

# Changing By The Minute

## Discussion Guide for Professional Development with Educators (62min film)



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### Pre-Readings

Suggested reading prior to viewing the film.

#### Articles

- Rebora, A. (2020). How teens' brains are different. *Educational Leadership*, 77(8), 58–59.  
[https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/journals/ed\\_lead/el202005\\_brain.pdf](https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el202005_brain.pdf)

- Roehlkepartain, E., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T., & Scales, P. (2017). *Relationships first: Creating connections that help young people thrive*. Search Institute. <http://page.search-institute.org/relationships-first>
- The Pennsylvania State University. (2017). *Promoting social and emotional learning in the middle and high school years*. [https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/penn\\_state\\_middle\\_high\\_brief\\_final.pdf](https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/penn_state_middle_high_brief_final.pdf)
- Williams, J.L., Mims, L., & Johnson, H.E. (2019). *Young adolescent development*. [https://education.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/files/Youth\\_Nex\\_files/AR\\_MS\\_BRIEF1\\_D.pdf](https://education.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/files/Youth_Nex_files/AR_MS_BRIEF1_D.pdf)

#### Books

- Bishop, P.A., & Harrison, L.M. (2021). *The successful middle school: This we believe*. AMLE. [Should be read prior to the Gallery Walk Activity.]
- Brinegar, K.M., Harrison, L.M., & Hurd, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Equity & cultural responsiveness in the middle grades* (see especially pp. 3-21).

## **General Discussion by Sections of the Film**

Time permitting, have teachers watch the entire film in one session or show the film in sections (sections and times listed below). Ask teachers to respond to each question with evidence from the film.

### **Section 1: The School** (opening through 12:11)

*(Synopsis: Students create individual schedules, students work in mixed grade groups Science of Death class, students comment on working in mixed grade groups, teachers discuss teaching multiple subjects.)*

### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- Physical environment
- Scheduling
- Unstructured times (class transitions, recess, before/after school)
- Student grouping (mixed grade, multiage, interest-based)
- Teacher-student relationships
- Curriculum
- Instructional strategies
- Academic expectations
- Behavioral expectations

## Questions:

- What do you notice about teaching and learning at the school in the film?
- What do you notice about the school's physical environment?
- In what ways is the school environment welcoming? Inclusive? Describe the environment at your school.
- How might school environments influence teaching and learning?
- What do you notice about the school's schedule? How does it reflect school priorities? What does your school's schedule say about what your school community values?
- What do you notice about the unstructured times of day (e.g., class transitions, recess, before and after school)?
- In what ways were students grouped at the Center School and why? How does this compare to your experience when you were a middle school student?
- In what ways do teachers foster relationships with students in the film? In what ways do you foster positive relationships with students?
- What do you notice about the curriculum at this school? What instructional strategies do you observe? In what ways were these responsive to these students? How would you describe your teaching approach to someone who has never seen you teach?
- What academic and behavioral expectations do you notice in the film? What kinds of expectations are developmentally and culturally responsive? In what ways are your own expectations of students developmentally and culturally responsive?

## Section 2: Friendship (4 mins long, begin 12:11 – end 16:09)

*(Synopsis: Students discuss making and keeping friends, friend groups, and social drama.)*

## Possible Discussion Topics:

- Friendships
- Peer relations
- Social emotional learning
- Choices

## Questions:

- What stands out to you about the young adolescent experiences highlighted in this film?
- What do you notice in the film about friendships, peer relations, and social drama?
- How important are friendships during early adolescence?
- How might such experiences impact young adolescents' schooling? Personal lives? How do these experiences impact the way you build relationships with students?
- How might these experiences impact the way you teach?

- Based on students' experiences, what might be good topics to include in advisory? Does your school offer advisory? If so, what topics are part of advisory and why?
- What social emotional skills do students exhibit (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills)?
- How can educators support the development of positive peer relationships and social emotional skills?
- In what ways do the experiences of the young adolescents highlighted in this film reflect/seem different from those of the young adolescents at your school?

