every classroom. Supporting their needs and providing justice for middle level schools’ queer populations are critical to these students’ safety, recognition, and respect (Downing, 2019; The Trevor Project, 2022).

Educators do not need to and may never know who they are, and a percentage of middle level students who are LGBTQIA+ have not come out and are not ready for that pronouncement (Brown et al., in press; Kosciw et al., 2022). Many young adolescents begin to discover their gender identities and/or sexual orientation during their middle level school years, and a proportion already know and have for some time prior to age 10 (Brown et al.; Downing,

2019). The percentage of adolescents who reportedly know their gender and/or sexual identities and are willing to report that is at 7–9 percent as of this writing (Jones, 2022; Movement Advancement Project, 2022).

The way students who are LGBTQIA+ are treated in school is perhaps unknown to many administrators and teachers. Some teachers are cognizant of mistreatment, but do nothing to intervene or protect students who are LGBTQIA+ (Downing, 2019; Kosciw et al., 2022; Miller, 2019). Educators are responsible for every student's safety while at school as required by states' laws embodied by the Latin phrase *in loco parentis*: "in the place of the parent" (Cornell Law School, 2023, p. 1). Teachers have a legal and moral responsibility to protect all students, and students who are LGBTQIA+ are particularly harassed, bullied, and physically assaulted while at school (Kosciw et al., 2022; The Trevor Project, 2022).

We wanted to ascertain how young adolescent LGBTQIA+ students are being treated in two middle level schools (Brown et al., in press). Interviews were conducted with 11 young adolescent participants. It is perhaps revealing that our desire to interview more students who are LGBTQIA+ was curtailed due the requirement that young adolescents obtain consent from parents to participate in the study. Several students who are LGBTQIA+ at the schools had not come out to their parents, unwilling to reveal their sexual or gender identities to their caregivers, thus preventing their participation. This uncertainty for those who are LGBTQIA+ of being accepted by their family, fellow students, and educators for who they are creates a level of anxiety, fear, depression, and for some, suicidal ideation (Miller, 2019; The Trevor Project, 2022).

An initial question asked of the participants was for them to describe when they realized their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Five of the 11 participants revealed that they recognized their sexual orientation and/or gender identity prior to age 10. Some respondents spoke of their reluctance to announce their gender and sexuality identities at school with

teachers or fellow students, but eight students were voluntarily “out” at school (Brown et al., in press). One trans student noted their reluctance to come out at school because they had no idea how fellow students or adults in the building would respond, adding, “Kids say inflammatory things, and there’s not much that teachers do to remedy the situation” (Brown et al.).

The most common themes the data reveal are

- lack of support from educators to protect students from homophobic slurs or bullying
- a disinterest by teachers when students who are LGBTQIA+ mentioned their identities, noted that they were bullied, or provided their preferred pronouns and asked that those be used publicly instead of their dead names
- frequent disparaging comments from teachers when they learned of students’ sexual orientation and/or gender identities (Brown, 2023).

Respondents provided numerous suggestions for teachers for how to demonstrate their support including a need for conversations among all students of the realities of the LGBTQIA+ population at schools, protection from bullying, and lessons about LGBTQIA+ populations that exist globally, and their impacts on history and current life (Brown, 2023).

Educators’ responsibilities for creating equitable communities of care and social justice for all students include supporting students who are LGBTQIA+. Middle level students who are LGBTQIA+ may require more attention, support, and care than any other demographic in middle level schools. How are faculty galvanizing to create safe havens for the LGBTQIA+ population of students in your school? What are administrators or teachers doing to lead faculty in essential conversations about how teachers will dispel heteronormative beliefs and practices within the middle school? What specific actions are being taken at your middle level school to insure the

safety, protection, support for, and acceptance of students who are LGBTQIA+? It's not too late to begin, but every day wasted places students who are LGBTQIA+ at risk.

