

MMG and FS at TDS . . . OMG

One Instructional Facilitator's Story



Nerd Power!!

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
The Talent Development Model	4
About TDS	4
The Curriculum.....	5
Mastering the Middle Grades and Freshman Seminar.....	6
Curriculum Coaches and Instructional Facilitators.....	6
The Lenses	9
Curriculum Integration.....	10
Curriculum Integration Rubric	13
Differentiation	14
Differentiation Rubric.....	16
Social and Emotional Learning.....	17
Social and Emotional Learning Rubric.....	19
An Evaluation of Mastering the Middle Grades and Freshman Seminar	20
Basic Structure of MMG and FS	20
Evaluation of MMG and FS by Curriculum Integration.....	22
Evaluation of MMG and FS by Differentiation.....	25
Evaluation of MMG and FS by Social and Emotional Learning.....	27
In Conclusion	29

Introduction

Every classroom is unique. It changes with every new student that walks through the door, every teacher that leads it, and every lesson being taught. It changes because of the community it is in, the district administration, the school administration, and with each child's parents. Any curriculum designed for our nation's schools will attempt to account for these differences, but they are so vast that they will eventually fall short and require adaptation.

Take for example the curricula produced by Talent Development Secondary (TDS), a part of Johns Hopkins University. They have developed curricula for the core four subjects (math, science, English, and social studies) as well as a several *Student Success* (the focus of this report) courses that focus on study skills, conflict resolution and social skills, and looking forward to a post-secondary life. TDS recognizes that no amount of curriculum writing can account for the variances that teachers face in the classroom, so as a part of their program they offer not only the curriculum, but professional coaching and support for teachers to implement that curriculum in their classrooms. This is where I come in.

In my role as an Instructional Facilitator I support a school's use of TDS's *Student Success* curriculum: Mastering the Middle Grades (MMG) and Freshman Seminar (FS). Both are designed to support the students through their middle school years as well as when they transition to high school. Both focus on supporting student success by developing study skills, social skills, conflict resolution techniques, and post-secondary planning and motivation. In the end the purpose of both is to focus the students on the here and now by helping them dream/plan for what comes next.

The overall story being told is of a teacher, who may or may not know anything about TDS or their *Student Success* curriculum, and how they can make that curriculum their own. This story will be told through the viewpoint of someone who has both taught the courses as well as supported others as a curriculum coach and instructional facilitator.

After a brief description of Talent Development, their *Student Success* curriculum and teacher support system, this report will detail how this curriculum stands up in the light of three lenses. The first is through James Beane's notion of an Integrated Curriculum in which lines and distinctions between subjects are blurred in favor of overarching themes and concepts. The second, Carol Ann Tomlinson's method of differentiation in the classroom. Both MMG and FS will be evaluated based on how easily the content, process, and products may be adapted based on a student's readiness, interest, and learner profile. The final lens will be the Social and Emotional learning outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). TDS's *Student Success* curriculum specifically focuses on developing the students' understanding of human relations. Each year of which dedicates at least a full unit to social skills and conflict resolution strategies.

Section 1: The Talent Development Model

About Talent Development Secondary

The stated goal of TDS is “to create middle and high schools that meet all the students where they are and take them where they need to be in order to graduate from high school ready for college, career and civic life.”¹ From this vantage point TDS has developed a four pillared approach to education reform

- **Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities**
- **Specialized Curriculum and Coaching**
- **Tiered Student Supports**
- **Can-Do Climate for Students and Staff**

This approach was developed using research done at the *Everyone Graduates Center* at Johns Hopkins University on Early Warning Indicators: attendance, behavior, and course performance in math and English. A student that does not show up to school on a regular basis, does not follow school rules, and/or is not successful and Math and ELA are far less likely to graduate than their successful peers. These indicators can be used as early as the sixth grade to identify at-risk students is highly correlated with students that later dropped out of school.²

¹ As of May 5th, 2012 on the Talent Development Website <http://www.tdschools.org/about-talent-development-secondary/>

² Balfanz, R; Herzog, L & Mac Iver, D. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223-235. Retrieved from <http://web.jhu.edu/bin/g/b/PreventingStudentDisengagement.pdf>.

Each pillar of Talent Development Secondary was designed with those Early Warning Indicators in mind. Teachers in a school using TDS start with a research based curriculum, supported by facilitators from Johns Hopkins, that is designed for struggling students. They work in teams focusing on a small community of students they all share to develop supports and interventions for students falling off-track.

