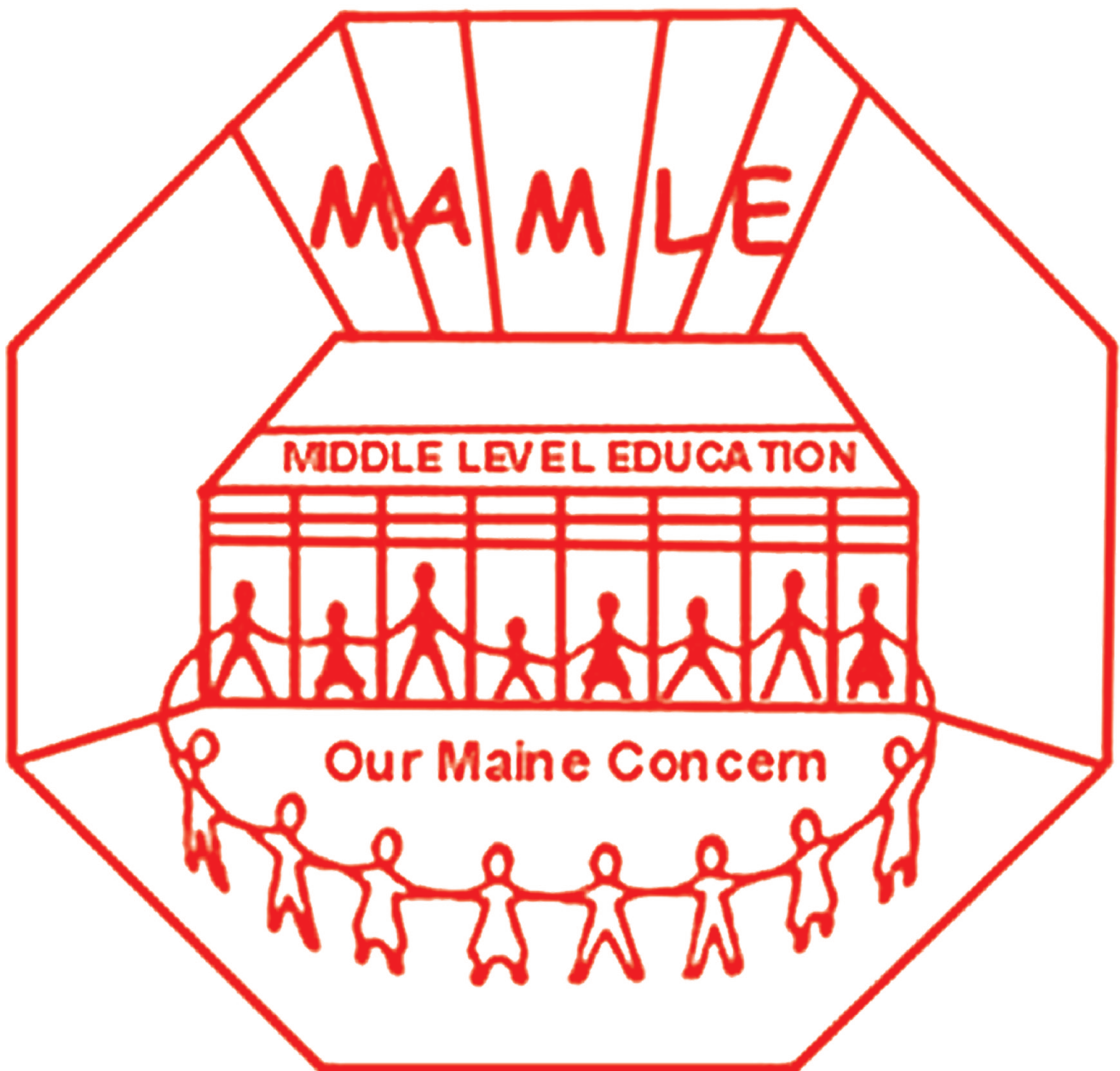


MAINELY MIDDLE

Volume 15, Number 1

2006

The Journal of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education



Mainely Middle

Journal of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education

Volume 15, Number 1
2006



Mainely Middle is the official journal of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education and is published once each academic year. Subscription to *Mainely Middle* is included in MAMLE membership dues.

MAMLE, Maine Association for Middle Level Education, is the professional association of teachers, administrators, and parents who have joined together to support the development of quality programs which serve the needs of young adolescents. MAMLE exists to promote a better understanding of middle grades education in our state. It is a source of ideas, information, and support. See page 32 for membership information.

Mainely Middle Editor
Dr. Wallace M. Alexander

Table of Contents

<i>Todd R. Nelson</i> The Learning Curve – 'Always be Closing'	3
<i>Tammy Ranger</i> Improving Learning by Connecting with Home	4
<i>Nancy Snowdeal</i> What EVERY Teacher Should Know About Comprehensive Middle School Guidance Programs	7
<i>Beth Weatherbee</i> Sticks & Stones May Break My Bones, but Relational Aggression .. Really Hurts Me	9
<i>Lynn Farrin</i> The Gift of Talent and Middle Schoolers?	11
<i>Denise De Vito</i> What's the Big Deal About Graphic Novels?	15
<i>Chris Williams</i> Where Are We Going?	19
<i>Michael R. Vieth</i> Staying Between the Sheets, a Little While Longer	21
<i>Michael A. Aldrete</i> Transition Between Middle and High School	24
<i>Lowell Oyster</i> The Merits of Advisory Programs: Differing Views and Different Results	26
<i>Shelly V. Chasse-Johndro</i> YIKES – Homework!	28
<i>Alyse Volovick</i> I + YOU = WE	30

Mission Statement

Maine Association for Middle Level Education

The Maine Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE) is the professional organization of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and others who share a commitment to young adolescent youngsters, ages 10-15. Established in 1987, MAMLE's purpose is to promote developmentally responsive education for young adolescents.

