

Middle School Journal

January 2008 • Volume 39 • Number 3 • Pages 4-12

The Under-Appreciated Role of Humiliation in the Middle School

* *This We Believe* Characteristics

- An inviting, supportive, and safe environment
- School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
- Multifaceted guidance and support services

*Denotes the corresponding characteristics from NMSA's position paper, *This We Believe*, for this article.

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In his book *The World Is Flat*, Friedman (2005) argued that we have under-appreciated the role that humiliation plays in terrorism. He notes that the reaction humans have when they are humiliated is significant and often severe. If it is true, that humiliation plays a role in terrorism, what role might this under-appreciated emotion play in middle school? If terrorists act, in part, based on humiliation, how do middle school students act when they experience this emotion?

To answer these questions, we interviewed 10 middle school teachers and 10 students. We asked them about times they (or their students or peers) were humiliated and what happened. In each case, they were surprised to be asked about this emotion. They said things like "It just happens; you gotta deal with it" and "You know how kids are, they can be mean." The responses from the teachers and students about the ways that students are humiliated clustered into three major areas: bullying, teacher behavior, and remedial reading. In addition, we searched the ERIC database for documentation about the impact humiliation has on middle school students. In this article, we will begin by discussing the findings from our interviews and surveys, then we will describe the effects of humiliation on middle school learners.



Types of humiliation

The 10 teachers and 10 students we interviewed worked or attended one of three large urban middle schools in two southwestern states. These schools fit the profile of many schools across America—large (more than 1,000 students), located in major metropolitan communities, with diverse demographic profiles among students and teachers. None of the schools had a formal anti-bullying or character education program. We sought a representative sample of teachers based on experience, gender, and subject area. We chose students who represented different grade levels, genders, and achievement levels. The names of students and teachers are pseudonyms. We conducted individual interviews with each teacher and each student to ensure privacy and promote candor in their disclosures. Based on an analysis of their responses, we identified three themes.

Bullying

Student voices. The most common topic raised in the conversation for both teachers and students was bullying. Many students believed that bullying was part of life, something that was unavoidable. It need not be. "Being bullied is neither a 'part of growing up' nor a 'rite of passage'" (Barone, 1997, p. 80). Every student participant recounted a time in which he or she had been bullied or had witnessed it occurring with other students. Marcus, a sixth grader, described an incident that occurred earlier that school year.

There're these older guys [eighth grade] who think they're the kings of the school. They talk loud, swear, shove people in the halls. I see them comin' and I bounce [leave]. My first month at this school, they walked behind me, talkin' loud about how I was a little faggot. I tried to ignore them, but they knocked my stuff out of my hand.

Marcus's experience is perhaps the most common type associated with bullying. There was an age and size differential between perpetrators and victim, accompanied by verbal abuse associated with sexual orientation, and some physical contact (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005; Olweus, 1993). This is also consistent with Bjorklund and Pellegrini's (2000) dominance theory of increased bullying directed at those entering a new social group.

Martha, a seventh grader, described a more subtle kind of bullying.

There's this girl, and she used to be our friend [named several girls] ... but she's just so weird. What happened to her? We were all friends since second grade, but when she came back to school [entering middle school] she still dressed and talked like such a baby. It's embarrassing to be around her. So, we stopped talking to her.

Martha described relational bullying, memorably chronicled in a number of studies (Bjoerkqvist,

Lagerspetz, & Kaukianen, 1992; Crick, Bigbee, & Howe, 1996; Simmons, 2002). Although Martha did not describe herself as a bully, she exhibited prevalent forms of female aggression: relational bullying and avoidance (Crick, Bigbee, & Howe, 1996). The transition from elementary to middle school appears to play a role as well. Pelligrini and Bartini's (2000) study of bullying across fifth and sixth grade noted that the move to larger, more impersonal school environments often interfered with the maintenance of peer affiliations.

We also sought students' perspectives on the reasons bullying exists. Their comments suggest that they accept bullying as a given, a common part of middle school life. "Everyone gets made fun of," remarked seventh grade student Juan. "If you can't take it ... if you let anyone see it bothers you, you just get it even worse." Martha echoed this sentiment. "It's how girls are. One day you're friends, and the next day you're not. Better not be caught lookin' at someone else's man. That'll get you quicker than anything." Beliefs about the normative presence of bullying, verbal taunts, and teasing are prevalent among adolescents, who view these as *de facto* elements of the secondary school experience (Shakeshaft et al., 1997).