The Curriculum

These same teachers are using research-based curriculum that was designed to *meet* those students who are struggling in school. Those that are operating several grade levels behind where they *should* be and pull them up to where they *need* to be in order to navigate school with success.

For example, students struggling in English Language Arts are supported in their transition from middle to high school with Strategic Reading, a curriculum designed for students operating one or two grade levels behind. As they move up from their freshman year to upperclassmen they are supported along the way with a series of bridge courses designed to support them throughout their entire high school career and as they move up into increasingly difficult material and skills. For students working several grade levels behind their peers TDS developed the Accelerating Literacy for Adolescents (ALFA) Lab, designed for high school students working at as low as a 4th grade level. The same series of bridge courses and the intensive triple dose course is offered in Mathematics as well.

Mastering the Middle Grades (MMG) and Freshman Seminar (FS)

Taken concurrently with the Math and ELA curriculum is Mastering the Middle Grades³ and Freshman Seminar⁴. It is in MMG during their middle school years and FS in their transition to high school that they learn the basic keys to school success.⁵

- **Study Skills**
- **Social Skills**
- **Human Relations and Conflict Resolution**
- **Effective Use of Technology**
- **Post-Secondary Decision Making and Planning**

During the hard years of middle school and into their first year of high school they are explicitly taught, among other things, how to take notes, to study for tests, deal with their peers and authority with respect, and how to use word processors, presentation tools and the internet. They end the course with a look into their futures, either high school or beyond.

Curriculum Coaches and Instructional Facilitators

Imagine you are a teacher. It is a couple weeks before school starts and you have been assigned to teach MMG or FS. After hearing this news, picking up the teacher's manual and supporting materials, you walk to your room to figure out what this all means. You read through the

³Garriott, Maria. Mastering the Middle Grades. (Baltimore, MD: Center for the Social Organization of Schools, 2010).

⁴Howard Gradet et al. Freshman Seminar. (Baltimore, MD: Center for the Social Organization of Schools, 2009).

⁵As of May 5th, 2012 on the Talent Development Website <http://www.tdschools.org/about-talent-development-secondary/curriculum-instruction/student-success/>

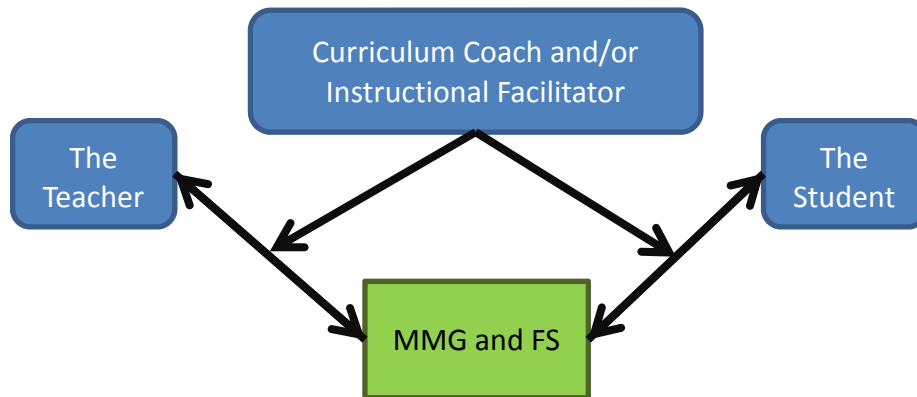
materials, flip through the student workbooks, readers, transparencies, and take a minute to scroll through the digital version of the class. You are a social studies teacher (the most commonly used teachers for this curriculum) and you have been handed materials that do not focus on history, geography, economics, or government. What do you do? How do you integrate all this new material into your own personal style?

It is this common occurrence that prompts TDS to provide support for teachers assigned to implement MMG and FS (and all their other curricula as well). This support is not a one dimensional Professional Development before school starts, which is provided, but also includes job embedded support throughout the entire school year. This provides teacher the necessary supports as they learn the curriculum and make it their own. TDS outlines the “boots on the ground” that are needed to support its curricula.⁶

- An onsite school transformation facilitator (STF) that acts as liaison between TDS and the school
- Full time curriculum coaches pulled from the school staff that may or may not be familiar with the curriculum but have proven themselves as master teachers to work one-on-one with the teachers
- TDS instructional facilitators that provide periodic support for both the coaches and teachers.

