

## **Editorial Remarks: Creating and Sustaining Relationships for More Inclusive Pedagogy**

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In this issue, five articles highlight how middle grades culture and curriculum can lead to engagement and academic success for young adolescents. The two research reports set the stage, with one focusing on how taking algebra in middle school can make a difference in college readiness, and the other, which examines how school culture is supported through personalized learning. The three practitioner perspectives provide a window into how teacher education programs prepare middle school teacher candidates for the unique experience of working with young adolescents (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

To begin, Durr, Graves and Hales use the School Culture Triage Survey to examine middle school culture in a school that spent the last seven years transitioning to personalized instruction. From the survey results and teacher interviews, the authors found that teachers were more collegial, the curriculum was more student centered and innovative, and the administration was more supportive - all hallmarks of a strong and healthy school culture.

In the next research report, Edosomwan, Young and Young describe their quantitative examination of the relationship between taking algebra in middle school and earning advanced credits in high school for Black, Latinx, Asian American or Pacific Islander, and White students. Gleaning their findings from the NCES HSTS (1990-2019) dataset, they found significant differences among Black and Latinx students who took algebra in middle school. While all groups benefitted from taking algebra in middle school, Black and Latinx students are still underrepresented. The authors conclude with a call for more access to early algebra for Black and Latinx students.

Moving on to the three practitioner perspectives, each highlights the importance of relationships when working with young adolescents. Miller and Alley explore boundary crossing - the act of stepping into unfamiliar domains (Engeström, Engeström, & Kärkkäinen, 1995). To prepare teacher education candidates to respond to the nature and needs of young adolescents, Miller and Alley created unique learning opportunities that included a "bus tour" and discussion activities for teacher candidates in their student teaching seminar. These opportunities afforded the candidates the chance to transgress their own experiences to better understand the cultural milieu of the students they may teach in the future.

Ellsworth's article depicts a series of conversations with a middle grades student teacher as they grapple with developing authentic learning opportunities in a middle school English Language Arts class. Reflecting on one assignment, Ellsworth, as supervisor, and her student teacher created a more authentic project by delving into the interests and needs of the student teacher's students. With this new understanding, the student teacher designed a task that included student voice and choice and optimized student engagement.

In the final practitioner perspective, Nelson, Ramirez, Diaz, and Ruppert describe how the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) protocol (Orr, 2013) can be used to explore culturally sustaining pedagogy among faculty and staff in middle schools. The SWOT tool allows educators to self-evaluate their own biases and equity challenges so to be more inclusive and culturally supportive in their schools and communities.

Collectively, the articles in this issue convey how relationships are the core of effective middle

school practice, especially curricula or cultures that are collaborative and authentic. Each article addresses teaching and learning within the context of an inclusive learning environment and provides a powerful reminder of how educators can work with students to support equity and justice. Ultimately, these articles offer insights and recommendations to guide teacher educators, teachers, and educational leaders who aspire to address complex educational and societal issues in middle schools today.

### References

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