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Making Authentic Connections: Teacher Candidates, The Profession, and Qualitative Research

Abstract

The author explores qualitative research methodology as a means for engaging teacher candidates in acquiring firsthand knowledge of changes among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher candidates conducted responsive, semi-structured interviews via Zoom

videoconferencing with four teachers and one administrator. Groups identified themes based on the interviews and discovered that the themes matched with current research. After interacting directly with educators and completing the research project, group reports and individual reflections showed an improved understanding of the importance of being affirming and supportive of all learners during times of academic and personal adversities. Sample responses cited safe environments as well as responsive and sustaining actions as important supports for adolescent learners.

Making Authentic Connections: Teacher Candidates, the Profession, and Qualitative Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has had lasting effects on individuals, families, and systems. Not one person has been unaffected by the pandemic. The physical, mental, and emotional toll it has taken on individuals in the education system has been significant. The impact of coronavirus was felt by educators, administrators, and students. Research on COVID-19's impact on young children's cognitive and mental health concludes that social restrictions, isolation, school shutdowns, and other pandemic mitigating measures have contributed to

increased levels of stress and severe anxiety or depression among both parents and children. In addition, COVID-19 was found to be related to the occurrence of adverse childhood experiences. Consequently, these adverse experiences are likely to create a greater risk for developmental delays and health problems in later adolescence and adulthood (Araújo et al., 2021). Given these conditions, it is clear that early childhood and adolescence, both critical periods of development, have not been immune to the consequences of the pandemic.

Adolescence is a critical period of cognitive and social and emotional development. The prefrontal cortex further develops, bringing with it an increased ability for adolescents to reason, make judgements, and better control impulses. During adolescence, youth are coming into their own, developing their identities and sense of self, and becoming more socially and emotionally mature (Arnett, 2017). Adolescents typically show development across these areas in recognizable patterns. However, when disruptions such as the pandemic throw a wrench into their typical developmental experiences, our students suffer. According to a systematic analysis of 16 quantitative studies conducted by Jones, Mitra, and Bhuiyan (2021) in 2019–2021, adolescents experienced higher rates of anxiety, depression, and stress due to COVID-19 and increased their frequency of alcohol and cannabis use during the pandemic. Adolescents who had good social support at home, positive coping skills, and active parent-child discussions fared more positively and maintained stronger mental health amidst the pandemic crisis (Jones, Mitra, and Bhuiyan, 2021).

In addition, the pandemic revealed disparities among marginalized student groups and widened the achievement gap between those who have been historically marginalized and those who have been historically empowered. Academic growth has been negatively impacted in reading and math, showing signs that some students may be falling behind pre-pandemic levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Students have lost regular access to “affirming student organizations and supportive peers, teachers, and school staff. These students also are

at an increased risk of isolation and abuse from unsupportive or actively hostile family members” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021, p. 5).

While research and reviews are available to confirm these facts, there is nothing more authentic than hearing directly from middle grades teachers about their lived experiences with the impact of the pandemic on adolescent development. As a university professor who taught in a teacher preparation program, both in the classroom and online, throughout the pandemic, I was assigned to teach the adolescent development course, a course I had previously not taught. As I engaged in planning, I recognized the course would need to be as rich and real as possible for my teacher candidates. They will enter an environment where the pandemic has had a significant effect and I decided to provide them with an opportunity to hear directly from the people who were interacting with middle grades students in these unusual times. The guests, four current middle level and secondary teachers and one secondary administrator, interacted with my class through virtual videoconferencing. Each of these guests were either former students of mine or my university’s alumnae. Each was asked to speak on how the pandemic has impacted adolescent development and mental health among their students. I hoped this direct communication would enrich the understanding of my teacher candidates.

Our Process

The teacher candidates developed three questions for each guest speaker. We then conducted responsive, semi-structured interviews via Zoom videoconferencing, as each individual “defines the world in unique ways” (Patton, 1980, p.196). Each interview was recorded, with participant consent, to allow future review, if needed. At the end of the guest speaker’s comments, teacher candidates had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. Instead of simply listening to the guest speakers, I asked my students to analyze and dig deeper into our speaker’s responses, to become qualitative researchers. The following questions were used to prompt our guest speakers.

1. What are you seeing in your classroom regarding changes your students are dealing with? How have they been affected mentally, emotionally, and physically?
2. How have your last two years of classes been different than previous ones?
3. What are the biggest challenges you see them going through related to their development?

