

Sharing Pedagogical Strategies

Part I

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The authors highlight pedagogical strategies and assignments they have developed, and discuss these through various categories and strategies.

It is both a cliché as well as a fact that teachers at the elementary, junior high and high school are, ensconced behind their closed doors, extremely isolated from their colleagues. Those of us who are involved in middle level education are cognizant, of course, that one of the key strengths of middle level education is that such components as interdisciplinary teaming help to break down the isolation teachers so often experience. In doing so, it enhances both their professional endeavors as well as their morale for it provides them with colleagues who they can gain support from, work closely with, and share ideas. Ironically, while many of us at the college and university both tout the middle level paradigm for its sensible way of bringing teachers together to work, more often than not we do not take advantage of our own windows of opportunity to co-develop curricula, work together to perfect our pedagogical strategies and/or share our successes. The result is that we are often as isolated as our colleagues in the elementary, junior high and high schools, and that's in spite of the fact that we often have much more discre

tionary time at our disposal.

Three University of Arkansas professors, who are members of the College of Education's middle level program, have come to the conclusion, though belatedly, that we have plenty to learn from one another. Indeed, by sharing our own pedagogical strategies and classroom activities with one another, we have come to appreciate the others' creativity, industry, unique insights, and dedication to their craft. Ultimately, this process is about much more than simply gleaning ideas from one another for use in our own pedagogical endeavors. By working together in this manner, it has also helped us to enhance our undergraduate and graduate middle level programs.

In the following two part piece (Part II will be published in the Fall 1997 issue of Current Issues in Middle Level Education) we wish to highlight those pedagogical strategies and assignments that we have individually developed and shared with one another. In order to neatly encapsulate our endeavors, we are going to place our ideas under nine major headings: (A) field experiences, (B) guest speakers, (C) responses to readings, (D) multicultural perspective, (E) interdisciplinary teaming, (F) use of technology, (G) assisting students to reflect on their own experiences as a student at the middle and/or junior high levels, (H) incorporating physical movement into the classroom, and (I) assessment and examinations (A through C will be included in Part I of the essay, and D through I) will be included in Part II.) Under each category we will discuss the focus of the category, describe various strategies, activities and/or assignments we have shared with one another, and provide additional commentary regarding to the success of the strategy/activity in the middle level courses we teach.

A. Field Experiences

Field experiences, of course, serve multiple purposes. A key reason as to why we include field experiences in each of our courses is that we encourage our students to move beyond simply

reading, discussing and taking part in class-based activities that focus on the middle level. Rather, our goal is to provide our students with eclectic opportunities to observe firsthand a middle school in action. In doing so, they are able to attend team meetings and advisor-advisee sessions, observe teachers and middle level students interacting in various ways, ascertain the distinct differences between middle level programs and other levels of schooling, and actually come into contact with middle level students so that they (our students) can observe what a diverse group young adolescents are and how they do, in fact, have unique characteristics and needs.

Among the field-based strategies and activities we have shared most recently are:

1. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: Plan and complete a major project on some aspect/component of middle level education that is field (e.g., school) based. Each student or team (which must be limited to no more than three people) will be required to complete a project in which he/she/they examine a key aspect of middle level education that has been implemented in a middle school located in this area. (Note: A list of exemplary middle level programs/schools is provided to the students.)

The philosophy, theory, and research on middle level education should be used to frame the project. More specifically, in order to complete the project, one must become well versed in (1) the philosophy, theory and research on middle level education, and (2) the theory, research and practical concerns vis-a-vis the particular middle level component under study. The latter is an absolute necessity! In order to be able to decide how one wishes to approach the project as well as to carry it out (e.g., develop interview guides and conduct and analyze interviews; develop, conduct and analyze surveys; take and analyze photographs; collect and analyze key documents, e.g., school developed plans, school board minutes, steering committee minutes, etc.; conduct and write up observations; etc.), one must have a sound theoretical and research base; otherwise, the project will

not make as much sense as it could or should. The final report should be written up in a paper.