As an association, we believe...

...that young adolescents undergo profound changes in intellectual, physical, and emotional development. These changes require schools with programs and learning opportunities that are responsive to the developmental needs of 10-15 year olds.

...that those working with young adolescents must understand and be sensitive to the unique needs of this age group in order to ensure their intellectual, physical, and emotional growth.

...that all young adolescents can learn and will respond to high academic expectations when they participate actively in their own learning.

...that learning about and responding to the individual and group interests and needs of students enhances their academic success.

MAMLE Goals...

...to set high standards to increase and improve the educational opportunities for young adolescents by assisting schools, homes, and agencies.

...to promote middle level practices as most appropriate for meeting the needs of students as they make the transition from elementary to high school.

...to promote forums to disseminate information about middle level education which models best practices for the developmental needs of young adolescents.

...to develop a statewide vision for middle level education based on exemplary practices responsive to the needs of young adolescents.

...to advocate for middle level certification.

The Learning Curve

A column by Todd Nelson

'Always be Closing'

In this column, I'm going to delve into adult behavior and institutional systems. Perhaps it'll give you some ideas about your work with middle schoolers.

The phrase above is playwright David Mamet's epigram to Glengarry, Glen Ross, the manifesto of the salesman who possesses the brass it takes to close real estate deals. The buyer, in this case, is usually unaware that a deal is even being closed, and to the exclusive benefit of the salesman. Let this be a paradigm for sales tactics in used car, insurance, Nigerian oil futures, or selling ideas.

The phrase came to mind during a conversation with a teacher. I found myself 'closing' when I should not have been. As the teacher was sharing information, I found myself anticipating how to use it for my own purposes. The more I contemplated my thought process, the more I saw it as an oft-repeated administrator trap loaded with complications. I had detected 'The Closer' in me.

Supervisory relationships ought to feel safe and energizing...

A closer in baseball is the relief pitcher who protects a lead, shuts down the offense. Think Dennis Eckersly. In baseball the purpose is clear, and desirable: Win the game. In any institution hoping to create a strong sense of community, like a school, a closer creates turmoil. Consider your daily school talk. As administrators and teachers we engage in numerous conversations on any given day that we are in danger of using or interpreting in a manner that might surprise the other participants. Thus, in casual conversation about family life, avocations, various innocent hopes and professional possibilities, we might find ourselves tucking away a piece of information in a mental file marked 'evaluation,' rather than a file marked 'personal: keep safe.' We become Holders of Information. Now it's about power.

In and of itself, this is benign. But when we are willing to

use information without sharing its value or our intentions, wanting to own it in order to control a person or situation, then we are abusing our position. We are closing. When information we have collected gets taken out and dusted off and used to achieve an outcome, without the person affected knowing that an outcome is being designed, that's closing – and it's not fair. At least in baseball, fair play means that the batter acknowledges the goals of the closer and agrees to the ground rules for the relationship! And so it should be in schools.

Though it may sometimes stem from benign motivations, closing is still potentially harmful. It is always an incursion on openness, honesty, and trust. It is what makes administrators suspect, befouls the process of school leadership, and inflames otherwise healthy discussions of ideas with issues of inappropriate control. And it happens frequently. In a job where we feel vulnerable and have little control over the matters we deal with, the temptation to close may be understandable, but is never justified. Supervisory relationships ought to feel safe and energizing; ought to give teachers a significant role in setting and achieving goals in order to let discovery, learning, and creativity forge their own sensible outcomes. They should be centered on strong, communicative relationships, bonds of clear authority and responsibility.

The administrative closer in me takes an egocentric view of responsibility and relationships, seeking to be a decider rather than a facilitator of good decision-making processes. The Closer is wedded to winning, not the cohesion of a team. The Closer belongs in baseball, where the terms of winning are clearly defined and agreed upon, not school.

Epigrams, although pithy, are useful if they keep us on the right track. I'm replacing 'Always be Closing' with 'Only Connect.'

Todd R. Nelson is principal at the Adams School in Castine, Maine. He has been writing "The Learning Curve" for MAMLE for several years. We are forever indebted to Todd for sharing his keen insight and humor on our pages.

Improving Learning by Connecting with Home

by Tammy Ranger

A common observation of teachers and parents of upper elementary students is the waning of communication between school and home. As a teacher of middle level students, and a parent of three teenagers, I can attest to the fact that there is a decided decline in parental involvement as children grow and mature, moving from the primary grades to the intermediate grades and beyond. Reasons for this decline vary from students having multiple teachers, to moms returning to the work force after being home full-time with younger children, to the perception that as kids age, they want more space and distance from their parents. Parents of intermediate level students who wish to remain involved in their children’s educational lives state that they often feel like an unwelcome presence in their child’s school. These reports of parental involvement (or lack thereof) in intermediate level students’ schools are surprising, given the strong evidence showing middle school children whose parents are actively involved in their education are more successful in school (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). This being the case, this inquiry will look at concrete ways schools can increase parental involvement in intermediate level students’ literacy education.

Review of the Literature

Communicating

Communication is a key component of effective parental involvement. In *The Essential Conversation* (2003), Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot showcases her research of parent-teacher communication through snapshots of authentic classroom practices of ten teachers across the United States. Amid Lawrence’s advice is the warning that there is no one prescriptive solution.

