Summation of Article by Susan Nixon

Review of article from **Middle School Journal**, Volume 4: Number 2, pgs. 58-62, November 2009

**“Engaging Students and Ensuring Success” by Janet High and P. Gayle Andrews**

This article explores the question “What motivates students to engage in the school environment?”

Quoting verbatim from the article “…when students can see the link between the learning process and their future, they engage because the task is personally important.” Teachers must provide experience that is relevant and can lead to meaningful engagement.

Recent studies (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, Rhodes, 2007, Skinner & Belmont, 1993) have found three components of engagement. They are the behavioral, affective and cognitive components.

* The behavioral component includes task persistence, regular attendance and sustained attention.
* The affective component includes excitement, interest in learning and a sense of belonging.
* The cognitive component is shown through motivation, wanting academic challenge, positive self-concept and aspirations for further education.

The article illustrates the difference between a typical lesson and an engaging one. The task given is the same in both lessons – to find perimeter. The typical task calls for them to complete the problems from their math workbook. This has no connection for the students to any real world task. In the second lesson teaching the same concept, the task is also to find perimeter, but the students are working from blueprints created by a landscape architect who is working with the students to create an outdoor classroom on school grounds as a service learning project that the students designed. The brick wall that is the perimeter piece could make a difference in the cost depending on how the problem is solved.

Both tasks are the same, but the second task is more likely to have higher value and interest to the students. It relates directly to their world, and with the higher level of interest comes a higher level of learning.

One more important concept that this article illustrates is that teachers do not have to be great performers to have great student engagement. Rather they have to know how to have great STUDENT performances. Schoolwork that is engaging creates this.

An insightful piece to this article involved the fact that students should have a voice in their curriculum and their opinions should be honored. A student’s environment and life should be an important context for how your material is presented. Students in downtown Miami might be presented with material far different than students in Point Barrow, Alaska, even if they teach the same concept.

Lastly, and probably the most important part of this piece, was that an engaging part of the curriculum was a caring teacher/student relationship. The article also mentioned school tone and support of teachers; that teachers must feel respected and supported as well. They cited a study (Black, 2006) that showed that students are willing to attempt difficult lessons if they feel supported and respected. Students discuss what expectations the teachers hold for them. A structured, relevant curriculum with meaningful experiences **creates** engagement.