## **Section 3: Identity** (15 mins long, begin 16:09 – end 31:41)

*(Synopsis: Students discuss the Odyssey in Latin Class, student wears camouflage to Bird Science, principal discusses giving students space to “be whoever they are,” Science of Death class discusses brain exchange, students and parents discuss the role of Theater Arts, students complete Self Assessments.)*

### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- Developmental domains (e.g., physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, social-emotional)
- Social and cultural identities (e.g., gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, religion, (dis)ability, citizenship status, grade, history of academic achievement)
- Self-expression and self-definition (e.g., clothing, outside interests, activities, hobbies)

### **Questions:**

- What developmental characteristics and social identities of young adolescents do you observe in the film?
- In the film, a teacher asks students “What makes you YOU?” Why is this an important question to ask young adolescents?
- What roles do self-expression and self-definition play in early adolescence?
- In what ways do the various characteristics of young adolescent development affect the lives of middle school students?
- Which social or cultural identities carry greater privilege than others? How does this play out in your classroom?
- How do you create opportunities for young adolescents to explore who they are, who they want to be and do not want to be, and how they express their identity?
- How does the school support the development of student voice and confident self-expression?
- What is the purpose of Theater Arts at Center School (TACS)?
- How do you promote self and social awareness in students?

- In the film, a student reads from a letter to families about the upcoming family conference night. The letter says: “Our main objective is for the students to learn that learning is their responsibility.” What could this mean for a student’s sense of identity?

## **Section 4: Choices** (15 mins long, begin 31:41 – end 46:29)

*(Synopsis: Teachers discuss frequent schedule changes and the need for flexibility, students play dodgeball, students attend a bake sale, students discuss common mistakes made by middle schoolers, students get in trouble, teacher comments on the morals of friendship vs. morals of the classroom, students write anti-valentine Valentines and decorate for the Valentine’s Day party.)*

### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- Adult rules and expectations
- Adolescent choices
- Social norms, expectations, impulses
- Teacher-student relationships
- Romantic interests

### **Questions:**

- What choices do young adolescents face in middle school?
- In the film teachers and students comment on frequent changes to the schedule “so it’s all just about changing and being ready to change.” What choices are involved in coping with this kind of environment?
- What choices (positive and negative) do students make in the film?
- What social emotional skills do students exhibit (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills)? In what ways do you support social emotional development?
- In what ways do peers influence young adolescents’ choices? At your school, what role do peers play in influencing choices students make?
- Educators often have different social norms than students. How do educators take that into consideration when evaluating students’ choices?
- In what ways do teachers foster relationships with students in the film?
- What do you notice about romantic interests?
- What might be the purpose of the anti-valentine Valentines?
- How do you create a supportive environment for your students to make healthy choices/decisions?

## **Section 5: Community** (16 mins long, begin 46:29 – end film)

*(Synopsis: Students participate in Facing History class, parent comments on her son's diverse friends and "a level of acceptance that is hard to find in world," students reflect on a friend's pronoun change, students participate in a People Hunt, two girls discuss a disagreement they had over social media, 5th grade Huck succeeds in math, two girls discuss a friend who takes pills, the principal comments on the mix of pains adolescents go through, school year comes to a close, students discuss moving up and moving on.)*

### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- School culture
- Instructional strategies
- Diversity of peer groups
- Gender identity
- Social media
- Acceptance and inclusivity
- Student responsibility

### **Questions:**

- What stands out to you about the school community in the film?
- In what ways do teachers teach about community? Inclusivity? Responsibility for others? In what ways do you teach about these topics?
- What do you notice about diversity of friendships and peer groups in the film?
- Two girls in the film discuss their friend changing pronouns. What did you notice about that conversation?
- How do school practices and traditions help establish a sense of community in the film? At your school?
- What do you notice about how students treat one another? Describe how students at your school treat one another.
- How does social media affect a sense of community? What can you infer about the role of social media in the lives of young adolescents at your school?
- One teacher says, "We want kids to come out of this school loving learning and knowing how to learn." Do you see teachers cultivating a love of learning in the film? What strategies do you see employed to help students learn how to learn? What strategies are used at your school to help students learn how to learn?
- What is the relationship between a sense of school belonging and individual student responsibility? How do you balance this at your school and in your classroom?