⁶ As of May 5th, 2012 on the Talent Development Website <http://www.tdschools.org/about-talent-development-secondary/professional-development/>

The Curriculum Coach and Instructional Facilitators focus on supporting both the teacher's understanding of TDS material as well as their instruction of that material in the classroom.



In my experience, it is at the intersection of the teacher and them, as well as the student and the material, which the facilitators and coaches operate. They develop and support the teacher's understanding of the curriculum and also how to modify and adapt the lessons for use with their students.

Section 2: The Lenses

As a teacher, when I was preparing my lesson plans, I would always imagine how the lesson would affect the many students I would see that day. The same is probably true of curriculum writers that no longer spend their days in front of a class, but imagine how their old students may have reacted. The problem is that those students are not the students that walk into every classroom that the curriculum may find itself. For a teacher to make something their own it requires modification, adaptation, and revision. As an instructional facilitator it falls on me to support them as they do this. This report attempts to evaluate TDS's *Student Success* curriculum through the following lenses.

Curriculum Integration: Courses that teach students how to be successful in their other courses scream out for the integration of those subjects into MMG and FS.

Differentiation: Courses that are designed for students who have previously been unsuccessful at school, they need modification/adaptation based on readiness, interest, and learning profiles.

Socio-Emotional Education: Courses that specifically focus on social skills and human relations are driven by Affective and Emotional Learning Theories.

It is through these three lenses that we will evaluate FS and MMG. Do they successfully erase subject and discipline lines to teach students to critically evaluate real world issues and problems? How well do they take into account students' different levels of readiness, interest, and learning styles? And finally, is the curriculum designed to help students understand themselves enough to learn how to work with their peers and authority figures successfully?

Curriculum Integration

In public education today there is a rigid separation of disciplines and subjects. Teachers are certified based on them, graduation requirements list and count the classes taken in each subject area, and state standardized tests, that all public school students are required to take, are divided by subject. The world is divided into specialties.

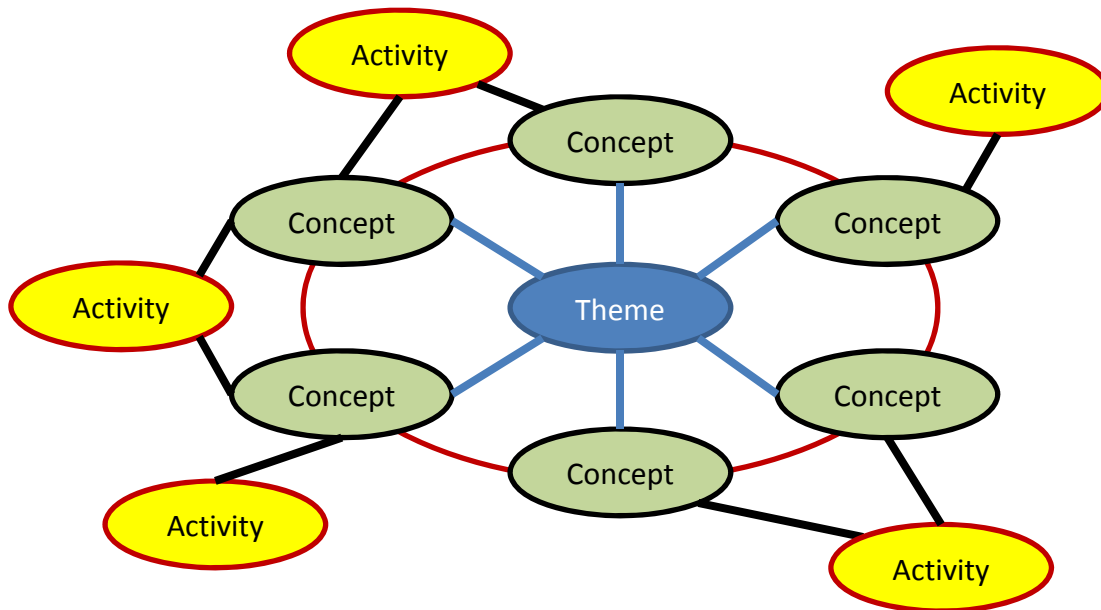
One voice against the disjointed curricula of subject and discipline based education is James A. Beane. His book, Curriculum Integration: Designing the core of democratic education, details the levels and types of curriculum integration and how it can occur case by case. According to Beane, there are four main aspects of integration⁷.