To help frame the project, one might consider setting one's paper up in the following manner: (1) the rationale for selecting the topic under study; (2) a succinct but thorough discussion of the topic; (3) the theory and research vis-a-vis the middle level topic under study; (4) the process(es) used to conduct the study; (5) the major findings of the project; and (6) the most valuable insights gleaned from the study, a discussion as to why they were so important. Key documents, tools, and other artifacts collected during the course of the project may be included in the report under a separate series of appendices.

The actual body of the paper need not be all that long (10-12 pages typed will be sufficient). The accompanying documents (mentioned above), and the documentation regarding a team effort will be in addition to the aforementioned 10-12 pages.

To locate the theory and research on a component a good starting place would be the journal entitled Research in Middle Level Education, and /or Middle Level Education: An Annotated Bibliography by Totten, Briegel, Barta, Digby and Nielsen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

Finally, if a team (2 to 3 people) is formed to carry out the project then a separate section in the paper should detail what each person did to assist in the development and completion of the project. This should be composed of three distinct parts: (1) A straight forward and detailed description of what each person did; (2) A statement by each person as to the quality and quantity of effort, thought, and creativity that he/she put into the project; and (3) A personal and detailed comment by each person on the team about the effort, thought and creativity that each of the other individuals put into the development and implementation of the project. The latter should name each person by name and then provide the details.

Why is this a requirement? Because too often one or two people in a group carry the vast majority of the weight of the

group, and this process is to serve as a check and balance. If a person does not end up carrying his/her weight then that will be reflected in this report. Obviously, if a problem appears at any stage along the line of the project in regard to another individual's participation then the concerned team members ought to consult with the professor so that it can be addressed as soon as possible.

That said, each team member will receive the same grade as all the other team members *unless* a team member is totally remiss and does little to nothing during the course of the project.

Commentary: This project moves the study of the middle level from written materials in a university classroom to the real world of the middle level school that is peopled by the students, teachers, administrators, counselors, parents and other key players. It also enables the university student to see the middle level component they are studying "up close," thus providing them with a view that they could never glean from afar.

2. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: Two of the professors' field experience activities are very similar in scope and focus. However, one class's field experience takes place in an elementary school setting with fifth and sixth grade students, and the other takes place in a middle school setting with sixth grade students. The assignments were originally conceived by Johnson for use in an upper elementary setting and the experience was designed to allow the preservice teacher firsthand observation of young adolescents, their differing developmental rates, and their classroom behaviors/interactions with peers, teachers, and the learning materials. Students are assigned to a supervising teacher usually in groups of four to five based on the number in the class. Students spend a minimum of ten hours in the classroom working with the teacher and the students. The purpose is to ensure that preservice teachers have opportunities to observe young adolescents and the instructional process for this group of learners.

A field experience notebook is to be submitted to the instructor at the end of the ten hours with the following items:

Field Notes: Preservice teachers are to maintain a record of their classroom visits and the activities observed. The focus is on young adolescents and the classroom environment, specifically what middle level instructional practices are employed and the students' reactions to these and other classroom practices. Include references to middle school philosophy, developmental, curricular, and instructional theories studied, i.e., the tenets of the major theories observed and the context in which they are observed. (For example, where are the students in terms of physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development? What middle level practices are observed? Which ones and in what capacity? How do students react to the instructional process and interact with their peers in class? What effects do these reactions and interactions have on the classroom environment? How do you know these things? Include evidence for your assertions, i.e., behaviors, interactions, etc., of phenomena noted.)

Group Meetings: The assigned group of preservice teachers for each supervising classroom teacher is to set up meeting times (a minimum of two) for all to meet and discuss the different activities observed in the classrooms, the relationship of these activities to the course material, and to interpret and evaluate the various activities.

Summary of Lesson/Experience: Preservice teachers are to provide a summary of the classroom environment that describes the students, the instructional unit(s) implemented during the field experience, and the relationships observed. The summary should include the following elements: class demographics (number of students, different ethnic groups, gender distribution), general information on developmental stage of the students (ages, sizes, social interactions, etc.), objectives of lessons (general, cognitive, affective, socialization, etc.), method(s) of

evaluation, and the number of student-teacher and student-student interactions.