## **Discussion by Middle Grades Concepts**

*(The middle grades concepts addressed in this section are defined in the pre-reading text: "The Successful Middle School: This We Believe." AMLE.)*

### ***Culture and Community***

#### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- School environment
- Teacher knowledge of and respect for young adolescents
- Teacher-student relationships
- Academic and personal development
- Adults who advocate for students
- School safety
- Advisory

#### **Questions:**

- What can you infer about the school culture / school community at The Center School?
- What do you notice about the school environment at The Center School?
- In what ways is the school environment welcoming? Inclusive? Describe your school environment.

- In what ways may a school environment foster a sense of belonging?
- How might school environments influence teaching and learning?
- What is the purpose of Theater Arts at Center School (TACS)?
- How do teachers in the film demonstrate understanding of young adolescents?
- In what ways do we see teachers foster relationships with students in this film? In what ways do you foster positive relationships with students?
- In what ways do adults in the film support student social-emotional growth? In what ways do you support the social emotional development of your students?
- How do teachers advocate for students in the film?
- What other ways can teachers advocate for their students?
- In what ways do adults in the film foster a sense of physical and/or psychological safety for students?
- In what ways do students foster a sense of physical and/or psychological safety for their peers?
- What is the role of advisors and advisory in middle school?
- What behavioral expectations do you notice in the film?

## ***Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment***

### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- Classes
- Curriculum
- Teaching strategies/methods
- Academic expectations
- Behavioral expectations
- Assessments
- Teacher understanding of content area

### **Questions:**

- What do you notice about the curriculum at this school? What instructional strategies do you observe? In what ways were these responsive to students?
- How would you describe your teaching approach to someone who has never seen you teach?
- How important is it for teachers to have depth of content knowledge?
- What academic expectations do you notice? What kinds of expectations are developmentally and culturally responsive? In what ways are your own expectations of students developmentally and culturally responsive?
- How could you leverage students' curiosity to design engaging curriculum for classes?



- To what extent were learning opportunities differentiated or personalized?
- How do teachers support Huck's academic journey through the math curriculum?
- How might you design lessons and units that connect to and build on the cultures and identities of students?
- In what ways do teachers in the film make use of young adolescents' needs for socialization to support student learning? How does your school make use of their need for socialization to support student learning?
- What forms of assessment and evaluation do you notice?

## ***School Leadership and Organization***

### **Possible Discussion Topics:**

- Principal
- Teacher leaders
- Multiage grouping
- Scheduling

### **Questions:**

- What do you notice about school leadership at The Center School?
- What is the role of the principal?
- What is the role of teacher leadership in middle schools?
- What does the schedule tell us about the priorities of the school?
- In what ways can the school schedule support or hinder learning?
- What do you notice about the unstructured times of day (class transitions, recess, before/after school)?
- What do you notice about the grouping of students?
- How can grouping be used to foster relationships between students? Between teachers and students?
- In what ways does the multiage grouping at The Center School foster a sense of student responsibility?

# Suggested Activities

Three activities that can be used in conjunction with the film.

## Activity Option #1: Fostering a Responsive Environment

### Before Viewing the Film:

- On a piece of paper have each teacher create two three column tables. Label the first “School Environment” and the second “Classroom Environment” (see Tables 1, and 2).
- Ask each teacher to list elements that make up a responsive school environment on the left side of the first table and elements that make up a responsive classroom environment on the left side of the second table. Encourage educators to consider both development and social identity (e.g., race, culture, disability, home life).

### While Viewing the Film:

Ask teachers to jot down in the middle column of the respective table elements of responsive school and classroom environments highlighted in the film.

### After Viewing the Film:

- Have teachers work in pairs and come to a consensus on the elements of a responsive school and classroom environment highlighted in the film. Have each pair partner with another pair and repeat the process.
- Have each quartet share out with the group and generate a list of all responses on a board visible to all and tally those that are repeated more than once.
- Engage teachers in a large group discussion (or series of larger group discussions depending on the number of teachers) on the importance of responsive school and classroom environments for young adolescent learners. Link the conversation back to your choice of the readings listed above. Connect key concepts back to the film (e.g., relationship development, personalization, sense of school belonging, importance of peers, school structures that produce a sense of personalization and belonging).
- Ask teachers to compare the elements of their school and classroom environment to the list generated by the group. Engage in a group conversation based on what stands out (e.g., What similarities are there? What stands out as being different?).