- **Integration of Experiences**
- **Social Integration**
- **Integration of Knowledge**
- **Integration as a Curriculum Design**

In essence, curriculum integration pulls together how we assimilate our different experiences into one life story, how common experiences and knowledge tie us together as a society, how new/old knowledge interacts when brought to bear on a single problem, and finally, how we design learning experiences for our students that focus on real world problems/issues that require a variety of skills and knowledge.

⁷ Beane, James. Curriculum Integration: Designing the Core of Democratic Education. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 4-9.

Any curricula designed using the model described by Beane would not follow traditional discipline lines, and would look like the diagram below.⁸



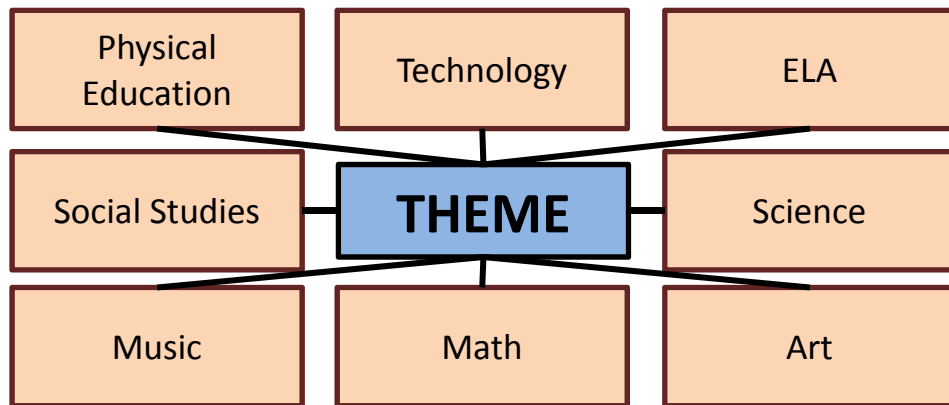
This diagram outlines Beane’s view of an integrated curriculum and it purposefully rejects any mention of subjects or disciplines and highlights overarching themes and concepts that cross discipline lines. Activities are then designed that best illustrate those concepts and the theme at large.

Beane is quick to point out that this approach does not equal a *Multidisciplinary* approach, where the many disciplines are brought to bear on a single theme. “Like the separate-subject approach, the multidisciplinary one still begins and ends with the subject-based content and skills, while curriculum integration begins and ends with the problem- and issue-centered organizing centers.”⁹

⁸ Beane, *Curriculum Integration*, 11.

⁹ Beane, *Curriculum Integration*, 9.

He illustrates the traditional multidisciplinary approach with the diagram similar to the one below.¹⁰



Each subject is called on to understand the overall theme, but unlike Beane's concept of full curriculum integration, they are *specifically* called on by discipline instead of as concepts.

¹⁰ Beane, Curriculum Integration, 12.

The Curriculum Integration Rubric

To evaluate MMG and FS I will be using the four key concepts that Beane outlines to answer some key questions about the TDS Curriculum. The questions below were derived from Beane’s explanation of the “Dimensions of Curriculum Integration.”¹¹