As part of the final culminating project, students learned how to analyze interview responses, identify underlying themes in the responses, and finally discuss their own conclusions as well as implications for educational practice. During the guest speaker interviews they took notes on interview responses and captured direct quotes. Using qualitative data consisting of “detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors, direct quotations from people about people and their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts” (Patton, 2002, p. 22) allowed the teacher candidates to access the perspective of the person being interviewed (Patton, 2002) and hear fresh commentary on the topic as the guests experienced firsthand the effects of pandemic.

After all the interviews were conducted, I placed my students in groups of four to five people. Together, they reviewed their notes, began to identify information that answered the three research questions, and began to color code and categorize these answers. Once the initial categorization was completed, each group further examined the information and created three to four overall themes that captured the main message and lessons from the group of guest speakers. This approach mirrored the inductive approach described by Yin (2014) where data is analyzed from “the ground up” (p. 136) to find concepts and insights that are started as an “analytic path and connected to discovery of additional relationships.” They subsequently created presentations to showcase their findings and shared them during our final exam

session, in lieu of an exam. It was incredible to see how much the students connected and drew from what the guest speakers said.

Lessons Learned

My colleagues and I have found that completing this type of inductive reasoning and forming and drawing new conclusions from text and evidence analysis is challenging for undergraduates and specifically our own pre-service teachers to complete. Students often revert to summarizing and restating facts instead of forming new ideas and information. This exercise was excellent in supporting the development of their higher-level reasoning and analysis skills, while experiencing a taste of qualitative research, a relatively new strategy for students, that allowed them to move beyond the text and draw more from their experience with teachers as primary sources.

The prominent themes, identified by the students' synthesis of interview responses, were aligned with current literature. Themes encompassed student social, emotional, and behavioral development, and how inconsistencies brought on by the pandemic were negatively impacting middle grade learners' lives and affecting their academic development. My students found that the pandemic caused instability in the external classroom environment as well as internally with each learner's mental health (Sapienza & Masten, 2011). One student group specifically noted that the lack of structure during the pandemic resulted in problematic behaviors and immaturity among learners. On a positive note, however, they found social emotional learning activities had been implemented more frequently and explicitly in classrooms as a means for assisting learners in managing changes and interruptions in their environment. When comparing pre-pandemic conditions to the present day, another group concluded school was a very different atmosphere, where students have not only lost motivation (Klootwijk et al., 2021) but also regressed in use of previously learned academic and social skills (Salmela-Aro et al., 2021). According to these student conclusions, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed inequities and gaps

in school programming and, in a way, accelerated recognition of the gaps and a need to address them sooner than if the pandemic had not occurred.

Impact on Teacher Candidates

When asked to reflect on the experience of making authentic connections with teachers on the front lines of COVID-19, the teacher candidates had many positive comments and reviews of the research process and guest speaker experience. They enjoyed exploring the topic of mental health and hearing from the teachers first-hand. For many, it made the information real and come to life. The pinnacle aspect of this assignment was how the research project impacted their teaching philosophies. Each student wrote a paper titled “Moving Forward” where they expressed their ideas about teaching adolescents as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Safe environments and responsive and sustaining actions were discussed in these papers as important supports for adolescent learners. Examples of student responses that speak to these new understandings are provided below.

Student 1: “My teaching philosophy in response to the mental health crisis in schools across America is to teach students to be people first, students second.”

Student 2: “My teaching philosophy in response to COVID-19 and the mental health crisis in students is to provide a learning environment that students feel accepted and celebrated so that they can achieve their full potential through the use of equity and opportunity.”

Student 3: “My teaching philosophy is to make sure students’ needs are always met and they always feel safe and wanted in my classroom.”

Student 4: “My teaching philosophy is to make sure that students have an open, honest, and safe environment where they can grow, and develop as individuals.”

