The Wonderful Wonder Years

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Teacher-to-Teacher
Young Adolescence, 10-15
IT GOES WAY BACK

Growing Up Forgotten, (Lipsitz, 1978)
Our Essential Questions

- What is the developmental nature of young adolescence?
- What will ensure the optimum growth and learning for our young adolescents?
The Wonder Years

“The period of life called young adolescence--the years 10-15--represents one of the most pivotal times in human development. How students fare in these middle years, sets a course for their future years in life and in school.”

(See R. Balfanz, Johns Hopkins)
Developmental Shifts

1. Psycho-social and emotional
2. Intellectual
3. Moral & spiritual
4. Physical
Middle School is not a building.

Vermont Middle School Association, VAMLE
“If we believe the student, not the organization, is the real uniqueness of the middle schools, let’s test that belief by judging our classrooms and our schools by how effectively they mesh with what students are like in those classrooms and schools.” Don Eichorn
Psychosocial Development
“Young adolescence is more important than anyone knows.”

-Albert Schweitzer
What we have found from our research is that kids who felt connected to school... do better across every social and academic measure we have. ...There is something in that bond, in that connection to school that changes the life trajectory—at least the health and academic behavior. It is very powerful—second only to parents in power. In some contexts it's more powerful than parents.

Robert Blu

Developmental Markers

- Who am I? Am I okay?
- What can I do well? What can I contribute?
- How will I fit in and make friends?
- What do I believe? What do I value?
- What are my rights? responsibilities?

(Stevenson, UVM)
Students’ sense of self is inextricably woven with their relationships with peers.
Descriptive Terms

- Erratic and exaggerated emotions
- Imaginary audience
- Personal Fable; Invincibility
- Bullying
- Peer pressure
Implications for Educational Practices
Higher levels of belonging

= 

Higher levels of student engagement and achievement
"Kids who feel they belong, felt connected to school . . . and do better across every social and academic measure. Connection to school changes the life trajectory."

(CDC, 2011; R. Blum, professor and chair, Johns Hopkins, Bloomberg School of Public Health.)
Conditions of Belonging

➢ When students feel known and valued by both teachers and peers.

➢ When students feel safe from unfair judgement, bias, bullying, ridicule or exclusion.

➢ When every student feels he/she has influence in the classroom setting. A case for school connectedness
Relationships are the first and most essential middle school curriculum. The quality of relationships significantly shapes the quality of learning.
Belonging demands:

- school support in guiding and nurturing the quality relationships students have with their teachers and peers. (Shelton, 2019)

- large enough cohorts to protect students from rigid patterns of bullying and popularity (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Vervoort et.al., 2010)
Advisory: We all belong here.
Interdisciplinary Team Teaching

- Personalized learning
- Teacher efficacy
- Improved behavior management
- Interdisciplinary studies
Cracker Jack Theory
Equity Practices

- Create flexible pathways for learning
- Break down barriers in how we see students
- Focus on student strengths first
- Eliminate rigid student grouping
- Apply restorative discipline approaches
Intellectual Development
Brain Growth
Profound Curiosity
Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize Winner at Age 12

Moral reasoning development
Implications for Educational Practices
We get carried away......
Collaborative Learning
Discussion & Problem Solving
Can I figure out what to do when I don’t know what to do?
Active Learning
Real, Relevant & Meaningful Curriculum
“The academic challenge in a middle school curriculum lies not in painful abstraction, but rather in its capacity to engage the intellectual imagination and curiosity of young adolescents.” (Beane, 2005)
Is it safe to tube and swim in our local creek?
How do idling cars impact the air quality in our school area?
What kind of chicken coop will provide the best shelter for our chickens?
Community-based service
Class Size Matters

- Too large or too small are both deadly.
- Above 25 or below 13: Neither afford the best learning environment.
Physical Development
From age 10-15

- Accelerated and uneven growth
- Metabolic fluctuations
- Bone growth exceeds muscle growth
- Enormous range in developmental growth patterns
- Puberty
True or False?
During young adolescence, a child can grow as much as 12 inches in less than 18 months.
True
It can be awkward.

All 7th/8th graders.
Implications for Educational Practices
Implications for Education

- Physical movement (recess, fitness, outdoor, active and place-based learning)
- Social support for image consciousness
- Integrated health education
- Flexible seating arrangements
Movement Matters
Alternative Seating Arrangements
Now what?
Scenario A

1. Sustain 7 & 8 in K-8
   a. Optimum class size would require one 5-8 interdisciplinary team cohort (25 students) with a (2) teacher team serving 2 multiage 5-8 classes. Possible support teacher. (1)
   b. Classes of 12 each, hovering just below best size.
   c. Multiage 5-8 classrooms can be very challenging.
   d. Numbers must remain stable over time.
Scenario B

2. School Choice/Tuition for 7 & 8 graders.

   a. Numbers must remain stable over time.

   b. Bolster K-6 program.

   c. Establish 5-6 cohort with middle grades practices.
Questions & Discussion
Young Adolescence, 10-15
The Challenges

➢ What are the implications for educating our young adolescents?
➢ Can we craft a plan that best serves students?
➢ What should be preserved? changed?