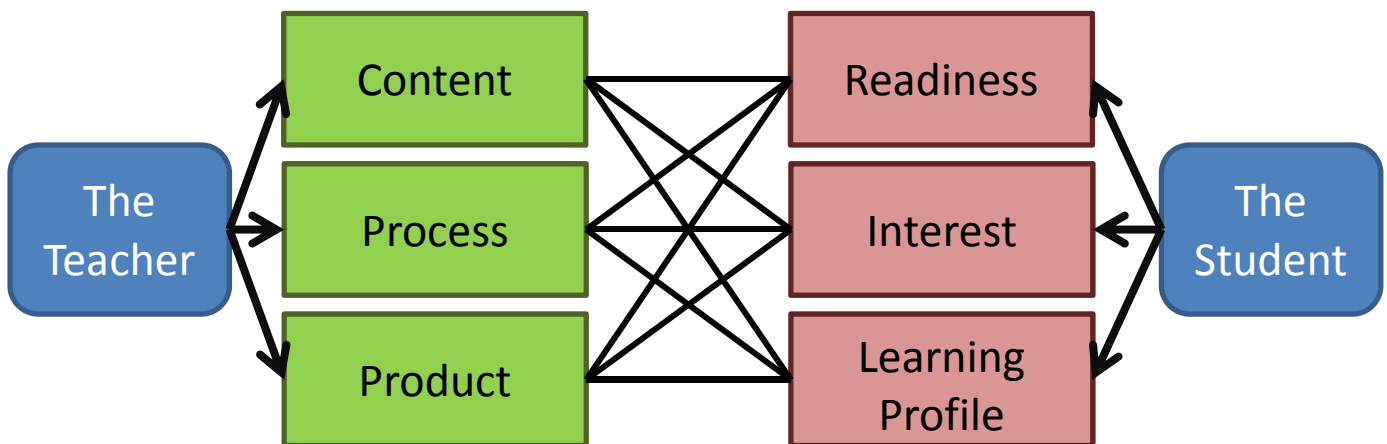
Key Concept	Key Questions to ask of the Curriculum
Integration of Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How well do MMG/FS integrate student perceptions, beliefs, values, etc? 2. What opportunities do MMG/FS provide students for reflection on those perceptions, beliefs, values, etc? 3. In what way do MMG/FS integrate new experiences with past ones and how does it call upon those past experiences to understand new issues/problems? 4. How deeply do MMG/FS embed themselves in the student’s experiences?
Social Integration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How often do MMG/FS provide students with the opportunity to create shared experiences? 2. In what way do MMG/FS promote a sense of “common good”? 3. What principles of “general education” are apparent in the MMG/FS curriculum? 4. In what way do MMG/FS provide students the ability to determine their own learning experiences?
Integration of Knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do MMG/FS organize and use knowledge? 2. How often do MMG/FS fragment/isolate knowledge into subjects/disciplines? 3. Do MMG/FS present problems/issues within or without regard for subject/discipline? 4. In what way is knowledge integrated into the lives of students and vice versus?
Integration as a Curriculum Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the curriculum organized around problems and issues that are of personal and social significance in the real world? 2. Are learning experiences in relation to the organizing center planned so as to integrate pertinent knowledge in the context of the organizing center? 3. Is knowledge developed and used to address the organizing center currently under study rather than to prepare for some later test or grade level? 4. Is emphasis placed on substantive projects and other activities that involve real application of knowledge? 5. Does this lead the students to integrate the curriculum experiences into their schemes of meaning and to experience the democratic process of problem solving?

¹¹ Beane, Curriculum Integration, 4-9.

Differentiation

Carol Tomlinson starts her how-to book on differentiation with the line, “Kids of the same age aren’t all alike when it comes to learning , any more than they are alike in terms of size ,hobbies, personalities, or likes and dislikes,”¹² This line defines the single greatest issue in the design and implementation of any curricula, the student. It makes the assumption that if our job as elementary and secondary teachers is to educate elementary and secondary students, then we must meet them where they are, not where we *want* them to be or where *we* are. Tomlinson’s How to Differentiate Instruction in Mized Ability Classrooms is a manual for teachers to do just that. To walk into their classrooms every day and meet the students where they are, so they can help them reach where they need to be (coincidentally, this is also the stated goal of TDS).

She presents this process in two ways. The first dives into what aspects of a student define how they will respond to any given less: readiness, interest, and their learning profile. The second describes how a teacher can respond to their students’ needs by differentiating content, the learning process, and the final product. That process is visualized in the diagram below.



¹² Tomlinson, Carol Ann. How To Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 1.

It is from these two sides that curriculum should be designed and implemented. The teacher looks at the classroom make up, at what level they are operating, the things that they care about and are motivated by, as well as their cultural, learning style, and gender differences. From here the teacher designs or modifies a lesson, unit, or a course. They change the content of what is taught. They may adjust how it is taught. And finally, they could adapt assessments (products) they have used in the past to more accurately reflect their student body's needs.

The Differentiation Rubric

In the review of FS and MMG the various lessons will be reviewed for differentiation based on readiness, interest, and learning profile as well as the flexibility that the curriculum provides teachers to differentiate by content, process, and product. The question is, does it take into account the different aspects of a student by providing the teacher with the flexibility and resources to differentiate?