We also asked students about their reactions to being humiliated by their peers. Most described deep levels of shame and responses that could be categorized as either violent or avoidant. Students told us they "snapped," "pounded his face in," "blew," or "got my bitch on" to describe verbal or physical retaliation. In other cases, students described attempts to avoid a situation. Similar to Marcus's attempts to "bounce" when bullies were spotted, Al, an eighth grader, reported that he did not use certain restrooms or hallways, because he anticipated that his tormentor would be there. Adriana, an eighth grade student, poignantly recounted the following incident.

When I was in seventh, I made up a boyfriend to my friends. It was stupid. ... Everyone had a boyfriend and I wanted one, too. I told them I had a boyfriend at [nearby middle school]. When Cindy found out that it wasn't true, she told everybody. They laughed at me, left notes ... told some of the boys. I told my mom I was sick, and I didn't go to school for two weeks.

Adriana's avoidance of the situation is a common response to the humiliation resulting from bullying. According to the American Psychological Association and the National Education Association, 7% of eighth graders stay home from school at least once a month to avoid a bullying situation (cited in Vail, 1999). Other middle school students, like Marcus and Al, alter their paths in school to avoid encountering bullies (Wessler, 2003).

Teacher voices. The 10 teachers who participated in this study were conflicted about the role of bullying in middle school. All 10 participants expressed concern over the amount of bullying in their schools (i.e., responding positively to the queries, "Bullying occurs frequently at this school," and "Bullying negatively impacts the learning of students at this school"). All were aware of the deleterious effects of bullying on both the victims and the perpetrators. Mr. Lee, a seventh and

eighth grade mathematics instructor, noted, "We have to worry about the kid who's doing the bullying as well as the one who's getting it. Those kids that are bullies now end up in trouble in school and in life." In addition, 8 of the 10 instructors reported that they "always" responded to incidents of bullying. Mr. Harper, a music teacher, said, "I had it happen last week. I was outside my class [during passing period] and saw a group of bigger students descend on this smaller boy. You could just see this kid brace himself for what was going to happen. It was like slow motion. ... I stepped in and made the kids leave him alone." Five other teachers offered anecdotal reports of their personal responses to bullying incidents, although, in all cases, it was related to the threat of physical harm perpetrated by either boys or girls.

Verbal abuse did not prompt such swift responses. "I won't put up with profanity, name-calling. If I hear it, I stop it. I write a referral if I have to," stated Ms. Indria, a sixth grade social studies teacher. However, when probed, all 10 teachers stated that they did not get involved in "personal relationships, friendship stuff." Ms. Indria offered, "Girls just seem to treat each other badly. It's a part of adolescence. ... I certainly remember doing it when I was that age." Seventh grade science teacher Ms. Anthony echoed a similar response. "I can't keep up with it. One week they're friends; the next week they aren't. Way too much drama. I find that when I have tried to mediate, it ends by consuming too much instructional time." Four other teachers made statements consistent with the belief that negotiating a verbally, or even physically, abusive landscape was a part of growing up. Physical education teacher Ms. Hartford noted,

You really have to be careful when you choose to interfere. It [teacher involvement] can really make it worse. The kids will just pick more—"teacher's pet." If it looks like the kid is holding his own, I don't get directly involved. I keep an eye on it.

It is also likely that Ms. Hartford and the other teachers interviewed were not cognizant of their relationships with the aggressors. Elias and Zins (2003) found that bullies often hold high social capital with their teachers and are perceived positively, while victims are often perceived as less likable.

Statements like the one offered by the physical education and science teachers illuminate a commonly held belief among middle school educators—that the ability to "take it" is a necessary rite of adolescent passage. Computer instructor Ms. Andersen evoked her own junior high memories to defend this position.

Face it, being able to dish it out and take it gets you ready for the real world. What's that old commercial? "Never let 'em see you sweat." Teenagers have to learn that you don't wear your emotions on your sleeve. People'll use it against you. I know, I went through it, but I survived. You have to toughen up.

When asked about the role of humiliation in bullying, she replied,

Yeah, they're good at humiliating each other. I keep an ear on what's going on. But I have to say ... a lot of times they use it to keep each other in line. In a funny way, they regulate each other's behavior.