Additionally, the class will visit a middle level program in the area. Students are to compare and contrast the middle level environment with that of the elementary's in terms of structure, practices and students.

Student Profiles: Each preservice teacher will choose two students, a male and a female, and compile a developmental profile on each. The two students will be observed throughout the field experience. The profile will include evaluations of the students' physical, emotional, social and intellectual development from the perspectives of the supervising teacher and the preservice teacher. The preservice teacher is to first give his/her general impressions of the student's developmental stage based on his/her observations and/or interactions with the students. Subsequently, preservice teachers will interview the supervising teacher concerning the students' development and his/her reasoning for this assessment of the students. Additional questions that the preservice teachers would like to ask of the public school students concerning their insights about the classroom and the instructional process should be included along with a rationale for the questions. These questions will not be asked; rather, they are required as part of the process to hone the preservice teacher's questioning skills.

Reflection: The following questions are to be addressed: As a middle grades teacher, how would you use this information for designing and implementing instruction? What classroom practices seemed to work the best for these students? Why? How do you know these practices affected them in a positive manner?.

Additionally, teachers are asked to evaluate the preservice students/teachers they supervised for this experience based on the degree to which they exhibited responsibility, initiative, and professionalism in carrying out the assigned duties. The evaluation is used in determining the student's final grade for the field

experience.

Commentary: A major purpose of this assignment is to encourage preservice teachers to begin to reflect on their perceptions of young adolescents and to engage in a process of examining their perceptions with different individuals. Formulating questions for the students is part of the reflection and inquiry process. Because of the preservice teachers' inexperience and the fact that they have not received parental permission to question the students, the proposed questions are not asked of the students. Rather, the questions are a means of assessing the preservice teachers' inquiry skills and talents for gathering student information to inform/benefit their instruction.

The students/preservice teachers consider the field experience one of the highlights of the course. Incidents from their field experiences that are related to concepts or ideas being studied during class are shared and discussed. The discussions are enriched by these experiences, particularly when we review how students or classroom practices operate in reality versus how they are portrayed in books. Differences between the descriptions in the book and the students observed are questioned. This inquiry is always thought-provoking and provides substantive background for a better understanding of the theories.

The teachers' evaluation of the preservice teacher provides additional reality to the experience. Students have commented that this evaluation has highlighted areas of concern related to responsibility, professionalism, and initiative that they need to work on.

Because this experience is in a school that has a very diverse student population (low socioeconomic status, 67% qualify for free or reduced price lunch, 12% are students of color, and the population is very transient), preservice teachers are also exposed to some of the precepts and ideas concerning diversity and its effects on young adolescent development. The realities behind the sometimes depressing statistics are viewed firsthand, thus providing a better understanding of the reasons for them.

3. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: Class is held on-site at a local elementary school (grades five and six). Initially students resisted this practice because of the distance from campus and the inconvenience. But, as the semester proceeds and we are enmeshed in the school milieu, students are glad we are there.

Visits to area middle schools are also included in order to highlight differences in settings, and to examine their implications for instruction of this age group. Two visits are arranged with one half of the class visiting each of the sites. Observational experiences are often shared during class discussions, and similarities and differences in settings, materials, instructional approaches are noted. It is not unusual for the preservice teachers to note the differences in provisions between the middle schools in more affluent neighborhoods and those available at the elementary school (in a low socioeconomic area) they are assigned.

Commentary: Being immersed in these authentic environments invokes discussions that are engaging and thought-provoking, especially as they relate to a combination of theory and practice. These discussions on field experiences and their relationship to material being studied often refer to middle school precepts, societal concerns, and the relationship of the two. As a result, students' reflection and analysis of the two is more astute and comprehensive than they would be in simply examining one of the two components. This is a result of having to take into account a variety of variables that influence the learning process.

4. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: Each semester a visit to an area middle school —each of which is newly constructed and was especially designed to address the specific needs of young adolescents as well as to enable implementation of middle level key middle level components — is arranged. The visit includes a tour of the building and a description of the school program by the principal. As the principal explains each area of the building, the arrangement of team wings (e.g., teamed classrooms located

in close proximity to one another), common team meeting areas, health services, media services, exploratory classrooms, cafeteria etc., and the daily schedule, the pre-service teachers are provided with unique insights into how and why middle level theory is being practically applied. When available, middle level teachers also describe their advisory program, teaming practices, and interdisciplinary approaches.

