Mark Springer, a Radnor Middle School teacher who helped develop the renowned Watershed seventh-grade interdisciplinary program, has recently seen his article, "Seeing the Future of Middle Level Education Requires a Mirror rather than a Crystal Ball," published in the May edition of the Middle School Journal.

Springer currently co-teaches the eighth-grade interdisciplinary program Soundings, which he also developed and initiated in 1998. He is the recipient of the National Middle School Association's Distinguished Educator Award and author of Watershed: a Successful Voyage into Integrative Learning and Soundings: a Democratic Student-Centered Education.

This five-page article explores the methods by which middle-level teachers and administrators can best prepare students for the 21st century, with its myriad avenues of communications and overwhelming amounts of information. Springer asserts that the tools to achieve this are already in the classroom, but that we need to reassess the ways we use those tools if our students are to succeed in the changing global environment.

Citing such sources as Alvin Toffler, the National Center on Education and the Economy, and Thomas Friedman, among others, Springer stresses the importance of engaging students at the middle level in their own education, reflecting the NMSA This We Believe philosophy of creating "curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory."

"In today's flattening world, as we prepare our students for tomorrow's world, we can't continue to rely on the 19th-century system of education that, unfortunately, remains so entrenched," Springer contends. We must develop new strategies to guide our students beyond the passive task of merely acquiring information and on to the active task of thinking - of analyzing and applying information. And that process has to begin in middle school when young, developing minds are the most receptive and their natural curiosity is peaking.

"In short, we need to build a new system of education that empowers and challenges both students and teachers alike to become more actively engaged in learning how to learn."

Springer and his co-teacher, Mary Canniff, do that on a daily basis in Soundings, which "challenges eighth graders to explore student-selected themes that merge their adolescent concerns with global issues? As they experience this process with its emphasis on both quality performance and higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and assessment, students master essential skills and concepts from all academic disciplines and apply them to real world issues."
Media Information
Lisa Williamson
lisa.williamson@rtsd.org
http://www.rtsd.org
135 S. Wayne Ave.
Wayne
PA
19087
United States