Ms. Anderson's beliefs are not entirely misplaced. Tapper and Bolton (2005) used wireless recording equipment to analyze bullying interactions among 77 students. They found that direct aggression (without physical violence) often inspired peer support for the aggressor. The reaction of the victim is a factor in whether the bullying will continue. Perry, Williard, and Perry (1990) determined that displays of distress by the victim increased the likelihood that bullying would occur again. "Never let'em see you sweat" appears to be accurate.

Teacher Behavior

Student voices. Students had strong feelings about the use of humiliation by teachers. Nine of the 10 student participants could recount times when a teacher had used sarcasm or humiliation to embarrass a student in front of the class. In some cases it was directed at them, while in others they had witnessed it in their classes.

We had this one teacher in seventh grade; man, she was rough. She had a nickname for every kid in the class. Like, she called this one girl "Funeral," because she said she always looked like she was coming from one.

This story, told by Al, is admittedly an extreme example and not typical of the incidences that were shared by students. However, three students told of times when teachers had "busted someone" in front of the entire class for failing a quiz or test, using insulting language. "I don't know why they do it," said Gail, a sixth grader. "It's not like it makes a difference. Who wants to work harder for someone who embarrasses you that way?"

Other students admitted that the use of humiliation might have a positive effect, at least in the short term.

My [seventh grade] math teacher reads everyone's quiz grades to the whole class. I failed one, and he said, "Spending too much time looking at girls?" It made me kinda mad ... but I made sure I didn't fail another math quiz. (Juan, eighth grade)

Veronica, an eighth grade student, said,

Ms. _____ likes to catch you doing something wrong. Like, we were reading our social studies book out loud and I missed my turn. She goes, "Wake up, Veronica! We're all waiting," in this really stupid way she has [imitates a sarcastic tone]. Everyone laughed as though it never happened to them. I don't let her catch me.

Veronica then used profanity to describe her teacher, evidence of the anger she felt toward this adult and perhaps school in general.

When asked what they thought these teachers hoped to gain with the use of humiliation, their insights were surprising. "They want to be cool, like it's funny," remarked sixth grade student Marcus. Seventh grader Harlan responded similarly. "They don't treat you like little kids. My dad talks the same way. Making fun of kids in the class is just what they do."

The use of sarcasm and humiliation by teachers has been less well documented in the literature than the prevalence and effects of bullying. It is certainly long understood in the teaching profession, as evidenced by Briggs's (1928) article on the prevalence of the use of sarcasm by young secondary teachers. Martin's (1987) study of secondary students' perspectives on this phenomenon was derived from surveys of more than 20,000 Canadian students. Students reported that the use of sarcasm resulted in dislike for the teacher and even anger toward the teacher. Martin also reported that some students described "anticipatory embarrassment," the dread associated with the belief that the teacher would humiliate them again. In addition, this created learning problems, including decreased motivation to study and complete homework, increased cutting of classes, and thoughts of dropping out. Turner and associates (2002) studied the classroom learning environments of 65 sixth grade mathematics classrooms to study factors that promoted or reduced help-seeking behaviors and found that the teacher's classroom discourse, including use of sarcasm, influenced the likelihood that students would seek academic help when needed. Classrooms featuring more negative teacher talk, including sarcasm, were associated with high levels of avoidance in asking for assistance.

Teacher voices. Six of the 10 teachers in the study named colleagues who regularly used sarcasm and humiliation with students. Ms. Robertson, a seventh grade language arts teacher, described a colleague as "us[ing] words like a knife. He just cuts kids down to size." Mr. Lee, the math teacher, described an experience when he was a student teacher.

[The master teacher] was just vicious with students. Everything was a big joke, but kind of mean-spirited, you know? He'd single out kids because of a quirk, like they talked funny, or they had a big nose, or they wore clothes that were kind of different. Kids would laugh, but I saw the cringes, too.

Five of the participating teachers discussed the fine line between humor and sarcasm. Ms. Andersen offered,

You have to take into account that they're really very fragile, in spite of all their bluster. We all remember what it was like. Worried all the time about sticking out. They're already sensitive to the need for conformity. As teachers, we have to make sure that we don't make them feel different.

