

Middle Grades Musings

My Middle Level Pledge

Your heart is beating ninety miles per hour, hands are shaking, palms are sweating, and you couldn't sleep at all last night. This is it... The moment you've thought about the entire summer, it's the start of MIDDLE SCHOOL.....AHHH!

Do you remember back to when you were a young adolescent, ready to walk into a new chapter in your life? Boy was that a scary time. You had to figure out how to change classes, remember all your new teachers' names, make new friends, figure out where you were going to sit in the cafeteria, make your lock work, and on and on. You were just in elementary school... things were so simple. You had the same teacher for an entire year, were able to play with your friends on the playground every day, and your only worry was who had the better snack. Wheww... wasn't that the life?

Then you were in middle school, and things were so different. You worried about who was friends with who, and who you should be friends with, and what *<insert popular kids name>* thinks of you. Oh, and then maybe you worried about your school work as well.

Last fall, I was in a course that allowed me to explore what being a middle school teacher was all about. One reason I chose middle school was because I thought it would be easier than teaching younger kids. However, my perspective on the workload has changed a lot; middle grades teachers actually have a lot to deal with. Middle school is a very impactful period in our lives! Teachers can either have a positive or negative influence on their students. One thing I've realized by working with middle school students is that they care about everything other than the actual school part. The students want to have friends, and "fit in". Students are constantly being judged on their physical characteristics, cultural background, personality, athletics, and academics. And to "fit in" you must have most of the desired qualities.

This social-emotional development is extremely important during this age; students are battling between independence and dependence, acceptance from peers, a sense of belonging and fads. If students aren't able to "fit in", they need something to make them feel needed and important. This is where teachers can help. Young adolescents need to feel accepted and have a need to belong.

Students strive to "belong" somewhere, and middle school teams are a perfect way to create a sense of belonging. Many middle schools are designed with the team concept in mind. Teams

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To contribute to a future *Musing*, please contact Dr. Lora Roukema, editor, at roukema@campbell.edu

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of teachers work to create a team identity and to have cool initiatives to get the students excited for learning. For example, a pizza party could be thrown for anyone that completes all their homework for two straight weeks. As a teacher, we are getting paid to teach students the material provided by the state; however, for us to have a lasting impact on the students we must invest in their lives--and make them feel like they are needed in the world. Teachers can either have a positive or negative influence on students; I will strive to be the positive influence in their lives.

Greeting students at the door of the classroom is a great way for students to feel special. There are many other little ways we can impact students' lives. I pledge to take a moment to do this intentionally each and every day.

Just think back, you were once a young adolescent. Who were those teachers who put up with you during those middle grade years? As a teacher, I will strive to do the same for my students. I have seen that it is important to be understanding with these students. I pledge to try to make each day a better day, find an area in which each of my students excel, and help them to determine where they can "fit in."

The author of this edition, Brittney Melton is currently a senior at Campbell University. When she graduates she will be certified in elementary education with a concentration in both math and science, and will also receive a middle school extension with a concentration in math. She can be reached at blmelton1121@email.campbell.edu.



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