Commentary: The site visit is a powerful strategy for the integration of theory and practice. Students are always amazed at the school plant and how it is specifically constructed to address the needs of middle level students. The credibility of middle level practitioners skyrockets because of the professionalism and enthusiasm exhibited. The end result is that most students want to teach in just such a school.

B. Guest Speakers

In order to avail our students of the unique and valuable insights of both middle level educators (teachers, counselors, and administrators) as well as middle level students, we all make a point of inviting guest speakers from local middle schools to our classes. Our students have commented that such interaction, which often consists of a presentation and a question and answer session by the guests, is among the most valuable and insightful components of our courses.

Among the guest speaker activities we have shared most recently are:

1. Strategy/Activity/Assignment. At least once a semester, a middle level teacher is invited to bring in five to six of her students (young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 15) to speak to the class on a given topic. In the past, such topics have ranged from service learning projects, classroom management, the transition from an elementary school to middle school, and student perspectives of advisory/advisee programs and/or inter

disciplinary teams.

Commentary: The key reason for inviting young adolescents into class is to provide ready access for the members of the class to the unique words and insights of young adolescents. To come

face-to-face with young adolescents is generally much more meaningful than reading about them in a book and/or seeing them on a video. It also allows for unique and close-up interaction (through question and answer sessions) between the university students and the middle level students. In turn, this allows the university students to recognize and appreciate (a) the radical differences in physical size among young adolescents, (b) how serious and articulate young adolescents can be, and (c) the unique concerns and issues that young adolescents are dealing with as well as their unique perspectives on the middle level programs that are ostensibly in place to meet their needs.

A major benefit of having young adolescents come to the class is that in the field it is often difficult to gather a group of middle schoolers to address issues that are uniquely germane to the study and focus of university students (e.g., the efficacy of an advisor/advisee program, the value and benefits of a service learning program, etc.). Instead, they are more likely to be engaged in work germane to their own curriculum and instructional process, and it is often difficult to pull them away from such concerns.

2. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: A panel of middle level school counselors and nurses are invited to the class in order to address a host of key topics: social, emotional and health concerns/issues faced by young adolescents; how they work with teachers to address the social/emotional and health issues facing young adolescents; their interactions and interventions with young adolescents, and how the unique and diverse needs of their students are or are not met.

Commentary: This session always proves to be extremely enlightening as the panelists, through their personal stories, relate the varied issues/problems faced by young adolescents — from homelessness, to proper hygiene, drugs, peer pressure, lack of acceptance by peers and/or teachers, et al. The preservice teachers gain unique and powerful insights into the complexity of a young adolescent's life and what it means to address the needs of the whole child.

3. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: One of the first guest speakers at the outset of the semester is an assistant superintendent in a district that opened two middle schools in the fall of 1995. The focus of her presentation is the change process as it relates to how this district implemented the new middle schools. Her detailed and honest explanation of her district's journey to middle level education is a testimonial to the fact that in order to implement change, all stakeholders must be informed and be actively involved in the change process.

Commentary: The middle level expertise and cumulative experiences of this guest speaker provide an excellent source of information for students on how school and district personnel can work together to effect positive change. Each student receives a detailed booklet describing this particular district's move to middle level education.

4. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: During the class' focus on middle level curriculum a middle level teacher is invited to share her team's journey on the road to thematic, integrated studies. In addition to receiving copies of the thematic study, the students are availed of the step-by-step approach that the teacher and her interdisciplinary team took in planning and implementing the activity. The university students are also engaged in a sampling of the various activities that the teacher's students took part in during the unit.

Commentary: The teacher's insights on the development of her team's curriculum afforded the preservice students an opportunity to see how team planning and implementation of thematic studies actually works, thus providing them with a clearer understanding on how to construct their own units.

5. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: In recognition of March as National Middle Level Education Month, an evening meeting of middle level practitioners and university students was arranged. Invitations were extended to local middle and junior high schools, students and faculty in the College of Education, and to the Middle Level Coordinator in the Arkansas State Department of Education. The goal was to strengthen university ties with area middle level educators and to recruit students into our middle level teacher education program.

The program consisted of greetings and statements of support from university administrators and approximately an hour of speakers focusing on middle level programs in our area. Following the program was a more informal reception consisting of visiting and exchanging information.

Commentary: The university students were enthusiastic about the speakers because they told real stories about daily practice in middle schools. The information gleaned at the reception provided them with realistic insights into life in the middle. Another positive result was the increased visibility of the university's middle level program.

C. Responses to Readings

In all of our courses we make a concerted attempt to model exemplary middle level strategies for our students. We purposely and assiduously avoid the "talking head" and "sage on the stage" syndromes; and in doing so, we incorporate a series of engaging, thought-provoking and well-structured minds-on and hands-on activities into our classes. In that regard, we attempt to

move beyond the lecture format and the staid sort of assignments that all students are accustomed to, e.g., listen and take notes, read a book and write a report or analytical paper or read a chapter in a book and reiterate the key points made by the author. We attempt to abide by the rule of thumb that "action speaks louder than words" and thus we try to be model teachers who attempt to thoroughly engage their students in thought provoking, meaningful, enjoyable and challenging exercises. Among the reading and response strategies and activities we have shared most recently are:

1. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: After reading James Beane's Middle Level Curriculum: From Rhetoric to Reality (Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association, 1992), please read the following scenario and directions, and then complete the assignment:

The Situation: You have heard that the school board is seriously thinking of endorsing the ideas espoused by James Beane in his book entitled A Middle School Curriculum: From Rhetoric to Reality. Assuming the role of either a parent of a young adolescent, a middle school teacher, or a young adolescent, take a stance *either* in favor of Beane's proposal, against it, *or* as one who sees both the pros and cons in it.

Your reaction can take one of two forms:

a. You can write a letter as either the student, the parent, or the teacher to the school board. In doing so, write a letter arguing in favor of your stance. More specifically, in writing the letter, which should be between 4-6 pages in length (double spaced, typed), take a position as to whether or not you think Beane's philosophical stance and suggestions for implementation vis-a-vis middle level curriculum are something that should be implemented. When addressing the issues, make a point of going to the heart of what he is talking about and do not focus on the periph

eral issues. Be sure to quote both Beane (using full and correct citations), and to support your argument(s) with your own opinions. Since this is a letter, be sure to set it up in letter format. Finally, remember, since you are taking a stance, be clear, passionate, and support your argument as well as you possibly can. While being academic and professional in tone, also have some fun in designing the letter. Let your own voice and opinions shine through!

b. Assume that you are either a student, a parent *or* a middle school teacher and that you are at a school board meeting. There is an open forum (which involves school board members, a superintendent, a middle school principal, middle school teachers, lots of parents of middle school students, and a few middle school students) that is addressing Beane's ideas.

In your paper, which should be between 4-6 pages (double spaced, typed), take a position as to whether or not you think Beane's philosophical stance and suggestions for implementation vis-a-vis middle level curriculum are something that should be implemented. When addressing the issues, make a point of going to the heart of what he is talking about and do not focus on the peripheral issues. Be sure to both quote Beane (and use full and correct citations), and to support your argument(s) with your own opinions. Set your paper up in either a monologue (make it sound as if you're actually talking to a group with diverse opinions) or a discussion format. If you do the latter then be sure to include various voices of the different people who hold varying perspectives and opinions. No matter which approach you take, be sure to try to convince the Board and other people of your stance. Since you are taking a stance, be clear, passionate, and support your argument as well as you possibly can. Have some fun with this, and let your own voice and opinions shine through!

Commentary: This assignment avails them of Beane's perspective in a way that is more innovative, enjoyable, and hopefully

more meaningful than a typical “term” paper. It encourages and allows the students to play with different perspectives and voices which, in turn, will hopefully result in their coming at Beane’s ideas in an original manner and raise questions for them that they might not have confronted if they had written the paper in a more traditional format.

2. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: For certain *specified* articles and/or chapters read for a particular class session, the student will be required to write up (double spaced, typed) a minimum of three key points along with an accompanying statement/rationale for each point. These points may address any of the following: (a) the most significant point one has gleaned, and why one considers that the most significant point; (b) a new idea one has gleaned, and the import of that idea, (c) an idea one disagrees with, and why; (d) an idea one doesn’t understand, and an accompanying discussion as to what he/she doesn’t understand; and/or (e) any other pertinent point. The accompanying statement/rationale should be well thought out, well written, and detailed. In other words, it will not suffice simply to jot down a simple thought in a sentence or two.

The points will be due at the end of each class session. These assignments will be graded as outstanding, above average, average, below average, or poor.

Commentary: The ideas/points in these papers are used as a catalyst for subsequent class discussions. The rationale for using such assignments is to cultivate as high a level of thinking and discussion as possible.

3. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: After reading various sources on the rationale for middle schools and the developmental needs of young adolescents, students work in groups to produce pamphlets focusing on the rationale or developmental stages of social, emotional, physical and intellectual growth of students. Students are asked to choose a particular audience such as par

ents, teachers, school board members or middle level students for the pamphlet.

This assignment models teamwork, synthesizing information by teaching others, using writing as a learning tool, and using technology to produce a group project. The pamphlets are evaluated on accuracy of information and mechanical correctness.

Commentary: This project works well at the beginning of the semester as a means of establishing an understanding of middle school philosophy. It also emphasizes the importance of teamwork and building a sense of community. The trifold pamphlets, complete with graphics, have become treasured items in student portfolios. Because much of the work has to be done outside of class, students have to arrange times for group meetings and access to computer labs.

4. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: For each chapter or article assigned as class reading, students are to choose at least four specific points to list and to react to personally in writing. Students are asked to use 8" x 5" index cards to encourage succinctness and to facilitate grading. These response cards provide students with an agenda for discussion. They also provide the instructor with insight into student understanding of the texts being read. During class, the cards are used for small group discussions. Summaries from each group are also shared with the whole class. The cards are turned in once a week and critiqued for student understanding of concepts, personal connections, and issues that need to be addressed in subsequent class meetings.

Commentary: The use of response cards has been invaluable not only as a catalyst for class discussions, but also as a window into individual student thinking. Very often students will write questions and comments that they do not feel comfortable verbalizing. This assignment is a nonthreatening means of involving everyone in the discussion of a particular topic. As I read the

Commentary: This activity provides students with the opportunity to research and defend a particular stance on one of the most controversial issues in public schools. The discussion always results in a lively cross-current of ideas as we wrestle with how to create a learning environment which best meets the needs of all students. In graduate courses, this constitutes an authentic activity because practicing teachers are often striving to effect changes in grouping practices in their schools.

7. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: Believing in a constructivist philosophy and approach to the class, my syllabus states the following under “course requirements”: Attendance/Participation:

A constructivist approach is employed in class whereby students are expected to actively involve themselves in their learning. The class will engage in a variety of classroom practices to address the different ideas and issues presented. Class discussion, an important component of the course, will be one of the primary methods employed to examine the various dimensions of these issues and ideas. Students are expected to attend class regularly with assigned readings completed so that they can participate fully in the discussion and other exercises.

Journals are also required. In their journals, students are expected to summarize the readings and classroom discussions, record their reactions, and provide analyses (pro and con) of issues discussed. The summary (one to two paragraphs) addresses the readings and class activities of the week. Reactions and analysis of events should include a student’s perspectives and thoughts on the material presented vis-a-vis its significance to them as future educators, middle level programs, preadolescents, education in general, society, etc.

Commentary: Initially, some students have a difficult time with the analytical component of this assignment. They regurgitate the information, comment on it in very vague or obtuse terms, and/or may glibly reflect on their own experiences without fully

exploring the implications of these reflections. I am constantly encouraging them to “dig deeper,” look beyond the surface for meanings, and not to rely on my opinions/ideas for their thoughts and/or meanings. As one student remarked after asking my opinion on a subject and I referred the question back to her and the rest of the class, “This class is just one big question!” Her frustration, while understandable when one is accustomed to having “cookbook” replies, was part of the learning experience of the course.

