

This Week at Central Academy

September 28, 2009

I dropped by Reverend Tyus' Fish Fry Kickoff for his board election campaign last Thursday night. It's interesting. Board of Education members are running unopposed for this election. So, I'm sure that many people were curious as to why he is going to run an active campaign. He explained that night, that the issues that effect our schools are so important that he feels an active campaign will give him the opportunity to bring those issues to the public for discussion. Well put.

In any community, perhaps the most dangerous action is to have no action. In order for communities to function well and to serve everyone's needs, it is critically important for community members to speak up, and to listen to each other. This kind of dialogue and discussion is what makes any community strong.

Here at Central, we view developing the skills to speak and listen to each other as equally important to any other academic skills. This issue features all of our various class activities that have involved helping students to find this sense of voice, as members of a class and school community. The hope, then, is that when our students leave us, they fully understand the importance of their voice and actions in any community.

This past Friday, we had our second Celebration of Learning. It was exciting to watch the developmental abilities of our students, as they shared their excitement about various academic projects and experiences they were having. It's amazing how articulate our youngest students can be when talking about a learning project they are passionate about. The highlight of the assembly for me was when *Lexie* and *Allie*, two of our middle school students, shared their power point, put to music, with accompanying heart-felt verbal presentation about the service learning they initiated.

Frustrated by a bureaucracy that seemed to say no to them at every step, they decided on their own to go around that bureaucracy and simply go to Smith Park and clean it up. They had no one to ask, and no one who could say no to them. They simply showed up, worked hard, and felt very good when their work was done. Their abilities to articulate their experience, and their clearly heart-felt belief in volunteerism was amazing, and touched all of us.

I truly do believe that our students from Central will make a difference – not just in their own lives, but in Middletown and beyond. They are learning daily the importance and promise of speaking up to make a difference. As I stood and listened to Reverend Tyus last Thursday night speaking about the challenges and promise in our schools, I couldn't help but smile as I spotted A.J. Smith listening intently in the room. A. J. is not just any citizen running for City Counsel. He is, only three years after graduating from Middletown High School, a former Central student, running for City Counsel. My hope is that we produce many other active citizens, willing to do the work needed to continue to move Middletown forward. Our future is linked to theirs!

Dianne

Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates Newsletters Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!)

www.middletowncityschools.com

(click on Central Academy)

IMPORTANT DATES

Sept. 28	Picture Day
Oct. 13	TEAM Bd. Mtg. – 6:30
Oct. 14	Early Release
Oct. 15	Skating Party – 6:30-8:30
Oct. 21	Early Release
Oct 24	Middle School Bon Fire 7-9:00

EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

I am pleased to announce that the students in Mrs. Jantausch's Early Primary room will be known this year as the "Rainbow Rockers!" I did not choose this wonderfully creative and fun name. No, in fact the entire class worked hard to come up with a list of possible names, discussed the merits of each, and then voted on our new class name. We had quite a range of suggestions! *Paige* suggested this name because we often sit in a "rainbow" formation to listen to stories or have lessons on the carpet. She also pointed out that we use two rocking chairs in our room throughout the day. The students must have agreed that the name fit us, because it won many votes! This is just one example of how students' voices are heard here at Central.

Another illustration of powerful student voice and choice happened recently in class. We have been working hard to make good choices throughout our day, but sometimes this can be difficult. So, a few weeks ago we sat down and talked about what to do. We talked about the fact that last year we had cards that could be flipped as reminders to make better choices in class. This year, we have not been using these cards. I had made an executive decision that we would try not to use these as a management tool this year. As we discussed our problems and students suggested using the cards again, many kids said that they did not want the card system back. We took a vote, and overwhelmingly the answer was "no" to the cards. We decided to try and handle poor choices in other ways.

However, this week, we noticed that people were still having a difficult time making good decisions. During this week's discussion, the cards came up again. This time, the vote was overwhelmingly FOR using the cards. Wow, I was surprised! I asked students to raise their hands if they had changed their mind from the last time we voted. When I asked them why they changed their opinions I received many insightful reasons. *Brooklynne* said that she voted for the cards because, "we need to get better at things." *Will* said, "The cards helped me last year, so I think it will help our youngsters." *Paige* said that during the first vote she hadn't wanted people to lose their recess. However, now she doesn't want people to talk in the hall or hurt each other, so she changed her mind. *Camille* shared that she thought the youngsters may want to try them out. These young students were able to reason, problem solve, and vote on a new management plan for our classroom. Their voices were heard loud and clear as they made choices that will affect our room each and every day! I was very proud of them all!