- For the school environment table, ask teachers to think about ways to enrich their school environment to be more responsive based on what they learned from the readings, the film, and this activity. Write these ideas down in the right column.
- For the classroom environment table, ask them to think about ways to enrich their classroom environment to be more responsive based on what they learned from the readings, the film, and this activity. Write these ideas down in the right column.
- Have each teacher self-select the best idea generated for improving their school environment and for enriching their classroom environment on each list. Engage in a stand-and-share protocol and have each teacher share their ideas.

**Table 1.**      *School Environment Three Column Table*

My School Environment	School Environment in Film	Ways to Foster a More Responsive School Environment

**Table 2.**      *Classroom Environment Three Column Table*

My Classroom Environment	Classroom Environment in Film	Ways to Foster a More Responsive Classroom Environment

## **Activity Option #2: High-Quality Responsive Instruction**

### **Before Viewing the Film:**

- Ask teachers to describe responsive instruction for young adolescent learners. Encourage the teachers to consider students' unique social identities (e.g., race, culture, disability, developmental stage), and experiences that students bring to school. What does this type of instruction look like and sound like in practice? Is it student-centered? Teacher directed? Personalized? Have teachers write these thoughts down to refer to later.
- Using the readings as a guide, have teachers work in pairs to determine what the readings state about high-quality instruction that is responsive to the needs of young adolescent learners. In what ways does instruction respond to the developmental and cultural needs of young adolescent learners? Have each pair share out with the larger group. Write down these responses on a board visible to all.
- Compare the lists. Discuss similarities and differences between each.

### **While Viewing the Film:**

Have teachers take notes on the types of instruction they see in the film. Ask them to describe what the instructional scenes in the film portray. What does it look like? What does it sound like? In what ways might instruction respond to the developmental and cultural needs of the students?

### **After Viewing the Film:**

Have teachers engage in a conversation about the ways the instruction observed in the film compares to their understanding of instruction that is responsive to the needs of young adolescent learners.

## Activity Option #3: The Successful Middle School

### Before Viewing the Film:

- Have teachers read *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* prior to engaging in this activity.
- Divide teachers into groups (of four people or fewer). Assign each group one of three categories (see page 9, *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe*).
  - Culture and community
  - Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
  - Leadership and organization
- Have each teacher create a Successful Middle School Characteristics Table (see Table 3).
- Tell teachers that they will watch the film in its entirety in one sitting or by sections (depending on allocated time). Ask them to look for examples of each characteristic of their assigned category. They should write down all examples they find, noting the time/place in the film the example occurs.
- 

### While Viewing the Film:

Ask teachers to complete their chart with examples for the various characteristics of their assigned category (see Table 4, sample answers).

### After Viewing the Film:

- Have teachers share their examples from the film in their groups.
- Have teacher groups list examples of what their school is already doing to support each characteristic in their assigned area.
- Ask teachers to discuss what their school could do to support each characteristic in their assigned area.
- After each group discusses their ideas, ask each group to decide on one idea to share with their leadership team. Have them create a plan to share that includes:
  - a. Name of idea
  - b. What characteristic/characteristics of *The Successful Middle School* it supports
  - c. What the idea is
  - d. Who it involves
  - e. Why it is necessary
  - f. Where it is to take place
  - g. How it can be accomplished
- Once all groups have created a plan, have groups share their ideas with the larger group.

**Table 3.**      *The Successful Middle School Characteristics Table*

<b>Culture and Community</b>			
	Provide examples from the film	List examples of what your school is already doing	List ideas of things your school can do
Educators respect and value young adolescents.			
The school environment is welcoming, inclusive, and affirming for all.			
Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate.			
The school engages families as valued partners.			
<b>Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</b>			
	Provide examples from the film	List examples of what your school is already doing	List ideas of things your school can do
Educators are specifically prepared to teach young adolescents and possess a depth of understanding in the content areas they teach.			
Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and diverse.			