Key Concept	Key Questions to ask of the Curriculum when Differentiating by Content, Process, and Product
Readiness	When does the curriculum differentiate based on the following readiness categories? -Foundational vs Transformation. -Concrete vs Abstract. -Simple vs Complex. -Single vs. Multi-Faceted. -Structured vs Open-Ended. -Dependent vs Independent.
Interest	How often does the curriculum take into account the students' areas of interest as well as their preferred method of expressing their knowledge?
Learning Profile	In what way does the curriculum deliver its lessons based on multiple intelligences, cultural differences, gender-based preferences, etc?

Socio-Emotional Learning

I fly a lot. I work with a variety of schools in many different cities and every time I visit one it almost always requires a two to three hour plane ride. For everyone who has ever ridden in an airplane we all know the little speech that is given at the beginning of each flight. Let me paraphrase a portion of that speech.

We do not anticipate a loss of cabin pressure, but if one were to occur, four oxygen masks will drop from the compartment above you. Place the strap over your head and secure it to your face. The bag may not inflate though oxygen will be flowing. If you are travelling with small children or anyone else that may require assistance, please secure your mask first before helping them with theirs.

It is this part of the speech that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is for. As a teacher, as a student, as a person, you need to take care of yourself before you can even begin to think about anything or anybody else. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL teaches people “The skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively and ethically.”¹³

This process, outlined on the CASEL website, has five parts and begins with self-awareness. Knowing fully how you feel and what you believe will help you successfully interact with others. Second, we all need to learn how to manage our emotions and deal with stressful situations in a way that moves us closer to our goals. When dealing with

¹³As of May 5th, 2012 on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning website <http://casel.org/>

others we also need to learn how they see the world. To understand their perspective. To navigate in this world, specific relationship skills, such as how to maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, need to be expressly taught. Finally, when confronted with important moments in our lives, we all need to learn how to make the best decisions with the knowledge we have.

I agree with CASEL in that this type of learning is as important to the development of young people as academics. It defines who they are in their interactions with others in a way that math, science, English, and social studies do not.

The Social and Emotional Learning Rubric

To review the MMG and FS curricula based on its adherence to the core principles of CASEL I will be applying their process to one unit in the curriculum which focuses on the Social and Emotional Learning. This unit is repeated in every year of the curriculum, from sixth grade to their freshman year of high school, and the same skills are presented using different methods. CASEL specifically lists a series of skills for each of those core principles.¹⁴

Core Principle	Specific Social and Emotional Skills from CASEL
Self-Awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths. 2. Maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
Self-Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles. 2. Setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals. 3. Expressing emotions appropriately.
Social Awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others. 2. Recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences. 3. Recognizing and using family, school, and community resources.
Relationship Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation. 2. Resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict. 3. Seeking help when needed.
Responsible Decision Making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions. 2. Applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations. 3. Contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community.

¹⁴ As of May 5th, 2012 on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning website <http://casel.org/why-it-matters/what-is-sel/skills-competencies/>

Section 3: MMG and FS Evaluation

Mastering the Middle Grades and Freshman Seminar

The basic structure of both MMG and FS follow follow Madeline Hunter’s ITIP model for instruction.¹⁵

Learning Objectives: The predetermined learning objectives for this curriculum are to explicitly instruct students in the different aspects of school success. In the 6th Grade MMG the introduction specifically states each learning objective for the entire curriculum.¹⁶

Anticipatory Set: Each lesson begins with a “bell ringer” that gets the students in their seats and pulls from either the previous day’s lesson or the current days.

Lesson Objectives: Found at the beginning of each lesson.

Direct Instruction: Almost every lesson in both curricula require at least a brief 10-15 minutes of teacher lead instruction. It is even referred to as direct instruction in the teacher’s manual of both MMG and FS.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hunter, Madeline. Enhancing Teaching, (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 67-85.

¹⁶ Garriott, Masstering the Middle Grades, 6.

¹⁷ Garriott, Masstering the Middle Grades, 6. See also Gadet et al, Freshman Seminar, 6.

Checking for Understanding: Throughout each lesson there is ample opportunity to assess the student's current status. For example, looking at Unit 2, Lesson 5 in the 6th Grade MMG are several student workbook activities as well as group charts and a journal entry¹⁸.

Guided Practice: After providing direct instruction on each skill being taught, the students are lead through a trial run, mostly in groups, before moving on to independent practice.

Independent Study: at the end of each lesson, and many times during, the students are provided homework or time to practice what they have learned in that lesson.

¹⁸ Garriott, *Masstering the Middle Grades*, 115.