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The past few weeks in **Miss Miller's Early Primary Class** we have been making great choices. We have been working hard to improve our line while we walk down the hallways and when we line up next to the restroom. *Morgan* made great choices to be an older role model for our class in the hallway by lining up next to the bathroom with a "bubble and bunny tail" which means we are not talking and our hands are to ourselves behind our back. *Benjamin* was a great role model by making the choice to use "bubbles and bunny tails" while walking through the hallways this week.

After our CGI math problem we take a few minutes to share our strategies. One day this week, we were having trouble trying to get quiet on the carpet to listen to our friends share their strategies with the class. When trying to share, *Tristan* did an awesome job trying to get his friends to listen by using his voice to tell the class that we should be listening to the person who is trying to share. *Emilee* also did a great job when trying to share how our counting jars went for the day by asking for everyone's "attention" which means you have to stop what you are doing, look and listen to the person who is trying to give information. We have been making better choices using problem solving while talking about issues that come up and how to solve them such as talking while others are trying to share.

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In **Ms. Roe and Miss Smith's Early Primary** the students have several opportunities for choice throughout our daily schedule. During our morning, the students make choices about which Math Workshop activity they will participate in. Some of the activities can be done as individuals. However, some activities require the students to work cooperatively with a partner. This week during our Math Workshop time this posed a problem. There were three students working at the Double Compare Dots game and three students working at the Double Compare game. The individuals without partners came to me with their problem. I asked the two classmates how they could solve the problem. *Rowyn* shared that she could switch and play *Andrew's* game with him. Wow! What great problem solving, as well as willingness to be flexible. Another group had chosen the number game Hi Ho Cherry-O. The object of the game was for the group to work together to pick all of the berries from the game board before the bird puzzle was assembled. One student decided to leave and switch stations before the game was completed. When *Curtis* came to join the game that had already started, *Payton* told *Curtis* he was glad that he had come to help them beat the bird! What a great example of making a community member feel needed in an effort to reach a common goal!

We were so proud to watch *Micai* use his voice this week and remind some of his classmates of our community expectations. During our CGI Math time (problem solving) in the afternoon, he moved from his work area to ask the teacher a question. When he returned to his work area, two of his classmates were tossing his math tools to one another. *Micai* reminded his classmates that tools were not toys! He also told them that they should not be touching anyone else's tools or work area! Great job, *Micai*!

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Mrs Uhl's & Ms. Stillwell's Early Primary Class has continued to implement characteristics of voice and choice. The students have been working collaboratively and really growing as learners. As part of a get to know you activity, we have been doing the Name Game daily. Each day we put up a new student's name. We mix up their letters in their name and try to put it back together. Then, we ask a set of questions about our new friend. Then, each student goes back to their seat and tries to write their new friend's name on a paper and then draw a picture of them doing one of their favorite things. This past week, we finished all of the students in the classroom. So, we decided to do my name. The class said that if I was the person for the Name Game that someone else would have to act as the "teacher". *Trey* volunteered to be the

“host” of the Name Game. He did a great job of modeling the “teacher” role by leading the class in the Name Game and he even had the student’s give him 5 (one of our strategies to ask for quiet)!

More recently, we brainstormed a list of questions of things we were interested in learning more about this year. *Paige* wants to know why the moon moves when you are driving in a car? *Nathan* wants to know why we can’t just walk or run in space? *Alex* wanted to know why the moon is out in the morning? *Eniyah* wanted to know more about how to roller skate. Now that we have finished brainstorming, we are going to dive into researching these topics!

Our class has really developed a strong sense of community. In fact, when cleaning up from project time, they chant, “What’s going to work? TEAMWORK!” Everyone quickly pitches in to help. Another example is during our morning meetings. Each day I write a morning message for the students. As a class we decode the words and read it together. Then, we call on students to come up and find some of our snap words we have learned. On their own, the class decided that they would start cheering on whomever was looking for the snap words. While *Addison* came up to find the word “going”, the class was cheering, “Go Addison, go” What a great way to see a budding community make decisions of how to get along and work together.

LATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

In Mrs. Andrade and Miss Zumbahlen’s Room, voice and choice are out of this world. Our recent visit from Dr. James Beane, author of *A Reason To Teach*, inspired us to embrace project learning. This is a time where students delve into topics of interest. We started by taking a survey of the students’ interests. Next, we combined their similarities. In the end, we were left with several years of themes. While the school’s overall theme for this first trimester continues to be “Counting On Us,” this gives our class a direction in which to find out how someone or something is relying on someone or something else while at the same time learning about highly engaging concepts.