Ms. Hartford noted, "It's great to keep it light and fun, but not at someone else's expense." Sarcasm is typically used for three purposes: to soften a criticism, especially through feigned politeness; to mitigate verbal aggressiveness; or to create humor (Dews & Winner, 1995). However, the use of sarcasm in social discourse assumes an equal relationship between parties. This is never the case in the classroom, where the teacher holds the power in the relationship. Therefore, the student cannot respond with a sarcastic reply without consequences. The use of sarcasm with middle school students is ineffective as well, as evidenced by a study of 13-year-olds by the Harvard Zero Project. They found that 71% of the students studied misinterpreted sarcasm as deception. In other words, the majority had not yet reached a linguistically sophisticated developmental level that would allow them to accurately discern the speaker's purpose, even when it was accompanied by a gestural cue (Demorest, Meyer, Phelps, Gardner, & Winner, 1984).

Remedial reading and mathematics

Bullying and sarcasm are age-old tools of humiliation, but a more recent (and inadvertent) tool is that of the remedial class created for students who fail to achieve in reading and mathematics. Commonly referred to as "double dosing," it is the practice of increasing the number of instructional hours spent in remediation, at the expense of electives or core classes such as science and social studies (Cavanaugh, 2006). Though well-intended, our student participants were vocal about the negative effects on the lives of adolescents.

Student voices. "Everyone knows who the dumb kids are," explained Martha, a seventh grade student. All you have to do is look around at who's not on the wheel [elective class rotation]. They're all in reading mastery." At Martha's school, students who score below a cut point on the state language arts and mathematics examinations are automatically enrolled in another section of instruction. Jessika, an eighth grader, is one of those students. "I hate it. We're all the stupid kids. Everyone knows it." Carol, another eighth grade student, described her classmates this way:

Nobody even tries in my [remedial] reading class. It's like, if you do, you're trying to make yourself look better than you really are. No offense, but it's "acting white." People just sleep in class. You know, pull their [sweatshirt] hood up. If you look like you're trying, you'll catch it from [classmates.]

Marcus and Al are also enrolled in similar classes for mathematics. When asked what others said to them and about them in regard to their participation in these courses, we heard, "retard," "SPED" [special education], "loser," "tard," "spaz," and "window licker." These labels are quite troubling for students with disabilities, because they suggest an accepted intolerance for students in need of academic supports.

Slavin's (1993) review of the literature on remedial classes in middle school found a zero effect size for academic gains. While it is too soon to gauge the long-term effectiveness of double-dosing academic achievement, the voices of middle school students provide a bellwether for

assessing the social and emotional repercussions of such practices. In a few short years, these students will have reached an age at which they can voluntarily exit school. There is further evidence that low-achieving students are more likely to use so-called "self-handicapping strategies" such as giving up and refusing to study (Midgely & Urdan, 1995; Turner et al., 2002). In particular, they are more likely to associate with other negative-thinking students. The remediation classroom, it would seem, from Carol's and Jessika's comments, is a perfect environment for breeding this sort of attitude toward school and learning.

Teachers' voices. We were particularly interested in the views of Mr. Lee and Ms. Robertson, both of whom teach a section of remedial math or reading. "No one wants those classes," remarked Mr. Lee. "I got it because I'm new here. They stick the new teachers with these classes. Wouldn't you think that they should be taught by people with lots of experience?" he asked. Mrs. Robertson described her classroom learning environment. "I'm ashamed to say that I dread fourth [period] because of the students. I feel like all the energy gets sucked out of the room, and me. I can't seem to inspire them, and it affects the way I teach." When asked to elaborate, she said, "I know I'm stricter, and I feel like I can't even smile or make a joke. I'm grim, and it makes for a grim period."

Two other teachers explained that, while they saw the logic in double dosing, they worried about the detrimental effects on their students. Mr. Espinosa, a seventh grade social studies teacher, said,

We're organized in houses here [a cohort model]. But every time we excuse students to go to another class, one that's different from everyone else, it chops away at the concept of a family of students and teachers. I can see the light go right out of their eyes when they have to pass up computer class to go for extra reading or math class.

Ms. Andersen, the computer teacher, expressed concern about the content students were missing. "If I'm not teaching literacy and math, then what am I doing? They'll just get further behind."

The effects of humiliation

In addition to the ways in which middle school students experience humiliation, we discussed the impact that humiliation has on young adolescents. Both students and teachers identified a number of outcomes from humiliation, including drug and alcohol use, attendance problems, dropping out of school, pregnancy, and suicide. Let us examine the perspectives of teachers and students on each of these issues.

