

FOREWORD

Frances R. Spielhagen

Editor-in-Chief

Motivation! This special issue of *Middle Grades Research Journal* tackles the complex problem of motivation in the middle grades. What *moves* youngsters in the middle grades? Why does the initial enthusiasm of young children falter in the middle grades? How can educators address the growing *motivation* gap that seems to characterize the middle grades? What are the variables that affect this well-documented decline? More importantly, what are the factors that increase and enhance motivation in the middle grades? These questions plague both educator practitioners and education researchers.

In many ways, the middle grades are the black box of the educational trajectory. The stakes are higher than ever for educators and students in the current high-stakes environment. Individual success or failure finds its roots in these critical grades. Therefore, understanding the complex nature of motivation in young adolescents is also critical for those who would foster their success. Sound research-based findings can inform our understanding and in turn inform practice. The task has always been how to concretize the abstract concept of “motivation” in order to measure it in defensible ways.

We are grateful to Dr. James Middleton, for his work on this special issue of the *Middle Grades Research Journal*. Dr. Middleton has taken on the task of harnessing the best recent research on the problem of motivation in the middle grades. In his eloquent preface he explains the thematic structure of the volume and the order that ranges from nomothetic research, to analytic cases, and then back to nomothetic. Each article stands alone beautifully, but the combination of the articles illustrates how the inner workings of the classroom are shown as the causes of the larger motivational patterns.

Volume 8.1 of the *Middle Grades Research Journal* is the first issue of a new publication cycle for the journal, adopted by the editorial board at its semiannual meeting at the Association for Middle Level Education Conference in Portland, Oregon, in November, 2012. Under the new publication schedule, three issues will be produced each publication year: Spring/Summer, Fall, and Winter. Each of these issues will contain more articles of greater length, that will continue to provide substantial coverage of compelling middle grades research. The editorial staff is grateful to the members of the editorial board for their support of this transition and their tireless

efforts on behalf of *MGRJ*. In sum, this issue has been the result of the collaborative effort of many scholars, and we have been extremely motivated to provide the best product for our readers!