Conclusion

My goal is to prepare future teachers who embrace growth and approach each experience as a learning opportunity. Through this assignment, I find that my students are well on their way to becoming thoughtful and reflective teachers. I believe they now understand the importance of being affirming and supportive of all learners during times of academic and personal adversities. Input from the guest speakers combined with the use of qualitative methodologies made this advance in their thinking possible. I'm proud of the teachers they are becoming and excited for them to begin their journey in their classrooms.

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Changing Classroom Climate Through Circles

Abstract

Restorative practices is a method to build and maintain positive relationships within a community. Circles are one of the main pillars in restorative practices and can be used to positively change classroom climate. The use of circles gives teachers the opportunity to empower students to express their feelings in a safe environment. This also gives students an opportunity to have their voices heard and play an active role in their learning.

Changing Classroom Climate Through Circles

Restorative practices have become increasingly prevalent in schools across the United States. They are being used both proactively and responsively in hopes of shifting school culture away from punitive consequences. With the appropriate support, restorative practices hold promise for schools across the country, including but not limited to, improved school climate and minimization of negative behaviors. One of the most commonly used pillars of restorative practices is the circle process. A circle is a way of bringing people together to ensure that everyone is respected. Everyone gets a chance to talk without interruption. Participants explain themselves by telling stories. Everyone is equal, and spiritual and emotional aspects of individual experiences are welcomed (Pranis, 2005). While there is no limitation on how, where, and when circles are used, they can be useful any time two or more people need to accomplish something. Some examples include: have a disagreement, need to address a harmful situation, want to work together as a team, wish to celebrate, wish to share difficulties, and want to learn from each other (Pranis, 2005). Circles provide equality, safety and trust, responsibility, facilitation, ownership and connections (Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel, 2019).

The circle process has several intentional structural elements - ceremony, a talking piece, a facilitator, guidelines, and consensus decision-making. Since circles aim to engage all aspects of human experience, there is usually an opening and closing ceremony in which everyone gets to share an answer to a question. Opening and closing questions can be unrelated to the circle topic just to warm up the group and help everyone get to know each other. Some examples include: "What am I grateful for today?;" "What is a gift I have yet to share with the world?;" or "What am I taking away from this learning journey?" Another important element to a circle is the use of a talking piece. A talking piece regulates the dialogue as the item circulates from person to person, and can range from anything that is available in the room to something that is important to all participants. The use of a talking piece creates a space "for people who find it difficult to speak in a group" and allows the person holding the

talking piece to have undivided attention from everyone else in the circle (Pranis, 2005, pg. 12). A circle also has a facilitator who guides and assists the group in creating and maintaining a safe space, and stimulates reflections of the group. A facilitator does *not* control the circle or the issues raised by the group to try to move the group to a particular outcome. The guidelines of the group should be designed by all participants as gentle reminders to keep the group on track and to eliminate negative conduct. These are the *norms* of the circle. Lastly, if decisions are to be made in the circle, all decisions could be made by consensus. The decision does not need to be a fan favorite, but should be accepted and supported by all participants (Pranis, 2005).

In education, circles “provide opportunities for students to share their feelings, build relationships and solve problems, and when there is wrongdoing, to play an active role in addressing the wrong and making things right” (Riestenberg, 2002 as cited in Wachtel, n.d.). Circles can be used proactively or responsively in a classroom. The purpose of proactive circles is to build positive relationships and community, and should be used 80% of the time. They can also be used to deliver course content in a classroom. Responsive circles respond to wrongdoing, conflicts, or problems between two or more people within the classroom, and should be used about 20% of the time. Most commonly, educators use morning meeting or advisory times to facilitate circles. Due to the inclusive nature of restorative practices, both types of circles contribute to a positive, safe learning environment with minimal behavior issues.

Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum, and equality. The circle process allows people to tell their stories and offer their own perspectives (Pranis, 2005 as cited in Wachtel, n.d.). Allowing students’ voices to be heard in a classroom and community is one of the most important things an educator can do, and the circle process, whether proactive or responsive, allows for just that. Encouraging student voices in a circle will change the classroom climate now, but will also allow for strong self advocates in the future.

