

**Title:** *From Advocacy to Action: Moving Beyond Talk and Toward Enactment*

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**Summary for SIG Program:**

Our students create young adolescent advocacy projects, but do they ever move beyond planning to enactment? This study follows a group of students in their subsequent internships to find out.

**Objective(s) of Presentation:**

The presentation will provide insight into the ways a group of prospective middle grades educators view advocacy and enact it in their classrooms (or fail to enact it). It will investigate the level of commitment to advocacy and examine the potential barriers to advocacy faced by the students when attempting to enact their plans. The objective is to share the findings with other middle level teacher educators who promote advocacy in their classrooms and programs as a way to assess the effectiveness and impact of the work we ask our students to complete. The hope is that we can come together as a community to share our experiences and critically reflect on our programs and practices to determine whether or not they achieve the intended outcomes.

**Abstract of Presentation:**

*This We Believe* (2010) and other works committed to middle level philosophy and instruction view advocacy as an essential component to working with young adolescents. They posit that each student benefits greatly from having at least one adult advocate who is responsible for supporting them through their academic and personal development. Our program infuses advocacy throughout, emphasizing it early on and asking students to create an advocacy plan that addresses the needs of a particular group of students they might encounter in their internships, student teaching, and early years. The intent of the project is to foster in prospective middle grades teachers an understanding of how advocacy influences the identity development of young adolescents as well as a desire to serve as a liaison between the student and the school, family, community, and larger social world.

Our students embrace the opportunity to develop plans and gather information about a particular student group with whom they empathize or about whom they hope to learn more. These plans are shared with their colleagues in their first semester of our middle level education program. But what becomes of these plans? Do our students view them as merely a required assignment and forget

about them when they encounter students who need an adult advocate? Or are they fully committed to making a difference in the lives of young adolescents who need an adult who can listen, care, and guide? This study is an attempt to follow a group of students who have already completed their advocacy projects. To what degree do they move beyond talk to action? Do they enact what they once espoused in their advocacy projects and presentations? Or do they feel disempowered to do anything when faced with the students they claimed they would advocate for? This is what I hope to discover throughout the coming year as I continue to work with our students in their courses and their field assignments. I hope to find that they seek out opportunities to use their knowledge and provide for young adolescents the “continuity of caring and support” adult advocates can and should. If I find that they do not carry their plans for advocacy beyond their university courses and into their middle grades classrooms, I hope to better understand why they do not so. This study can provide important information to help me, my program and department, and other teacher educators better understand the motivations for and barriers to enactment of advocacy with young adolescents.