Health, wellness, and social-emotional competence are supported in curricula, school-wide programs and related policies.			
Instruction fosters learning that is active, purposeful, and democratic.			
Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it.			
<b>Leadership and Organization</b>			
	Provide examples from the film	List examples of what your school is already doing	List ideas of things your school can do
Policies and practices are student-centered, unbiased, and fairly implemented.			
Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships.			

**Table 4.** *The Successful Middle School Characteristics Table Example*

<b>Culture and Community</b>			
	Provide examples from the film	List examples of what your school is already doing	List ideas of things your school can do

Educators respect and value young adolescents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to Huck's body language, a teacher checks in with him and they work together to understand his schedule. (3:13-3:29)</li> </ul>		
The school environment is welcoming, inclusive, and affirming for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal explains how they provide a place where students can explore who they are from one day to the next. (19:05-19:21)</li> <li>• Parents talking about acceptance and diversity. (48:38-49:01)</li> <li>• Students discuss how classmate helped them understand gender preferred pronouns followed by Chance explaining how he learned to be more accepting from the accepting nature of the school community. (49:00- 49:48)</li> <li>• Annual People Hunt (49:48- 50:12)</li> <li>• Student speaks to the ability to be herself with no one giving her a hard time about it at Center and how thankful she is for the opportunity. (59:26-59:50)</li> </ul>		
Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress reports and student advisors. (26:36- 28:18)</li> <li>• If you get in trouble, there are consequences and</li> </ul>		



	you could get sent to advisor. (38:30- 42:04)		
The school engages families as valued partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress report meetings require students and parents to attend. (27:00-27:27)</li> <li>• Math quiz requires parent and advisor signature. (29:15-29:22)</li> </ul>		
<b>Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</b>			
	Provide examples from the film	List examples of what your school is already doing	List ideas of things your school can do
Educators are specifically prepared to teach young adolescents and possess a depth of understanding in the content areas they teach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math teacher demonstrates empathy when working with Huck on his math assignment. (30:20-31:27)</li> <li>• Adults understand the dynamics and role of friendship in students' lives, teacher speaking on morals of friendship trump morals of classroom (42:01- 42:20)</li> </ul>		
Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and diverse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Latin class for 8th grade reading Ulysses. (16:17- 17:00)</li> <li>• A well rounded education is more important than the NY State test. (42:47-43:02)</li> </ul>		

Health, wellness, and social-emotional competence are supported in curricula, school-wide programs and related policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students reflect on their own progress in their courses in preparation for family conferences. (27:49-28:16)</li> </ul>		
Instruction fosters learning that is active, purposeful, and democratic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poses a question about “Who is it?” to a group of students that fosters critical and creative thinking. (20:05- 21:57)</li> <li>Multiage grouping affords opportunities for older students to become experts and teach younger students to increase depth of understanding. (04:58-5:38)</li> <li>5th grade math help is student led. (36:17-37:14)</li> <li>Keeping students out of the circle Facing History class. (46:33-48:30)</li> </ul>		
Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly math assessments are given. (11:25- 11:49 and 29:05- 29:14)</li> </ul>		
<b>Leadership and Organization</b>			
	Provide examples from the film	List examples of what your school is already doing	List ideas of things your school can do
Policies and practices are student-centered, unbiased, and fairly implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers explaining how principal loves chaos and that it is good for the kids. (32:16- 33:31)</li> </ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not right shoes, no participation in gym. (33:32- 33:50)</li> </ul>		
Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each student's schedule is individually made. (2:31- 4:18)</li> <li>• Multiage grouping/students are taking mixed grades classes. (4:45- 6:26)</li> <li>• Teachers and students work together to solve scheduling problems. (3:53- 4:21)</li> <li>• Unstructured times (e.g., before school, recess) are highly preferred and allow opportunities for students to foster peer relationships. (12:56- 13:16)</li> </ul>		

## Changing By The Minute

A 62min documentary film providing an asset-based view of early adolescence, and part of the “Changing By The Minute documentary tool kit.” These resources are intended to help professionals, students, and families think optimistically and creatively about the middle school years with the hope of alleviating some of the stress and distress experienced by early adolescents.

### Film Credits

Producer/Director  
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Camilla Calamandrei

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YOUTH-NEX



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