Mars (space) just happens to be our first exploration. We are so immersed in space concepts. Our read alouds revolve around fiction and non-fiction space books. Our poetry is all about space. After many read alouds and practicing note-taking, each child was asked to write down a specific area in which they wanted to know more. *Aaron, Austin, Anna, and Aly P.* wanted to learn more about the Lunar Rover. *Madison, Hayden, Briley, Jake, and Day’Sean* wanted to learn more about space suits and the effects of the sun’s harmful rays while in outer space. *Gabe H., Briella, and Savanna* wanted to learn more about comets. *Jocelynn, Amalia, Allison, Rowan, Chris R., and Chris J.* wanted to learn more about the moons around Mars. *Anastasia, Kya, Chelsea F., and Chelsea S.* wanted to learn more about living things on Mars. *Daniel and Emily* wanted to learn more about meteorites. Besides choosing their own topic, they had to decide if they wanted to work alone or with a partner. Many have paired up to figure out their inquiries.

Who knew that space would be just what the doctor ordered for our Late Primary Room. But, we have to admit that it’s one of our most engaging times of the week. We are getting to the point where the students are almost finished collecting enough information. The next step will be figuring out how to present the information. We have made it our goal to present our findings at the first Celebration of Learning in October. We hope you will join us there to see how the students wrapped up their self-selected topics on space and how it all tied in to the school theme.

MMM... “One voice, all it takes is one voice...” Same song, same topic! This year we are talking about each topic for two issues of This Week at Central. We have continued to discuss using your voice in the classroom.

In **Mrs. Van Ostrand’s** and **Mrs. Amburgey’s** (a.k.a. **Van Burgey’s**) room, along with **Mrs. Zahora** and **Miss Qua**, we had a great conversation today about our procedure for the end of the day. This conversation couldn’t have come at a more opportune time because the students had such wonderful ideas to share and really enjoyed voicing their opinions. Students are doing such a great job with the routines during the rest of the day, we felt it was necessary to tweak the procedure for the end of the day. When most of us were growing up, the teacher would make the decision as far as how procedures would look and the students would have no voice in the decision making process. We all know that this is not how we do things at Central and we felt that we would get a lot of great ideas for how to improve this routine – boy were we right!

We held a community circle where we asked for suggestions and ideas from the students to help us problem solve and improve our end of the day routine. *Maddison M.* was the first to speak up and suggested that we call students by the first letter of their name from A to Z. *Aaron* thought that we could “assign each student a number and call numbers to go get your things”. *Kylie* said “If your cubbie is on the side of the room where you sit, then you can go get your things. Then we can switch sides.” *Andre* had the idea that we tried out. The students got their things by “whatever color your cubbie pocket is.” *Logan* spoke up and said in response to *Andre’s* idea, “I even like that idea better than my own!” We enjoy hearing all of the students’ ideas. They come up with things that we would never even have thought of. Until next time, use your voice. GO CENTRAL!

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

This afternoon during math, the students in **Mrs. Larison’s Intermediate class** had a mission. They had to decide how to organize and represent data they had collected concerning their heights and the heights of their reading buddies in Ms. Miller’s Early Primary class. Their goal was to find a way to visually represent a comparison of the data. The adults in the room (Mrs. Larison, Mrs. Brubaker, and Mr. Dannis) knew that some representations would more clearly show the data than others. However, we also knew that the students’ understanding would be deeper and more meaningful if they could explore options and exercise choice when deciding on the representations.

Observing and facilitating as the students worked through this assignment was exciting because we were able to glimpse their unique thought processes. Throughout the entire afternoon, the students remained engaged and thoughtful. *Emma* and *Barbie* found an efficient way to organize the raw data. Their visual representation comparing the varying heights was different than the other students, yet creative and accurate. They felt proud of their accomplishment. *Cody* and *Nadia* chose to represent the data using a bar graph. They struggled with how to combine the Intermediate and Early Primary heights into one graph, yet they persevered in their task. Why? I believe one reason is that they were personally invested in successfully completing the task because they had chosen the mode of representation. Giving less than your best effort is more difficult when an idea comes from and belongs to you. When students are given choice, they own their choices; therefore, they own the success that comes with that choice.