Drug and alcohol use

Most educators recognize that experimentation with alcohol and drugs during adolescence is

common. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm) indicated that more than two-thirds of middle school students report ever having had a drink of alcohol and that 26% report ever having used marijuana. However, several students commented on the regular use of drugs and alcohol by students who feel humiliated at school. In the words of Marcus, "I know a kid who drinks every night. He hates school and says they make him feel stupid." One of the teachers noted that the rate of drug and alcohol use was highest for students who were enrolled in remedial reading classes. Mooney (Mooney & Cole, 2000), a student with a disability who subsequently graduated from an Ivy League college, discussed his use of drugs and alcohol to "turn off the shockers" at school.

Attendance problems

Another outcome of humiliation that both students and teachers discussed was poor school attendance. Mr. Harper, the music teacher, put it eloquently—"They vote with their feet"—meaning that students tell us, by their physical presence in school, whether or not it is a comfortable place to be. Again, most educators acknowledge that there are patterns of problematic attendance, such as is typically seen in urban schools. More important, for our purpose here, is the difference of attendance patterns within the school. It is clear from an analysis of attendance patterns—both tardiness and absence—that students are communicating with which teachers they feel comfortable and with which they do not. While there are many reasons for students feeling comfortable with teachers, one reason is the climate that is created in class. Veronica reported, "Lots of us cut class with Mr. _____ because he makes you feel bad when you try to answer."

Dropping out

While calculating an accurate drop-out rate has been exceedingly difficult to do, it is important to note that in many states there is no mechanism for capturing middle school drop-outs. It seems that when the data systems were created, people assumed that middle school students either would not or could not drop out of school. Unfortunately, that is not the reality; middle school students are dropping out. In-grade retention (an indicator of either poor academic performance or poor attendance) is the single strongest school-related predictor of dropping out in middle school (Rumberger, 1995). As Ms. Indria reported, "There are students who just leave us. They don't find school fulfilling and are ashamed of their performance, and they stop coming. No one really knows where they go." Turner and associates' (2002) study on the relationship between classroom climate and help-seeking offers further evidence of the role of humiliation. There is also evidence that the overall school climate—the degree that students feel safe to learn and are not threatened by peers or teachers—is directly related to the drop-out problem (Wehlage, 1991). As Al indicated, "If I had to deal with the crap that Jeremy does, I'd just quit. I wouldn't come to this place."

School institutions related to humiliation play a factor as well. According to Goldschmidt and Wang (1999), "Two school policy and practice variables affect the middle school dropout rate significantly: the percentage of students held back one grade, and the percentage of students

misbehaving" (p. 728). Here we see the snowballing effects of humiliation. Students retained in grade, attending remedial classes, surrounded by misbehavior (including bullying), with lower rates of attendance and less inclination to seek help from sarcastic teachers appear to be at great risk for dropping out, and humiliation plays a role in each.

Pregnancy

Another issue associated with humiliation, identified primarily by the teachers we interviewed, was teenage pregnancy. While less common at the middle school level than at the secondary level, teen pregnancy is still an issue with this age group. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, national data suggests that between six and seven of every 1,000 middle school girls become pregnant (Klien, 2005). While there are a number of theories about the causes of teenage pregnancy, including too much free time, poverty, access to alcohol, and physical maturity, Ms. Hartford had another take on the situation. She said, "In this community, pregnancy is one of the acceptable reasons to leave school. If school is a toxic environment for you, you can get pregnant and leave school. Nobody will question your decision."

Suicide

A final outcome of humiliation identified by the participants was suicide and suicidal thoughts. Public health officials have noted a significant increase in youth suicide—more than 300% since 1950 (Bloch, 1999). Suicide is now the third leading cause of death for youth ages 10 to 19 (following accidents and homicides) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). While the suicide rate for high school students has remained fairly stable over the past decade, the suicide rate for middle school students (ages 10 through 14), increased more than 100% during the decade of the 1990s (Bloch, 1999). A haunting thought was shared by Adriana, who said, "Everybody I know has thought about suicide, but the one who did it was bothered all the time by other kids and no one did anything." As Fisher (2005) noted, teachers have to understand the signs and symptoms of suicide and ensure that students feel honored and respected at school. One of the teachers suggested, "I think that they're under a great deal of pressure to perform. If you add humiliation to that, they don't see a way out and might consider taking their own life."

