

***Teaching and Learning
with
Young Adolescents:***

***Celebrating Diversity,
a
Working Document***

September 2001

I confess. I started out as a creationist. The first days of every school year I created, and for the next thirty-six weeks I maintained the creation: my curriculum. From behind my big desk I set it in motion; then I managed and maintained it until June. I wanted to be a great teacher—systematic, purposeful, in control. I wanted great results from my great practices. And I wanted to convince other teachers that this creation was superior stuff. So I studied my curriculum, conducting research designed to show its wonders. I didn't learn in my classroom. I tended my creation.

Today, I learn in my classroom. What happens there has changed, and it continues to change. I've become an evolutionist. The curriculum unfolds as my kids and I learn together and as I teach them what I see they need to learn next. My aims stay constant—I want us to go deep inside language together and use it to know, shape, and play with our worlds—but my practice evolves as my students and I go deeper. This going deeper is research. Today my research shows me the wonders of my kids, not my methods. But it has also brought me full circle. Learning with students, collaborating with them as a writer and reader who both wonders and knows about writing and reading, has made me a better teacher to them than I dreamed possible.

*Nancie Atwell,
In the Middle: New Understandings about
Writing Reading and Learning, 1998*

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Acknowledgements

The Department of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador gratefully acknowledges the following members of the working group for their contribution to the development of this document:

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The Department acknowledges the following individuals for their contribution to this document.

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Preface

The Royal Commission

In its report; *Our Children, Our Future*, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education (1992) acknowledges that the “transition from elementary to junior high is one of the most difficult for many students”. The report further states that “students in this age group need the security and support of caring adults” and a need for “a wide range of educational experiences. The Commission makes seven recommendations specific to “junior high level education”; among them:

Recommendation 117

That the Department of Education develop a junior high school level curriculum guide. The curriculum guide should include, among other things, (1) a clear set of learning expectations for junior high learners based on the Aims of Education and current learning theory, (2) the values, knowledge and skills students should acquire during the junior high years, (3) the mandatory curriculum components.

The Carnegie Corporation

More recently, the Carnegie Corporation of New York released its report, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, at the National Middle School Association's 27th conference. This report includes seven recommendations to improve middle schools:

- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
- Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development opportunities.

- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best.
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

The Working Group for This Document

The Assistant Directors of Programs for all districts in the province, in conjunction with the Department of Education, determined the need to address a range of teaching and learning strategies. The Working Group, established in the fall of 2000, took its direction from the following terms of reference:

- Develop a philosophy statement to form the basis of a necessary attitude change and which reflects an understanding of diverse learners, reflects an understanding of a variety of environments, and supports a range of learning outcomes.
- Consider effective strategies for use by classroom teachers of middle school grades, such as:
 - multi-age, multi-level instruction,
 - curriculum integration
 - cooperative learning
 - exploratories and mentoring
 - student assessment and evaluation
 - resource-based learning
 - classroom workshops, and
 - teacher teaming and advisories.

Guided by the *Intermediate Level Handbook* (draft) 1996 by the recommendations of the Carnegie Corporation; by research and discussion; and by the topics contained in the Terms of Reference; the working group prepared *Teaching and Learning with Young Adolescents: Celebrating Diversity*. This document, developed as a basis of support for teachers, is intended to be used as a catalyst for meeting the learning needs of youth.

