Middle School Moments

Discussion Guide for Professional Development with Educators (10min film)

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Pre-Readings

Suggested reading prior to viewing the film.

Articles
- Bouton, B. (2021) Social emotional development of young adolescents: fact and fiction
  https://www.amle.org/social-emotional-development-of-young-adolescents-fact-and-fiction/
- Brinegar, K.M., Caskey, M.M. (2022) Developmental characteristics of young adolescents: research
  https://www.amle.org/developmental-characteristics-of-young-adolescents/
- 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

Books
- Bishop, P.A., & Harrison, L.M. (2021). *The successful middle school: This we believe.* AMLE.
- Brinegar, K.M., Harrison, L.M., & Hurd, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Equity & cultural responsiveness in the middle grades* (see especially pp. 3-21).

Discussion Questions

After viewing the 10 min. film, divide into interdisciplinary teams, small grade-level groups, or other small groupings. Ask each group to discuss the following questions using evidence from the film and their professional experiences to support their responses.

Topic 1: Young Adolescent Experiences

Areas for Discussion:
- Friendships, peer relations, drama
- Social media
- Social emotional learning
- Romantic interests
- Choices
- Mistakes
- Accountability

Questions:
- What stands out to you about the young adolescent experiences highlighted in this film?
- In the film, students talk about friendship and friend groups, making friends, and sticking with a group of friends. How important are friendships? What do you believe the role of friend groups play in the lives of young adolescents?
- What do you notice about friendships, peer relations, drama?
- What can you infer about the role of social media in young adolescents' lives?
- What do you notice about romantic interests?
- Based on students' experiences, what might be good topics to include in advisory?

Topic 2: Developmental Characteristics and Social Identities

Areas for Discussion:
- Physical characteristics
- Intellectual characteristics
- Moral characteristics
- Psychological characteristics
- Social-emotional characteristics
- Social identities

Questions:

- What developmental characteristics of young adolescents do you observe in the film?
- In what ways do the characteristics of young adolescent development play out in the lives of middle school students in the film? In your students' lives?
- In what ways do students exhibit social emotional learning and skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness and relationship skills)?
- What social identities do you observe or hear about in the film?
- In what way are you developmentally and culturally responsive to your students?
- Based on your experience, how does understanding the characteristics of young adolescent development inform how you teach?

Topic 3: School Environment

Areas for Discussion:

- Physical environment
- Schedule
- Unstructured times (class transitions, recess, before/after school)

Questions:

- How would you describe the school environment in the film?
- What do you notice about the physical environment?
- What do you notice about the school's schedule in the film? How does it reflect what the school prioritizes?
- How does the school convey a sense of inclusivity and belonging? What aspects of your own school convey this sense?
- What do you recall about the unstructured times of day (e.g., class transitions, recess, before and after school)? What roles do such times play in young adolescents' lives?
- What can you infer about how school environment may influence teaching and learning?

Topic 4: Teaching and Learning

Areas for Discussion:

- Teacher-student relationships
- Classes
- Curriculum
- Responsive Instruction

- Teaching strategies/methods
- Academic expectations
- Behavioral expectations

Questions:
- What do you notice about teaching and learning at the school in the film?
- In what ways do teachers foster relationships with students in the film? In what ways do you foster positive relationships with students?
- What can you infer about the classes at this school? Curriculum? Teaching strategies and methods? How would you describe your classes, your curriculum, and teaching strategies/methods to someone who has never seen you teach?
- What is expected of students, academically and behaviorally in the film? What kinds of expectations would be developmentally and culturally responsive?

Topic 5: Choices Faced by Young Adolescents

Areas for Discussion:
- Peer groups
- Social media
- Behavior
- Romantic interests
- Academics

Questions:
- What choices do young adolescents face in middle school?
- What can you recall from the film about student choices (positive and negative)?
- In what ways do peers influence the choices students make in the film? At your school, what role do peers play in influencing choices students make?
- How can teachers help students practice making decisions in a healthy and supported environment?

Question 6: Peer Groups

Areas for Discussion:
- Identity
- Belonging
- Decision-making

Questions:

- What role do peer groups play in young adolescents' lives?
- What do you notice about diversity of friendships and peer groups in the film?
- Why is a sense of belonging to a peer group important to young adolescents?
- In what ways may educators support the development of positive peer relationships?

Suggested Activities

Two possible activities to 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 charts. 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 of 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 what they believe is responsive instruction for young adolescent learners, instruction that takes into consideration the unique identities and experiences that students bring to school. Encourage the teachers to consider understanding who students are developmentally, as well as their social identities (e.g., race, culture, disability, home life). What does this type of instruction look 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 and 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.

Y'All R Real Ones: Middle School Moments

A documentary short created as part of the Changing By The Minute documentary tool kit, providing an asset-based view of early adolescence. 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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Aaron Srdoc

Designer & Animator
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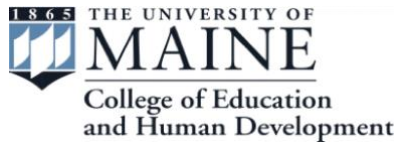Jenise L. Freeland
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