Voice and choice have continued to be prevalent in **Muenchenburgey Land!** In math, students created a survey to assist us, the teachers, in developing their weekly CGI (Cognitively Guided Instruction) word problems. They brainstormed different aspects of their lives, which we were able to use as math scenarios in creating the differentiated math word problems. For example, we used *Vernon’s* love for

Tech Decks to form a scenario where the students had to solve a problem dealing with elapsed time. We also used *Maggie's* interest in gardening to design a grouping (multiplication) problem for the class to solve. *Cameron's* interest in buying comics lead to an intriguing problem, which required the equal distribution of money. The students' voice in framing the content of the questions has truly enhanced our math curriculum!

As students transition through the levels at Central, homework becomes a more routine part of their learning. An expectation at Central has always been that students read for a specific amount of time each night, according to their age level. In general, Intermediate students are expected to read for 30 minutes, 4 nights per week (Monday through Thursday). While that is the expectation, the students still had plenty of voice in creating the homework policy. The students helped decide the different response choices they have for their nightly reading. They also created the procedure that is to be followed by the students who do not turn in their homework. Because their voice guided this policy, they feel more ownership and take more accountability for their work. We honestly feel their plan is fair to everyone and is better than what we could have created on our own!

One other component we have added to **Muenchenburgey Land** this year to support voice and choice in our room is our idea box! This idea came from Dr. James Beane's book, *A Reason to Teach*. The idea box is a place where students can put any suggestions or concerns about our learning community. They may take ownership of their idea or submit it anonymously. Every Friday during our weekly community meeting, we read and discuss the ideas from the idea box. *Mary* submitted a suggestion about bringing in our own pillows to use during Self-Selected Reading. After much discussion about the pros and cons surrounding this idea, we came to consensus that the students are now allowed to bring in a sealed pillow (no pillow cases) every early-release Wednesday. Through the idea box, we have addressed issues concerning recess, the noise level in the room (we developed a noise scale together), the cafeteria, basic classroom structures, along with many others, and these all came from the students!

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Ms. Thinnes' Intermediate class brings many opportunities for student choice and voice. Students have been sharing their voice in our Class Meetings on a classroom Peace Pledge. The Peace Pledge has led our class to discuss the importance of respect and communication in our classroom community. Students, such as *Amirah J.* and *Jazmyne B.*, have expressed the importance of watching how students talk to one another. Put downs and negative verbal tones are not permitted in our democracy. Also, these students stressed the importance of watching nonverbal language with one another. Some nonverbal language can come across as a sign of disrespect, such as a student rolling their eyes while another student is talking. Students in the classroom have a shared voice and are willing to share their voice in a respectful way, even if two students see sides of an issue differently.

Our class has many chances to experience student choice in our democracy. Students in our class meeting choose items to pass around. The student holding the item is the only person who can speak. *Karah W.* brought in "Oodles" the pet poodle, and *Colin M.* brought "Yoshi" to be passed around during our class meeting. This makes sure everyone has a student voice. The item being passed is a great visual reminder to be respectful while someone is talking. Students also have the opportunity to choose the topics for discussion in the class meeting by writing topics on post-its and then placing those post-it notes on a parking lot poster in the room. This poster is a place to "park" items that students feel a need to discuss. Also, students have the opportunity to write questions down on index cards about our school theme. For example, if a student wants more research on pollution, other students may find articles from magazines or newspapers that they staple on our Concept/Question Board. Students not only have a shared voice but also have student choice in what is shared.

Students then have the opportunity to choose what topics they would like to research in our daily Theme Time. Most of the students in our class have chosen to research different types of animals and weather. The students walked through Dr. Beane's work and the student world and self-questions led our class to themes on animals, space and weather. These topics are the student's choice and will later drive the curriculum that is presented in class. So, the students in **Ms. Thinnes' Intermediate** class have many continued daily opportunities for finding student choice and voice!

MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

"Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy."

Adam Fletcher

At Central, when we seek first to understand our students and the meaningful contributions they can make, that conversation can transform our school into much deeper learning communities. **Mrs. Hodson's** Humanities classes just recently worked on creating the guidelines and rubric for their Renaissance project. *Austin* and *Kaleb* worked on the criteria of how understandable the presentation should be. *Leah* and *Asia* focused on what it means to have a project that is relevant to the topic that was researched. The next step will be for them to look at the State Standards and see what will be covered. It is interesting to see how well the students worked together to come up with this Quest. They had voice and actively participated in the process.