Evaluation of MMG and FS by Curriculum Integration

Both curricula are excellent when it comes to the first 3 aspects of Beane's curriculum integration (integration of experiences, social integration, and integration of knowledge).

However, when talking about and advocating for Curriculum Integration James Beane goes out of his way to make a distinction between what he refers to as true integration, the blurring of the lines between subjects and disciplines, and Multidisciplinary education.¹⁹ Because of this distinction between multidisciplinary and full integration that I have to say falls just short of what Beane calls integration.

Integration of Experiences: As I have previously stated, the purpose of MMG and FS is to support students in their school success. The starting point for this is both their current success that can be built upon and their academic challenges that can be turned around. It always starts with the student, and almost every lesson provides them with an opportunity for reflection. For example, the very first lesson of FS begins with a reflection on "their personal traits, attitudes, and preferences" for use in a discussion on classroom and school rules.²⁰ And again, in the final unit of MMG 6th Grade the exploration of career opportunities begins with the objective "that knowing themselves is an important prerequisite to choosing their career."²¹

Social Integration: As Beane points out, curriculum integration requires that students be afforded the opportunity to create shared experiences, determine what those experiences are going to be, and promote the "common good" within their communities.²² Both curricula are

¹⁹ Beane, *Curriculum Integration*, 11.

²⁰ Howard Gradet et al. *Freshman Seminar*, 1.

²¹ Garriott, Maria. *Mastering the Middle Grades*, 300.

²² Beane, *Curriculum Integration*, 6.

organized to promote that sense of shared and common good. Lessons on conflict resolution promote a positive atmosphere within the school. Freshman Seminar devotes an entire unit on human relations and conflict resolution and Mastering the Middle Grades does the same, but with two full units of instruction (FS Unit 5, MMG Units 3 and 4). This common good training deals with the *here and now* of students' lives and has application today instead of some far off future.

Integration of Knowledge: It is here that FS and MMG begin to fall short of full integration and land in the world of the multi-disciplinary. It is here that they resemble more of what he calls “Multidisciplinary” rather than “Curriculum Integration.” There are many instances where both curricula bring in outside texts and subjects. For example, all 4 years of the curriculum supports teachers to pull in textbooks that their students are using in other classes for the reading assignments (Reference). Particularly during the study skills section, learning how to take notes and study for tests in their other subjects is encouraged by the course developers.²³ This bringing in of other subjects does not equal out to integration. When completing their student portfolios they are encouraged to bring exemplary work from their other classes, but they are subject/discipline based classes and any work brought in for the portfolio as labeled as such.

Integration as a Curriculum Design: The most difficult aspect of Beane's Curriculum Integration design is that it must be carefully and thoughtfully designed to ignore subjects and organize itself around a theme. Both FS and MMG have a theme that does not fall within one subject, School Success, but once it does that, it teaches students how to be successful in their

²³ Howard Gradet et al. Freshman Seminar, 4. See also Garriott, Maria. Mastering the Middle Grades, 110.

separate subjects. It is only in the final unit of Freshman Seminar that it has the potential to reach integration.

There are several activities and projects centered on different careers and getting a job. This unit serves the dual purpose of preparing students for a post-secondary world as well as (being roughly 14 and 15 year olds) getting their first real job. Using Beane's diagram²⁴ I have illustrated that unit below.



There is much more to this unit, however, the lessons provided above more than illustrate how it becomes a fully integrated lesson on jobs/careers.

²⁴ Beane, Curriculum Integration, 11.

Evaluation of MMG and FS by Differentiation

Carol Ann Tomlinson details a perspective on education that starts with the student, where they are in terms of readiness, interest, and learning profile. She then demonstrates how to differentiate what you teach, how you teach, and what you use to assess based on those difference.²⁵

Differentiation by Readiness: Both MMG and and FS assumes a particular student readiness in its curriculum. The student is having difficulties in school and needs to be explicitly taught basic study skills, social skills, and conflict resolution. It was not designed for high achieving or on-track students. Specifically, it assumes that every lesson will be foundational, simple, structured, concrete, single faceted, and the student will need to work dependently before the first student walks into the class. We have to ask, how well does it allow for or provide resources for teachers to differentiate the curriculum?

Differentiation by Interest: The main question asked of differentiation by interest is if the curriculum takes into account both student areas of interest as well as expression? Do they learn what they want to learn? Are they able to express what they have learned the way they want to? Both curricula are skills based and, aside from learning specifically about conflict resolution, the only content based section of the course, any content can be brought in based on what the student wants to learn about.