Although I do not believe that there is a single recipe or a set of discrete rules for constructing successful parent-teacher dialogues—one size does not fit all—I do believe that there are lessons here that delineate sound principles and good practices that are applicable to a variety of settings and situations. (p. xxix)

Molly Rose, a teacher highlighted in Lawrence’s book, talks about the importance of making her classroom transparent for families. Molly manages part of this task with her weekly

newsletter. This communication tool avoids generalities and instead focuses on specific information. The newsletter features an “Ask me . . .” section listing a dozen or so questions parents can ask their children about their time at school. Molly finds this communication gives parents the tools they need to have specific conversations with their children, which allows them to discover how much their children are learning at school (p. 65). Epstein and Salinas (2004) also report that newsletters are an important component of effective parent partnerships in schools in a variety of settings, including urban, suburban, and rural locations.

One of the more important pieces of communication is the parent-teacher conference. Davis and Jackson (2000) advocate for student-led portfolio conferences. They report that when parents hear their children articulating what is happening in the classroom and reporting on what they have learned, parents come away, “committing themselves to increase communication with their children” (p. 202). Lightfoot (2003) also endorses student-led portfolio conferences through teacher, Molly Rose. “The real information, the authentic work and assessments, are all in the child’s report . . . I have never had any parent complain about the grades on the report card. They’ve already heard the evidence” (p. 97).

Informal notes, phone calls, and emails home should not be overlooked as communication tools. Davis and Jackson (2003) remind us of the importance of establishing positive communication at the beginning of the year. Too often, parents’ first communication with the school is about a problem their child is having, which automatically sets up the parents and teacher for an adversarial relationship (p. 204). Davis & Jackson continue to argue the case for consistent communication.

The efforts that schools make to communicate with parents – surveys, telephone calls, written messages, meetings – and their efforts to bring parents fully into

Tammy Ranger teaches at the Margaret Chase Smith School in Skowhegan, Maine. She is a National Board Certified teacher.

the life of the school... The goal is to create within the community a kind of 'force field' of support and high expectations for all young adolescents that they simply cannot ignore. (p. 205)

Third grade teacher Caltha Crowe (2004) furthers parent communication by inviting parents to experience a typical day in her classroom one day a week. Crowe coins these visits "Wonderful Wednesdays" and explains that parents attend as full participants.

They're not there to be helpers or passive observers. They aren't there to see a show or to be the show. Rather, the purpose is for parents to experience day to day life in our classroom in a safe and comfortable way. (p. 4)

Crowe finds that these visits help parents to understand current teaching practices, which often look much different from their own educational experiences.

Supporting Student Learning

A significant way parents can be involved in their middle level student's education is to help him/her with homework. Homework assignments should consist of work that reinforces what students are learning; not work that introduces new ideas or concepts (Davis & Jackson, 2004).

The National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University developed the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork Program (TIPS) as a model for interactive homework assignments. This homework "reinforces learning and supports high-quality parent-child teacher interaction and communication around children's learning" (Davis & Jackson, 2004). Two TIPS language arts assignments include parents and children discussing prescribed topics such as, "A Time When Someone Helped You" and "Hairstyles from the Past." These assignments include interview questions for students to ask their parents, and at the end of the assignment there is a "Home-to-School Connection" section asking for parental comments concerning their child's work in the homework assignment.

Another example of interactive homework assignments comes from sixth-grade teacher Maria del Rosario Barillas (2000). Barillas teaches in southern California and most of her students are Mexican and Mexican American. Barillas explains how she includes her non-English speaking parents in meaningful learning experiences with their children.

Because language arts in my classroom is taught in the primary language, parents are able to assist students with homework assignments, and opportunities exist for both parents and children to

read, write, and respond together in their common language. When this occurs, parents know they have made a contribution through their unique perspectives and experiences. (p. 303)

Teachers need to find the fabric comfortable for them, and allow the threads to maximize communication between school and home.

Topics selected include: parents and students writing a piece of advice to one another, reading and responding to the 1990 Nobel Peace prize acceptance speech of the Dali Lama, and to completing a pattern poem titled, "I Am." Overall, three quarters of the parents participated. Barillas tried to foster full participation by encouraging parents with lower literacy levels to dictate their responses to their children, providing her home contact information (insisting that receiving parent communication at home was not an intrusion), and finally, being careful about the level of the reading selections she sent home. Parent and student writings were published in books, and a culminating event was held at the end of each quarter. At this event, parents and students were invited to read their work aloud from the author's chair. Barillas notes two benefits gleaned from this program.

The first has been to encourage reading, writing, and discussion about school assignments at home. Second, because parents' experiences and knowledge are valued and recognized in the classroom, bonds of respect and appreciation for their culture, language, and identity are affirmed through this celebration of literacy. (p. 308)

A program sharing similar aspects as Barillas' is the "Parents as Authors" program held at Loreto Elementary School in Los Angeles, California. This program concentrated on teaching parents the writing process by inviting them to come to the school for weekly, thirty minute writing sessions. With teacher support, parents wrote books and poems about their lives and experiences. At an end-of-the-year ceremony, parents shared their books with their children. (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2003).

Cline and Necochea (2003) provide us with yet another perspective to consider when thinking about involving parents in children's literacy lives: to value and respect multiple paths to literacy. Each of these educators grew up in what would be

In the real world, people select and wear fabrics and layers according to demographics, the seasons, and comfort.

labeled a “literacy impoverished home,” yet each of them have “achieved high levels of literacy” (p. 122). Cline and Necochea attribute their literacy success to their rich cultural traditions of storytelling, music, dancing, and singing.