Recommendations for reducing humiliation in middle school

Some of the problems members of our profession discuss about the challenges to achievement in middle school might be explained by students' experiences with humiliation. When students experience humiliation, as these data suggest they do, a series of negative outcomes can be triggered. We recommend that educators make a commitment to reduce the needless opportunities for humiliation that creep into the daily experiences of their students.

Recommendation #1: Assess the school climate

The first step to reducing humiliation is to recognize that it might, in fact, be present. Schools routinely administer annual school climate surveys, and this can provide an excellent starting point for analysis. For example, the California Healthy Kids Survey contains questions that can

shed light on the issue of humiliation. The survey asks respondents to assess the extent to which adults "treat all students fairly" and "listen to what students have to say" and contains several queries about bullying and bully prevention programs (California Department of Education, 2005).

Recommendation #2: Observe and analyze curricular and instructional interactions

The middle school reform report entitled *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006) strongly recommends heterogeneous grouping of students in small learning communities to improve achievement and personalize learning. This requires schools to abandon outdated ability grouping and tracking, which result in lowered expectations and missed opportunities for rigorous curriculum. Some schools cling to tracking and remedial classes because they do not possess the capacity to differentiate instruction for all learners. Building this capacity is not a matter of scattershot inservices, but rather targeted peer coaching, professional development, and administrative accountability. A first step toward realizing this goal is to conduct classroom observations for the purposes of data collection and analysis of needs. The Instructional Practices Inventory developed by the Middle Level Leadership Center is a useful tool for developing a school-wide profile of the instructional practices occurring at the school, including the amount of teacher-led instruction, student-led discussions, and levels of disengagement (www.mllc.org).¹ Classrooms with high levels of student disengagement should be targeted for further analysis to determine contributing factors, especially teacher behaviors and interaction styles. Teachers struggling with disengagement can participate in the Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) professional development program developed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (www.lacoe.edu/orgs/165/index.cfm). This is a five-month experience that involves peer observations and coaching focused on 15 specific instructional behaviors that increase positive student perceptions about learning. Other teachers who are having difficulty with curriculum design for heterogeneously grouped students can benefit from focused professional development and planning on differentiating instruction at the unit level. A beginning step may include the formation of book study groups using materials such as *Differentiation in Practice for Grades 5–9* (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). By collecting and sharing data to develop targeted professional development, teachers are able to move beyond "I've heard/read this before" to take specific action. This is further reinforced through administrative accountability and ongoing data collection to measure improvement at the curricular and instructional levels.

Recommendation #3: Make an anti-bullying curriculum part of the school culture

Much has been written in the past decade about anti-bullying curricula, especially in the wake of high-profile school shootings throughout the nation. Many fine programs exist, and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is among the most respected (www.clemson.edu/olweus/content.html). The multi-layered design of this program targets school-wide, classroom, and individual interventions for both bullies and victims. However, anti-bullying curricula are only effective if there is long-term commitment. Perhaps the most common mistake is that after a period of enthusiastic introduction and implementation, programs such as these fall to the wayside as other initiatives command attention. A multi-year plan that includes

refreshers for existing staff as well as training for teachers new to the school is essential for sustainability. The anti-bullying program should be written into the school's accountability plan, the new teacher induction program, and as part of the curriculum for each grade level.

Conclusion

The recommendations made are all costly in terms of time, money, and resources. However, the unintended costs of humiliation are much higher for our students. It is time to take another look at the anti-bullying curricula being developed by groups across the country and how they can be sustained for more than one school year. It might also be time to notice our own behaviors and to have hard conversations with our colleagues about appropriate interactions with students—interactions that clearly demonstrate care, honesty, and high expectations. And finally, it may be time to reconsider the ways in which we group students and provide supplemental instructional interventions such that groups of students do not experience school as telling them they are stupid, incompetent, and not worthy. In doing so, we might just see increases in student achievement as well as youth who are more engaged in their educational experience.

Editor's Note

¹For a comprehensive assessment of middle school programs, procedures, and processes, readers might want to consider using the [School Improvement Toolkit](http://www.nmsa.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/SchoolImprovementToolkit/tabid/654/Default.aspx), available from National Middle School Association at www.nmsa.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/SchoolImprovementToolkit/tabid/654/Default.aspx

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