Another aspect of the course that sometimes causes distress is the different ways we “discuss” the readings. Several strategies are used that require the use of no words. The students are placed in groups and asked to depict the different dimensions of adolescent development (social, emotional, intellectual, and physical) on a large piece of paper.

During one class we described with different size and shape blocks how the different levels of curriculum as outlined by Goodlad (Messick & Reynolds, 1992) are related. Goodlad offers five separate conceptual levels: (1) the ideal curriculum is that which a group of specialists proposes as desirable; (2) the formal curriculum is that which a state department of education prescribes; (3) a perceived curriculum is that which teachers do to attend to the needs of their students; (4) an operational curriculum is what really happens in the classrooms; and (5) an experimental curriculum is that which students perceive is being offered them and to which they relate (Messick & Reynolds, p. 56). After several discussions as to what Goodlad meant by these different levels and their relationship, students remained uncertain of the ideas and concepts being outlined. Therefore, students were asked to work in groups and to take the different shapes and depict the relationship among the different conceptual levels. Within each group, students debated, discussed, and came to some consensus as to what was meant by these concepts. As students struggled to depict these concepts with the shapes, they began to construct their meanings of these concepts and under

stand them better. I continually traveled the room working with students by asking leading questions that would help them to address some of their misunderstandings. After completing this exercise/activity, students were more cognizant of the levels and the concepts Goodlad was discussing as well as their importance.

These exercises require students to utilize different intelligences and modalities to explain their ideas. In that sense, their use models how teachers can incorporate activities into the instructional process that meet the various needs of the students in the areas of learning styles and multiple intelligences.

8. Strategy/Activity/Assignment: As group work is a major instructional methodology within the class, students are often paired or put into groups to discuss material being studied. Given a question that focuses on the material/concepts being studied, students are given time in groups/pairs to discuss the material and formulate a response based on readings, personal experiences, and previous class discussions. The group/pair reports on their findings to the class. The class discussion from these group/pair exercises is more in-depth and comprehensive than the direct lecture approach. It underscores the utility of groups for more in-depth student learning and processing of information.

In class I try to demonstrate the efficacy of groups via the different in-class exercises and at least one graded group project. For the graded group project, there is a group and an individual component to the grade to ensure accountability. These requirements/criteria are my attempt to exemplify how to structure groups so that they are more equitable and lend themselves to collaboration.

Commentary: Many students report unfulfilling, negative experiences with groups. Ultimately, these attitudes are liable to negatively impact upon the teaming and/or collaborative process vital to effective teaming. Working in/with effective groups is a means or strategy used to offset these attitudes and hopefully move students to view working with peers in a more favorable

manner.

Over the years, I have learned that a major obstacle to groups is the expectation that some group members will not give their all and others will be left to "carry" the group. Time and again, I emphasize and provide exercises that exemplify the fact that effectively working in groups is a skill that takes time and commitment to realize its true potential.

Conclusion to Part I.

Part II of this article will appear in the Fall 1997 volume of Current Issues in Middle Level Education. In Part II, the following issues will be addressed: Multicultural Perspectives, Introducing Students to the Purpose and Value of Interdisciplinary Teaming, Use of Technology, Assisting Students to Reflect on Their Own Experiences as a Student at the Middle and/or Junior High Levels, Incorporating Physical Movement into the Classroom, and Assessment and Examinations.

NOTE: The authors of this article are in the process of compiling a book of professor developed pedagogical activities. The book will be published by a major educational publishing house. In light of that, the authors are currently soliciting teaching and field based activities from middle level professors of education for inclusion in the aforementioned book. Those whose ideas are included in the book will be acknowledged by having their names, colleges/universities, city and state included next to his/her idea/contribution.

In order to obtain a detailed authors call and a set of author's guidelines, please contact: Dr. Toni Sills-Briegel, Southwest Missouri State University, College of Education, Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle School Education, Hill Hall 115, 901 South National Avenue, Springfield, Missouri 65804-0095.

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