They told us stories in their language of passion, their language of success, their language of love. In doing so, they taught us the multiple ways that language can be used to express feelings, emotions, ideas, concerns, and knowledge. We heard flowery expressions, metaphors, dialogue, and deep structures as we listened to these family stories and internalized the language of our homes and ancestors. These family literacy experiences became the foundations for our future success. (p. 126)

Each of these educators strongly encourage schools to explore and embrace diverse literacy practices and see them as legitimate paths to literacy education.

Discussion

My inquiry focused on concrete methods to increase parental involvement in intermediate students’ literacy education. I was pleased to find several examples of how to accomplish this. The ideas provided above offer teachers several layers of parental involvement. Teachers can select the layer that is the best fit for them. This is important because some teachers would suffocate having parents in their classrooms once a week, as suggested in Catha Crowe’s (2003) *Wonderful Wednesdays*, but that same teacher may be excited about writing an interactive newsletter as described by Molly Rose (2003). Sending notes, emails, and making phone calls home are also lighter fabrics of parental involvement, but the threads still connect home and school. The TIPS homework Jackson and Davis (2003) reported on foster that same level of connection. TIPS assignments lack the weightier fabric of student-led portfolios, or inviting parents to write and participate in author shares in the classroom (Barillas, 2000; NNPS, 2003), but the lighter material continues to close

the gap between school and home. Cline and Necochea (2003) remind us to expand our vision to many different types of fabric for literacy foundations.

In comparing these methods of parental involvement to different fabrics and layers, I have a better sense of when to do them. In the real world, people select and wear fabrics and layers according to demographics, the seasons, and comfort. I don’t see a lot of difference in viewing family involvement through the same lens. Teachers are unique individuals, with a variety of students, and different “comfort zones.” One teacher may try on a weightier fabric and find its heaviness a burden, while another teacher wears it and discovers it is a perfect fit – providing warmth, comfort, and security. I agree with Lightfoot-Lawrence (2003), “one size does not fit all...there are lessons here that delineate sound principles and good practices; that are applicable to a variety of settings and situations” (p. xxix). Teachers need to find the fabric comfortable for them, and allow the threads to maximize communication between school and home.

References

- Barillas, M. (2000). Literacy at home: Honoring parent voices through writing. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(3), 302-308.
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.
- Cline, Z., & Necochea, J. (2003). My mother never read to me. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(2), 122-126.
- Crowe, C. (2004). Wonderful wednesdays: Inviting parents into our classroom community. *Responsive Classroom*, 16(4), 4-5.
- Epstein, J., & Salinas, K. (2004). Partnering with families and communities. *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 12-17.
- Jackson, A. W., & Davis, G. A. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other*. New York: Random House.
- National Network of Partnership Schools: John Hopkins University: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/default.htm>

Annual MAMLE Conference
Sugarloaf USA October 19-20, 2006

What EVERY Teacher Should Know About Comprehensive Middle School Guidance Programs

by Nancy Snowdeal

One of the key elements of the middle school concept is a developmental guidance program that supports students' social, emotional and personal growth throughout the pivotal period of early adolescence. During the period of time from ages 10 to 15, students are undergoing rapid and frequent changes with the onset of puberty and a very active stage of brain development. In fact, with all the changes that occur during this five-year period, many students don't know themselves from day to day how they will react to a given situation. As the students begin to more clearly define their values, interests, and abilities, they often find themselves struggling in their relationships with peers, parents and teachers. Enter the school guidance counselor...

In many middle level schools, the role of the guidance counselor has been changing as quickly as the roles of the teachers. With the onset of local assessments and changing graduation requirements comes the need for someone to manage the data. In addition, it has become more and more difficult to work with students, either individually or in the classroom, because it is hard to justify removing them from academic time and teachers are resistant to excuse students. After all, social skills aren't measured by AYP, right?

Why a comprehensive guidance program is needed

The reality, however, is that a comprehensive developmental guidance program with the right support and resources will do more than just help students get along. It will also help students clarify their interests and skills. They will learn how to be active school citizens and contributing members of their communities. They will develop strong communication skills and learn how to effectively resolve conflicts. They will be able to tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. They will practice making tough decisions and learn valuable research, homework and study skills. And though these skills aren't directly connected to the Maine Learning Results or the MEAs, a student who has these skills is much more likely to perform to her/his potential on assessments than a student who is full of stress because of interpersonal issues.

It is common sense – if we're stressed out about a fight with a friend, we have a hard time concentrating on work. Doesn't it follow then, that a student who is stressed out would also struggle in school? Current brain research shows that young adolescents' brains are ruled by emotion, not pre-algebra. For

a student in a crisis, no matter how trivial the crisis may seem to the adults, he or she will not be able to fully focus on schoolwork.

Like the middle school concept, for a guidance program to be most effective, all of its elements should be in place.

A guidance counselor can offer the support necessary to deal with crises as they arise, thereby minimizing the impact. Because they don't teach seven or eight classes a day, they have the opportunity to work with students on those skills that many times have to be pushed aside in the classroom in favor of academics. A comprehensive program that focuses on the developmental needs of young adolescents can be the glue that holds it all together, supporting both students and teachers.

Like the middle school concept, for a guidance program to be most effective, all of its elements should be in place. Missing elements is a sure way to miss kids. The result is some failing to acquire important skills. There are many jobs that a counselor takes on, but there are four key elements that ensure students receive instruction in eight major areas, which are:

- 1) Understanding the school environment
- 2) Understanding of self and others
- 3) Understanding attitudes and behavior
- 4) Decision making and problem solving
- 5) Interpersonal and communication skills
- 6) School success skills
- 7) Career awareness and educational planning
- 8) Community pride and involvement

(Myrick, 1997, p. 35).

Nancy Snowdeal is a counselor at Brewer Middle School in Brewer, Maine.