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The students in **Kristi Joseph's** Humanities class are demonstrating their voice and choice during our independent research time. The students have begun their research on the topic of their interest. The students were also responsible for determining whether to work in a small group, with a partner, or individually. In addition, the students contributed to the design of their upcoming Renaissance Project by suggesting topics for research, developing presentation ideas, and proposing guidelines for the project/presentation rubric. *Julia*, *Braden* and *Mark* proposed many significant ideas to the guideline development.

The students in **Kristi's** math and science classes also have many opportunities to express their voice and choice. *Stevie* always seizes the opportunity to use her voice and choice; her contributions to class are extremely insightful.

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The students in **Mrs. Smith's class** conducted a mini-"Beane" seminar this past Monday. We explored questions about how we see ourselves in relationship to our surroundings. We then took the focus to our questions about the world. They brainstormed what was important to them individually about their world and then shared these insights with a small group. We compiled those questions and found common threads of interest between them. My older students like *Charles*, *Bailey*, *Cole* & *James* found they have some of the same world concerns as my younger students like *Carson*, *Luke*, *Brennan D*, *Brennen C*, *Tyler*, *Jalan*, *Sommer*, *DeAnna*, *Brooke* & *Virginia*. In fact, we found that our self-questions and world questions were very similar to students around the nation. This activity will lead to the students developing their research topics. We had a great day examining our world and ourselves.

Other Places and Voices Around Central

Mr. Perdue, Mrs. Carroll and Miss Jessy noticed how the early primary students have been using their voices in the lunchroom to remind their friends to pick up their trash and line up quietly and more orderly when going back to the classroom. *Corrine* and *Camille* reminded their table to pick up their wrappers and one day *Will* asked the other kids to walk as they were lining up. What a great way to be modeling for our friends and using our voices!

While working with middle school students, **Mr. Gaston** was impressed when *Alex* and *Andrew* used their voices to plan how they wanted the Medieval Market to run as part of their Quest for Humanities. The two students took the initiative during their lunchtime to plan out the set up and process for the entire middle school to barter and trade items from medieval times. This was awesome planning and use of their voices!

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Working in **Muenchenburgey Land**, I (**Mrs. Brubaker**) has witnessed a great deal of student choice and voice during math. Our new Investigations curriculum matches our philosophy of allowing students to choose their own mathematical strategies. During our current exploration of data and how to represent and analyze data, students are given open-ended tasks. Then they are using their voice to explain their thinking and choice of representation. *Cole* offered many ideas, theories and strategies this past week on finding the median (middle) of a set of data, which contributed to the overall classes' understanding of this concept. *Zion* used her voice and shared her strategies on how to represent two sets of data on one line plot. Students have been choosing how they represent their data and will soon be developing their own survey questions, collecting data and deciding how they will represent the data they have collected. All of these choices help students become more fully engaged in their learning. Using their voice, helps our students become more confident mathematicians – able to communicate their strategies and learning.

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Students continue to use their voices in various ways during **Mrs. Hick's** music class! This is generally through singing songs, speaking rhymes, or contributing ideas.

Early Primary students continue to discover ways to show a steady beat using their bodies. They are using their ideas with a variety of styles of recorded music and are always interested in being challenged by hearing a new example.

Among other things, Late Primary students have been experimenting with nonlocomotor movement (moving part of one's body but not moving from one place to another) in various listening examples. Within an established structure, students walk the beat to part of a recorded piece of music. When they hear a musical signal from me, they must freeze and improvise various ways of showing half notes on their bodies.

The Intermediate classes were recently shown a color-coded staff chart of a piece called "Canoe Song." Each class was asked what they noticed about it and then was given the opportunity to ask me anything they would like to know about it. The discussions were quite interesting and brought out many musical concepts! Students began to play this melody on their recorders and this week will create an arrangement of it using recorder, voices, and pitched percussion instruments.

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In **Mrs. Beatty's** art room the students are getting ready to really show their voice and choice! We are starting a new unit and the students are going to look at our next artist, Georges Seurat, and come up with goals for their project. I will be asking them questions to figure out what interests them about his artwork. From their interests they will decide what materials are needed and what our focus for the piece is. We will also experiment with Seurat's style of pointillism. Each class will have a different project outcome. But all projects will be a reflection of what they have learned about the artist, and the best part is that they make all the decisions about how to express themselves creatively.

The Middle School students are improvising melodic patterns to incorporate into an already existing melody. This week they will decide how to incorporate these creations into a final product. Students throughout the different levels are asked to use their voices for more than singing at Central!