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Anxiety in Adolescents

Abstract

Based on a qualitative research project completed as part of an adolescent development course, the author explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of adolescents. She finds that anxiety has been heightened and describes current school efforts to support students. The paper ends with a recommendation to provide school-based

counseling, occupational therapy, and mental health training for teachers.

Anxiety in Adolescents

Imagine constantly feeling set back in life... A feeling where you want to do something but cannot because you get too worked up; That is anxiety for you. Anxiety is described as "constant and excessive worrying that interferes with daily activities" that can also be coupled with extreme physical signs such as "restlessness, insomnia, and muscle tension (Garcia, 2021). Anxiety is highly prevalent in the lives of adolescents which not only impacts their day-to-day activities, but also their performance in school. Due to increasingly high numbers of adolescents who have anxiety, the big question is what we can do to help. What type of school

affiliated programs can be established to help adolescents overcome high anxiety levels? This paper will carefully examine what anxiety is, research-based practices that have been proven to reduce symptoms, and what schools are currently doing.

Anxiety is defined as a “feeling of fear, dread, and uneasiness,” (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2021) that causes an individual to feel an onset of symptoms such as restlessness, fear, and uneasiness. Although the cause of anxiety is currently unknown, researchers have found that factors such as stress, genetics, and the environment in which the individual is in, heavily contribute. Many adolescents struggle with their anxiety because each day is different and unpredictable.

The onset of the pandemic has negatively affected adolescents. The absence of being physically present in school has certainly not helped improve anxiety levels within these individuals. One of the main concerns at the beginning of the pandemic was “disruptions from daily routine and social scaffold” (Vivechana, 2021). A lot of students relied on that structure in the classroom, and once learning was moved to home, they lost the motivation to do well in their academics. Even when they were back in the classroom, stress levels were still evident, because it was difficult to adjust to the new environment once again. Without adequate help, many adolescents with anxiety will continue to struggle causing long-lasting effects. Whether it be in or out of school or even in everyday life, anxiety does not go away for most, which is why it is important that some sort of intervention is taken as soon as possible to reduce anxiety levels.

What Schools are Currently Doing

What are schools doing to help adolescents who have anxiety and what more can they do? It all starts in the classroom. The classroom is where students spend most of their time, and a stress-free environment is the goal. It begins with providing emotional support, both guided and self-guided. Giving them the ability to take control of their emotions while still being there is the first step towards reducing anxiety levels. The delivery of instruction also plays a huge role, and providing students with extra resources such as written instructions, extending deadlines

and breaking assignments into smaller chunks are things to consider. Although every student's case is different and it is not a "one size fits all" scenario, "it's crucial for all of the people working with them to be in contact with their mental health providers about using school strategies like these," (Morin, 2022) and to ensure the accommodations provided are a correct fit for the student(s). Schools have also adopted an early intervention approach utilizing occupational therapists to help implement activities that hone in on the main domains of overall health: physical, emotional, cognitive, and mental. In doing so, Occupational Therapists are able to address each area and focus on the "teamwork" aspect, by working with the individual one-on-one, creating an individualized plan to "support comprehensive health and functional recovery" (Pisegna, et al., 2022).

Conclusions

In light of these facts, it is clear that anxiety is a growing mental disorder amongst adolescents. There still remains a countless amount of research and unanswered questions, but there is however an answer to the very first question raised in this paper: What type of school affiliated programs can be established to help adolescents overcome high anxiety levels? Personally, I believe the perfect school affiliated program would consist of the following: counselors who are well trained in any area of mental health, especially anxiety; a certified OT who is able to adapt to working with adolescents in a non-mental health setting; a safe environment for students that supports/fosters their needs; and most importantly, a certified training program, free for teachers to attend, to help educate them on mental health and what they can do in the classroom. The vision for this program is to put the students first, and give them the opportunity to center themselves, and put their mental health first. With grants and or donations, this is a program I could see working out in the long run, as anxiety is something that will never disappear.

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PA Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch and the Four Domains

Abstract

Schools to Watch is a program associated with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (<https://www.middlegradesforum.org/>). Its purpose is to recognize exemplary middle schools that show three years of growth regardless of having high test scores. The Schools to Watch program is based on four domains: Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity, and Organizational Structures and Processes.