The four key elements are student-centered interventions that are primarily proactive approaches to dealing with the issues middle level students typically face.

Individual counseling

Guidance counselors are typically responsible for two different forms of individual counseling – crisis counseling and on-going or skill-building counseling. In many instances, this work takes the form of conflict resolution, clarifying miscommunications and addressing rule violations. In other situations, the counseling is a reactive intervention to a crisis that has occurred in the student’s life, which could range from an ended friendship to a divorce or death in the family. Finally, a teacher may refer a student for individual counseling based on his or her observations of classroom behavior where the counselor is asked to work on the student’s issues as they impact the class. For example, a counselor may work with a student who struggles with anger management or with the symptoms of ADHD (Schmidt, 1991, pp. 72-78).

Group counseling

Another intervention that can be particularly powerful is small group work. This allows children dealing with similar problems (such as divorce, ADHD, organization or anxiety) to find other students with whom they can relate, learn about other students’ success strategies, and brainstorm new strategies together. Not only does this empower students to help each other and themselves, it teaches a valuable lesson about being a part of a caring community in a larger context. In addition, the success of group counseling relies on strong communication skills, self-awareness and the ability to feel empathy. These are all important life skills that happen in conjunction with the work being done within the group (Schmidt, 1991).

Classroom guidance lessons

In order to reach the most students in the most efficient manner, it is vital to incorporate classroom guidance lessons into a weekly or monthly schedule. These lessons are more generalized, and are focused primarily on skill-building. When considering the eight major topic areas prescribed by Myrick, lessons can be designed to address the issues that are overall weakness for the classes in question. For example, students in 6th grade who are new to middle school may benefit from a unit focusing on what it means to be in middle school, including preparations for changes in social, academic, and appearance expectations. In early spring, eighth graders at Brewer Middle School will receive classroom guidance instruction on the high school registration process, signing up for classes and preparing for the transition. Seventh graders are likely to benefit from training in conflict resolution and peer mediation, since this can be a very socially traumatic year for students.

Consultation

According to the American School Counselor Association

(2003), consulting with parents, teachers and, possibly, community agencies to consider strategies to best help students and their families is one of the primary responsive services that counselors offer. It is important to remember that consultation is merely a sharing of information among concerned parties. This could involve discussing observations, sharing student work, collaborating on interventions, and brainstorming contributing factors and responses. It is a proactive approach to addressing a student concern or behavior (Myrick, 1997). It also allows for a sharing of information that will allow all who work with middle level students to more fully understand the issues.

All of these key elements are highlighted within the American School Counselor Association National Model. In addition to these four, the ASCA model includes many more tasks for which a guidance counselor is, or should be, responsible. Almost all of them are connected in some way to one or more of the four key elements above.

For example, many counselors are responsible for appraisal of individuals or groups of students by evaluating test data, class performance, and social behavior. This appraisal is frequently followed by consultations, planning, and implementing interventions and evaluation. Counselors are also responsible for making referrals to community agencies, social services or law enforcement and for sometimes providing in-service training and helping develop curriculum within the health or career prep learning results guidelines. As of late, counselors may have also, by default, become the keepers of the mountains of data that are required as part of the local assessment systems.

If schools are truly working hard to transform themselves into an authentic middle school, they must not forget the comprehensive guidance program. The whole point of a middle school is to create an environment that allows, encourages and empowers every student to take charge of his or her education. In order to do this, students need to feel safe and confident. A comprehensive guidance program will help create this atmosphere for all students to succeed.

References

- American School Counselor Association. (2003). *The ASCA national model, A framework for school counseling programs*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Myrick, R. (1997). *Developmental guidance and counseling: A practical approach* (3rd ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation.
- Schmidt, J. (1991). *A survival guide for the elementary/middle school counselor*. West Nyack, New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education.

Sticks & Stones May Break My Bones, but Relational Aggression Really Hurts Me (Bones Heal, but Emotions Can Be Broken Forever)

by *Beth Weatherbee*

Relational aggression is a form of bullying that strikes the social and emotional rather than the physical component of our well-being. A wide range of tactics are used in this form of bullying, including name-calling, gossiping, giving the “silent treatment,” intentionally excluding someone socially, starting rumor mills, written notes, and e-mail, just to name a few. Whichever method is used, this type of bullying can lead to mental health problems in victims who are on the receiving end of this behavior. Many develop unhealthy self-images and self-deprecatory behaviors that have been known to lead to thoughts of suicide.

Relational aggression can begin at a very early age. According to Kelly Burgess, author of *Words Will EVER Hurt Me – Girls as Bullies*, “relational aggression can start as early as second grade and reaches its peak in middle school.” Still others contend that it can begin as early as preschool.

Who is the perpetrator of relational aggression?

For the most part, studies show that girls use this form of bullying when engaged in conflict because girls tend to use their social intelligence rather than their physical strength to handle conflict. Emotional intimacy is more common in friendships between girls and is an important ingredient in their emotional and social well-being. As a result, girls who bully use this to their advantage to achieve interpersonal damage through the above mentioned strategies. As for boys, a study done by Bjorkvist notes that boys tend to use relational aggression as their verbal skills increase and that over time both boys and girl use this form of bullying.

How does this type of bullying affect students?

Relational aggression can involve several people including the bully, the victim, witnesses, and at times emissaries who will perpetrate the crime of relational aggression for the bully. All of these people who fill a role are affected by this behavior. The bully seeks out power and control over others and tends to view friendship as a means to achieve this power and control. As a result, many bullies are incapable of forming true friendships. The bully is also very manipulative and is able to orchestrate multiple events hoping to escape discovery and blame for their actions. This allows the bully to continue his/her hurtful behavior without taking responsibility for it.