Differentiation by Learning Profile: It is in a student's learning profile that we take into account differences in learning styles and cultures. A student's preferences for content, process,

²⁵ Tomlinson, How To Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms, IIV.

and product can be determined by their type of intelligence (example: logical mathematical, emotional, visual, etc) or the culture they are from (industrial/agricultural, North/South, etc).

In the opening of the every unit the introduction of Freshman Seminar describes the readings as being “chosen for their value as a tool in teaching a skill, not for their intrinsic literary value. If you do not like these readings, feel free to use readings of your own choosing.”²⁶ This assumes that the teacher will not keep the readings if they feel they will not interest their students. In unit two of Freshman Seminar the students are asked to read a selection on the benefits of a good night’s sleep. In my opinion, a truly boring piece of writing. The purpose of that reading is to get students to take notes using the Cornell Notes Method. In the past, I have taught that section by providing a variety of readings from sports illustrated, Rolling Stone, and other popular culture items that display a variety of both interests and reading levels.

I have made many such substitutions and helped other teachers do the same. The issue is that the curriculum itself does not provide this support. There are no sources of high interest readings at appropriate reading levels. They do not provide methods of altering the readings they do provide to meet the students’ needs. In short, the authors of Freshman Seminar encourage, but do not provide support for differentiation.

²⁶ Howard Gradet et al. Freshman Seminar, 5.

Social and Emotional Learning Evaluation

Within each year of Talent Development's Student Success curriculum (MMG and FS), there is a unit or two on building appropriate social skills and how to work successfully with peers, family members, and authority figures to resolve conflicts and other issues. These units successfully fulfill every one of the core principles laid out by CASEL.

The simplest way to illustrate the extent to which both FS and MMG follow the core principles of CASEL is to go through the table of contents for the unit on Human Relations. The unit is broken up into three mini units of four to five lessons each.

- The first focuses on understanding conflict, defining it, know what will lead to it, as well as appropriate ways of dealing with it.
- The second deals more directly with the role of emotions in conflict, specifically anger, and how we can regulate our emotions when in tense situations.
- The final mini-unit works through the above concepts when dealing with specific situations, like being left out or teased, and with specific types of people (parents, teachers, peers, etc).

Self-Awareness: While working through each mini-unit the students are provided ample opportunities to reflect on past conflicts. For example, within the first mini-unit the students are asked to look back and explain how their handling of that conflict resulted in either a positive or negative outcome.

Self-Management: Within the second mini-unit there are two lessons that focus specifically on the role of emotions in conflict and explicitly teaches anger management strategies like positive visualization, counting numbers, or breathing techniques.

Social Awareness: It is important for every person to understand that context matters. Who you are dealing with, where you are dealing with that person, and what the specific conflict is will all effect that conflict differently. In the final mini-unit, FS specifically mentions how conflict can change based on the context it is in. It focuses on how the student needs to modify their responses based on what the conflict is over and who it is with.

Relationship Skills: Embedded throughout the lessons in this unit are specific, explicit, and appropriate skills needed to deal with issues such as peer pressure, authority, disrespectful people, and teasing.

Responsible Decision Making: The third lesson introduces the different ways in which people deal with conflict. It attempts to get across the idea that conflict is a natural and normal part of life. How it affects us depends on what we do when the conflict arises. Those strategies include confrontation, avoidance, compromise, and collaboration (reference). It is that final strategy that builds up a student's ability to make responsible decisions. The lesson teaches them to work through their emotions to determine the root cause of the conflict and work *with* the other person to problem solve that conflict.

In Conclusion

As an instruction facilitator tasked with supporting teachers who use this curriculum every day, the purpose of this review is to provide context in how and why Talent Development assists its schools with the implementation of its curriculum. Teachers each have their own styles.

Students walk into those classrooms with different needs. The curriculum is designed to provide a base from which the teacher can launch from.

If a teacher wishes to work more closely with his team to develop lessons within FS or MMG that cross subject lines, it is important to know that the TDS *Student Success* curriculum provides an opportunity for the teacher to do just that. The same can be said of differentiation and it specifically teaches several units on social and emotion development. These lenses provide means through which I can assist them in making Freshman Seminar and Mastering the Middle Grades their own.