PA Don Eichhorn Schools: Schools to Watch and the Four Domains

Is your school a school that has been showing progress over the past three years, but you don't think your school qualifies for recognition? Check out the PA Schools to Watch program at <https://www.pamle.org/Schools-to-Watch>. This is a program associated with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (<https://www.middlegradesforum.org/>). Its purpose is to recognize middle schools that show three years of growth regardless of having high test scores. As long as your state or local assessments show growth over a 3-year period, you are eligible.

The Schools to Watch program is based on four domains: Academic Excellence, Developmental Responsiveness, Social Equity, and Organizational Structures and Processes. These four domains are subdivided into 37 criteria (descriptors) that can be assessed through documentation and observation. Schools that are interested in being recognized complete a

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Bruce has been involved with middle level education for 47 years. He was a teacher for 15 years and administrator for 20 years at the Charles Patton MS in the Unionville-Chadds Ford School District. He has been involved with Pennsylvania Association of Middle Level Education (PAMLE) since 1992, and the state director of PA Schools To Watch (STW) for 11 years. He is the past president of PAMLE as well as the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

common application and (since this program is fully sponsored by the PA Association for Middle Level Education), they must be (or become) a member of the state organization.

Fully trained middle level practitioners or administrators screen all applications, and a site visit is set up if warranted. Each site visitation team is composed of current or retired middle level teachers, principals, or superintendents as well as a few middle level college professors. Every school that is visited will receive a detailed report on how they have addressed the 37 criteria. Option results after the site visit are 1) to be recognized as a PA STW School, 2) to be recognized as a PA Keystone School, or 3) not recognized at all. Keystone School recognition is a school that doesn't quite meet the STW standards but they are doing some great things and are on a path to be recognized.

All schools recognized as a STW School will be officially recognized at the PAMLE State Conference in February. They will also host an official celebration at their school in May/June and will be recognized nationally in Washington DC along with all the other recognized schools across the country. This recognition is valid for 3 years and if your school wants to continue as a STW school, they must apply for re-designation. Pennsylvania is in the process of re-designating schools for the 5th time. The re-designation process is based on continuous improvement and what has changed and improved since the last site visit.

If you have an interest in the PA Schools to Watch program, please reach out to Bruce Vosburgh by either email or phone.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Betwixt and Between: Education for Young Adolescents The Journal of the Pennsylvania Professors of Middle Level Education

Middle level educators are cordially invited to submit work to be shared across the state and beyond the on-line journal, *Betwixt and Between: Education for Young Adolescents*.

Gather your ideas and submit them to the corresponding email on the PA-POMLE website.

Deadline for submissions: January 14, 2024

Publication date: Spring 2024

Manuscript Submission Guidelines:

We are seeking submissions for manuscripts in the following categories:

- **Research Articles**
- **Schools to Watch – Principals**
- **Voices from the field:**
 - **Middle Level Teachers**
 - **Middle Level Teacher Candidates**
 - **Middle School Students**
 - **Middle Level Teacher Educators**

Please visit: <https://papomle.org/online-journal> for specific “Call for Manuscripts” details which vary depending on the type of manuscript.

General Content:

Betwixt and Between: Education for Young Adolescents is an open access peer-reviewed journal promoting research in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania regarding theories and best practices in the education and development of young adolescents. This journal provides for the sharing of formal and informal research related to the improvement of middle level education. Some issues may be thematic as determined by the editors in response to topics of timely interest. Submitted manuscripts should be responsive to this purpose and reflect research or analyses that inform practices in these areas. Submissions are accepted from any source but submissions from teachers/professors/researchers working in Pennsylvania will be given priority in the acceptance and publication process.

Content for special edition/Option for those currently in the field of middle level education:

Betwixt and Between is also interested in receiving editorials, professional experiences, action research, reflective item, etc. from those who are currently placed in the middle level grades. If you are teaching a middle level grade, student teaching a middle level grade, a principal of a middle level grade, or supervising a student teacher in a middle level grade, this special edition option is for you.