The image that comes to mind when I think of a bully enlisting the help of emissaries to do their dirty work is from the classic movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, when the Wicked Witch of the West sics her flying monkeys on Dorothy and her friends to sabotage their mission of reaching the Emerald City. This role of emissary is usually filled by someone who either wants to be accepted into a group that is led by the bully or by someone who fears that they will be ostracized by the group if they do not comply.

Working together educators can make a difference in schools and communities, stopping relational aggression before it hurts anyone.

The victims of relational aggression usually suffer in silence while anxiety and depression increase, causing many victims to become more frequently absent from school. Victims also run the risk of developing long-term mental health issues that can lead to self-destructive behaviors such as self-mutilation and suicide attempts.

As for the witnesses of this cruelty, they too experience feelings of anxiety and powerlessness similar to the victim. Their role is viewed as minimal at the time of the altercation but can be huge in stopping this type of behavior. Unfortunately, instead of having empathy for the victim and coming to their aid, many bystanders watch in silence, and over time tend to almost justify the bullying that took place.

Beth Weatherbee is an instructor of Diversified Health Occupations at Tri-County Technical Center in Dexter, Maine. She also serves as an advisor for the Health Occupations Students of America Organization.

Does the media reinforce this behavior in students?

The media reinforces relational aggression, especially in girls, as is seen in newspapers, magazines, television shows, movies, and even fairy tale books. Many of the fairy tales we remember have been brought to life through Disney - the ever loving *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* or the beloved *Cinderella, for example*. Both stories depict beautiful young girls who are envied by at least one or more women. They are teased, taunted, and made to do manual labor as directed by either the evil queen in Snow White's case, or by the evil stepmother and step sisters in Cinderella's dysfunctional family. This leads me to my next question.

Why do girls use relational aggression to resolve conflict?

A quantitative inquiry by Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005) found there are four motivators for relational aggression: jealousy, entertainment, social status, and deflection. Many girls become envious or jealous of their counterparts because of the way they look, the clothes they wear, the friends they have, and the talents they possess. Other girls use relational aggression as a form of entertainment at the expense of the victim they have chosen to emotionally destroy. Still others use this type of bullying to climb the rungs of the social ladder that at times can cost the girl many of her true friends along the way. Once she reaches the top rung she is forever hurting others to maintain her status. The last motivator, deflection, is used by some as a way to refrain from becoming the victim of relational aggression. They begin rumors or spread gossip about someone else to keep the heat off themselves. They do this in an attempt to maintain their own status and prevent exclusion from their social group.

What can a teacher do to prevent relational aggression?

- 1) Establish clear definitions for all forms of bullying and have your students contribute to ways of preventing bullying – developing rules and consequences for this type of behavior.
- 2) Give your students positive feedback when you witness pro-social behavior.
- 3) Improve supervision in places and at times you think this type of transaction could take place in your school or on your school grounds.
- 4) Advocate for victims of relational aggression. Do not ignore it.
- 5) Involve staff, parents, older teens, and community members by offering training, information, and ongoing support to prevent bullying.

6) Engage your students in the discussion of relational aggression, encourage students to participate in school-wide events, team projects, and cross-grade activities that deal with some of these difficult issues students face around the topic of bullying.

7) Emphasize collaboration rather than competition in your classroom, in your school, and in your community.

8) Address the negative impact bullying has on the school climate and encourage your students to devise several strategies for resolving conflict without resorting to relational aggression or other types of bullying.

Finally...

As teachers we need to get involved; educate ourselves on relational aggression and the resources that are available to us through our schools and our communities to combat relational aggression. For example, the *Ophelia Project* incorporates older teen mentors who help younger girls identify relational aggression and stop it in its tracks. *The Empower Program* uses skits to target relational aggression and shows the effects of bullying on those involved: emissaries, victims, and bystanders. These skits bring to the forefront girl bullies, cliques, the price of popularity and what it takes to keep it. *The Mix It Up Program* enlists the aid of all students – boys and girls – to improve the social climate in their schools by easing tensions and improving relations across social boundaries through student-centered activities. Working together, educators can make a difference in schools and communities, stopping relational aggression before it hurts anyone.

References

- Björkvist, K., Lagerspaetz, K., & Kaukiainen, A. (1992). Do girls manipulate and boys fight?: Developmental trends in regard to direct and indirect aggression. *Aggressive Behavior* (18), 117-127.
- Crother, L., Field, J., & Kolbert J. (2005). Navigating power, control, and being nice: Aggression in adolescent girls' friendships. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, Vol. 83, 349-354.
- Jackson, C. (2005). Mix it up: Talking across boundaries. *Teaching Tolerance*, 32-37.
- Mullin-Rindler, N. (2003). Relational aggression: A different kind of bullying. *Principal*, 82(5), 60-61.
- <http://www.detnews.com/2004/schools/0410/18/c05-306758.htm>
- <http://preteenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/girlbullies.htm>

The Gift of Talent and Middle Schoolers?

by Lynn Farrin

In Maine, gifted and talented children are described as children “who excel, or have the potential to excel, beyond their age peers, in the regular school program, to the extent that they need and can benefit from programs for the gifted and talented” (Maine Code Me. R § 5-071-104.2). Maine’s gifted and talented educational policy further states that “gifted and talented children shall receive specialized instruction through these programs if they have exceptional ability, aptitude, skill, or creativity in one or more of the following categories: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, and/or artistic ability.” Maine’s policy includes general terms, a description of each of the gifted and talented categories identified above, and statistical guidelines as to the percentages of gifted and talented students who might be expected in a typical school population.

While Maine’s policy does not prescribe a specific format for a school’s gifted and talented program, schools are required to submit to the Maine Department of Education a programmatic plan that takes into account all of the guidelines outlined. Implementation of this plan was to begin during the 2004-2005 school year. Gifted and talented legislation is another example of an increasing number of educational policies that have emerged at both the state and federal levels, all with the underlying intention of ensuring that schools address the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

How are schools that serve middle school populations attempting to meet the needs of the gifted and talented population? What programs have been developed to nurture and grow the unique gifts and talents these individuals possess? What are some of the underlying issues, attitudes and beliefs that shape the various educational opportunities as related to gifted and talented middle school-aged students?

A Snapshot of Strategies

Pull-out programs are perhaps one of the most familiar educational models used with gifted and talented populations. Identified students leave their “regular” classroom for part or all of the day to receive instruction separate from their peers. Students receive instruction that is at a higher cognitive level than that of their grade level peers and instruction often moves at a faster pace, or is taught in greater depth (has “expanded opportunities”), thus meeting the cognitive needs of the gifted and talented student. Students in pull-out programs are believed to be more appropriately challenged and are said to feel more

socially accepted in this setting because they are part of classrooms with other individuals like themselves. Pull-out programs typically remove those students from the “regular” classrooms who have shown a high level of achievement (as measured by some standardized test), have the highest IQ’s – often 125 or above, and/or have some “capacity of excellence far beyond that of their chronological peers” (San Diego, CA GATES Program). Some school districts have created “charter schools” or “clusters” to serve their gifted and talented populations exclusively. Students are selected for enrollment based on their abilities to meet specific criteria similar to those described above.

Gifted and talented children pose unique challenges to teachers and have even been regarded as being difficult to teach.

Another strategy to accommodate the talents and gifts of middle school students who are working above grade level is grade promotion. Students are “skipped” one or multiple grades to be more appropriately placed instructionally. While this strategy may seem to meet students’ immediate academic needs, students’ social and physiological development may be significantly inconsistent with that of their peers, causing them to feel like an outsiders or anomalies. As a result, high performing middle level students may feel anxious and put an enormous amount of pressure on themselves to maintain their high level of performance. For some, this is the beginning of uncontrollable perfectionist tendencies, overwhelming feelings of social isolation and other complex psychological issues. Other students seem to adjust with minor incidents.

After 15 years as a middle school science and mathematics teacher, Lynn Farrin currently works at the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance as a Project Director. She continues to work with middle level teachers and their students through her project work at the Alliance.

Content acceleration is a third way that schools try to meet the needs of their gifted and talented populations. Students who are working above grade level remain in the classroom with their peers but work (often independently) on individualized instruction to "cover" concepts at a more rapid pace. This approach seems like a logical and effective strategy that does not isolate students from their peer groups and provides challenging work to stimulate learning. Some argue that students in content acceleration programs are often merely "kept busy" working from a text book or computer tutorial and though not physically isolated from their classmates, are not engaged in the same sort of learning experiences concurrently with their peers. They are not experiencing discourse with peers; cognitive dissonance is not woven into their learning if they are not part of a "learning community."

The (most) contentious issue around gifted and talented education seems to be rooted in one's belief about whether or not these unique abilities can be or should be nurtured, maximized, and explored to the fullest level in a "regular" classroom setting.

Beliefs Behind the Strategies

Gifted and talented children pose unique challenges to teachers and have even been regarded as being difficult to teach. Less confident, inexperienced, untrained teachers may perceive gifted and talented individuals as "threats" because they push teachers' levels of content knowledge and often quickly master whatever concept is presented. An expression used to describe the traits of gifted and talented students is "terrible toos" – too much, too sensitive, too emotional, too much of a perfectionist, too much for everyone else. There is a lack of qualified teachers who understand, recognize, and have strategies for the "whole" gifted and talented student.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has been accused of not making gifted and talented education a priority. Because the focus of NCLB has been on non-achieving students, many feel that those students who are exceeding expectations are being denied an appropriate education. Genius Denied, a group

that advocates for the same level of spending for gifted and talented education as for special education students, states that "education of the gifted is in this sorry state because of indifference, lack of funding, and the pernicious notion that education should have a "leveling" effect, a one-size-fits-all concept that deliberately ignores the needs of the gifted." Genius Denied suggests we are wasting our brightest young minds, leaving them to cope with boredom in repeating the same things they had already mastered years ago. These students are perhaps the most poised – our "brightest and best" – our most creative young minds. Shouldn't we do everything we can to promote and enhance the potential these individuals have? It is through these young minds that we as a society will find answers to our most challenging, technologically demanding, and complex world problems. Are gifted and talented students a hidden "at risk group?"

Where Do I Stand?

All strategies and programs designed especially with the gifted and talented individual in mind seem to agree on one issue – all want what is best for students; all want appropriate educational opportunities designed to foster the growth of every student's unique talents and gifts. The (most) contentious issue around gifted and talented education seems to be rooted in one's belief about whether or not these unique abilities can be or should be nurtured, maximized, and explored to the fullest level in a "regular" classroom setting.

In many ways, I feel the majority of gifted and talented programming is a tracking strategy in fancier clothing. Who's to say what is recognized as "exceptional" and is therefore categorized as needing a specialized program or course of action? Just like kids, gifts and talents come in all forms – they may be academic, intellectual, creative, artistic, or physical. Why are gifts and talents defined so narrowly in schools? All children have special gifts and talents. What do gifted and talented programs say about what our society values? It seems all too often, gifts and talents are assessed or measured by paper and pencil tests. These practices are in many ways discriminatory, favoring students who are high performing in literacy and mathematics and biased against non-English speaking students. A substantial percentage of white students from affluent neighborhoods make up gifted and talented programs.