Format

All submissions must be prepared using word processing software and saved in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or rich text format (RTF). Manuscripts must comply with the guidelines in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, current edition. Double space all text, including quotations and references, use 1 inch margins for top and bottom, and use 1.25 inch right and left margins. All text should be Times New Roman 11-point font. Complete references should be placed at the end of the manuscript, using the “hanging indent” function. Additional article publication formatting details are listed on the PA-POMLE and PAMLE web sites.

Submission Guidelines

1. Manuscripts must be submitted electronically via the instructions on the PA-POMLE website at <https://papomle.org/online-journal> and select your type of manuscript and follow the requirements as stated.
2. All submissions, regardless of type, must include three separate files saved in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or rich text format (RTF) as follows:
 - **Cover Page** – Include the information listed below in a separate file
 - Manuscript Title
 - Thematic Topic (if appropriate)
 - Submission Date
 - Author's Name
 - Author's Institutional Affiliation and Address
 - Author's E-mail Address
 - Author's Complete Mailing Address
 - Biographical Information (not to exceed 30 words per author)

- **Abstract** – In a separate file describe the major elements of the manuscript in 100-150 words. Do not include your name or any other identifying information in the abstract.
 - **Manuscript** – In a separate file include the manuscript, references, and supporting charts, table, figures, and illustrations as defined above.
 - Do not include the author(s) name(s).
 - Manuscripts should be no more than 15 pages of narrative (excluding references, tables, and appendices), using the latest APA style, and double-spaced on one side of 8-1/2 by 11-inch paper with justified margins.
 - Pages should be numbered consecutively including the bibliography, but the author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.
 - Charts or illustrative material will be accepted if space permits. Such materials must be camera-ready. Photographs will usually not be used unless they are black and white and of high quality.
3. The editor and/or editorial board members reserve the right to edit articles accepted for publication.

Review:

- Manuscripts are peer reviewed in the order they are received.
- Manuscripts must be received by January 9th for consideration for the spring issue.
- It is the policy of *Betwixt & Between* not to return manuscripts. Authors will be notified of the receipt of the manuscript. After an initial review by the editors, those manuscripts that meet the specifications will be sent to peer reviewers. Authors will be notified if the manuscript is judged to be not appropriate for review. Following peer review (blind review by 2 peers) and editorial board member's review, the author(s) will be notified as to the status of the manuscript. The journal editors reserve the right to make editorial changes in the manuscript.
- Authors are expected to take full responsibility for the accuracy of the content in their articles, including references, quotations, tables, and figures.
- Authors of manuscripts accepted for publication are expected to make a presentation about their article at the next PA-POMLE or PAMLE conference.
- Any views or opinions presented within the manuscripts are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the editorial board.
- There is no remuneration for articles accepted for publication. There is no fee for the review of the manuscript.
- Currently, approximately 30% of articles are accepted on their first submission. Approximately 50% of articles are accepted on a provisional basis, meaning that they will be reconsidered once suggested revisions have been submitted.

Organization Membership

Members of each organization receive notification when new issues of *Betwixt and Between* are released. Don't miss an issue! Join the PAMLE and the PA-POMLE professional organizations today.

Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education

The mission of the Pennsylvania affiliate of the Association for Middle Level Education is to promote best practices in the schools and classrooms of our Commonwealth.

Membership provides an opportunity to meet like-minded educators, to keep up on the latest middle level practices, and, most importantly, be confident about providing the best education possible for students.

Regional chapters of PAMLE exist throughout the state providing access to local expertise at your fingertips. Membership rates range between \$20 and \$309. To learn more, please visit our website. <http://www.pamle.org>

Pennsylvania Professors of Middle Level Education

The Pennsylvania chapter of the Professors of Middle Level Education provides a professional network that contributes to the development of an expanded research base, disseminates best-practices, and enhances the preparation of future middle level educators.

Chapter meetings are held three times per year in various locations throughout the state. The annual membership dues of \$100 provide access to this network for all faculty members within a middle level teacher preparation program. Please take a moment and learn more about our association online. <http://www.papomle.org>

Our journal is available at the following link: <https://papomle.org/online-journal>