I am in no way implying that gifted and talented students should not receive special consideration because their needs are unique and diverse, but if schools are mindful and genuinely operate under the philosophy that the needs of all learners should be accommodated, gifted and talented students are already being served. Schools that blend gifted and talented education with the middle school philosophy are meeting the needs of the "whole" gifted and talented child – including the

MAINELY MIDDLE

child in regular education classrooms with same-age peers while learning occurs at a level appropriate for them. The middle level philosophy, as outlined in *This We Believe* (2003), “answers” many of the programmatic issues that gifted and talented educators are seeking solutions for – it is inherent in the nature of the middle school philosophy. *This We Believe* describes successful schools as ones that “provide learners the opportunity to engage with curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory; use multiple learning and teaching approaches that responds to diversity; and is organizationally structured to support meaningful relationships for learning.” Isn’t this what we want for all students, regardless of what label they wear?

Educators play an important role in nurturing genius. Good teachers learn to recognize common characteristics of gifted children in their classrooms and plan an appropriate education. They lobby their schools to be flexible with these children, and they create classes or programs that meet their needs. They foster an educational climate where intellectual inquiry is celebrated, and they insist that learning be the primary goal of school.

Genius Denied

References

- Buescher T. & Higham S. Helping Adolescents Adjust to Giftedness. Online at: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/adjust_to_giftedness.html
- Educating Exceptional Children. Online at: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/Educating_Exceptional_kids.html
- Genius Denied at <http://www.geniusdenied.com/>
- Giftedness and the Gifted: What’s It All About? ED 321 481, ERIC EC Digest #E476, 1990 at: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/giftedness_and_gifted.html
- Gwinnett County Public Schools, Lawrenceville, GA Gifted and Talented informational webpage <http://www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps-edprogweb01.nsf/0/dbe1ca14e9cd61ad852567d00054c3f9?OpenDocument>
- Hager, R. (2004) Gifted, talented & left behind. *Reno Gazette-Journal*. Posted: 5/22/2004 <http://www.rgj.com/news/stories/html/2004/05/22/71373.php>
- Hanninen G. Blending Gifted Education and School Reform. Online at: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/Blending_Gifted_Ed.html
- Maine Government Administrative Letter #40, Change in Gifted and Talented Statute at <http://www.maine.gov/education/edletrs/2004/adlet/04adlet40.htm>
- National Middle School Association. (2003). *This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents*. Westerville, OH: Author.
- Oak Harbor School District, Oak Harbor, WA. Student programs: More opportunities to be available for the “highly capable” student. Online at: http://www.ohsd.net/index2.cfm?page=_c2&cid1=26&cid2=46
- Renzulli J. & Richards S. Academies of Inquiry and Talent for the Middle School Years. Online at: <http://www.newhorizons.org/spneeds/gifted/renzulli%20richards.htm>
- San Diego City Schools, San Diego, CA. Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Program Overview <http://prod031.sandi.net/GATE2/>
- State Gifted and Talented Definitions. June 2004 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/52/28/5228.htm>
- Tomlinson C. (1995). Gifted Learners and the Middle School: Problem or Promise? ERIC EC Digest #E535, August 1995

Spotlight Your School

We see and hear about many outstanding programs and ideas in our Maine schools. Your Maine Association for Middle Level Education needs your help to spread the word. Please consider sharing your ideas and success stories in one of our publications. No article is too small. We would also appreciate any tidbits of news featuring people from our middle level schools. For more information, contact Wally Alexander at wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu.

MAMLE Announces

Middle Level Listserve

Would you like to hear your colleagues' answer to a question about Middle Level Education? Would you like to get announcements of upcoming MAMLE events? Would you like to share your ideas and successes with other middle level educators? Have you run into a challenge that you'd like other people's ideas on how to solve? Then the new MAMLE listserve is the tool for you! With the help and sponsorship of the University of Maine at Farmington, MAMLE has established an e-mail list to facilitate conversations about Middle Level Education.

How To Subscribe

Make sure you have an e-mail account and MAKE SURE THAT YOUR E-MAIL PROGRAM IS SET UP PROPERLY SO YOU CAN RECEIVE MAIL! CHECK BY SENDING A LETTER TO YOURSELF, RECEIVING IT, REPLYING TO IT, AND MAKING SURE YOU GET THE REPLY. This may seem complicated but it only takes a minute, and an incorrect return address (a very common problem) will prevent ANYONE, not just this mailing list, from replying to any of your mail.

Send a letter to majordomo@umf.maine.edu with only these lines in the body of the letter:

```
subscribe mamle  
end
```

(make sure the "end" command is on its own line.)

Check your mail. You should soon receive confirmation that you are a member of the "mamle" mailing list. You can now use the list.

How To Use The MAMLE Mailing List

Any mail you send to mamle@umf.maine.edu will go to all "mamle" subscribers, and you will receive any mail anyone else sends to that address. If you reply to a letter you got from the list, your reply will go to the whole list, too.

Important: Be sure the subject line of each of your letters shows what it is about. That will make it much easier for everyone to follow the several threads of discussion that will probably run concurrently on the mailing list.

BEWARE!! If you write a personal letter to someone, it can be very embarrassing to accidentally send it to a large group! Remember that your replies to list letters will go to the whole list. Whenever you reply to an e-mail, check the "To:" line at the top before you send it to make sure it is going where you intend it to go.

How To Unsubscribe

If you decide at any time that you no longer want to receive mail from the "mamle" mailing list, you can "unsubscribe:"

Send a letter to majordomo@umf.maine.edu with only these lines in the body of the letter:

```
unsubscribe mamle  
end
```

(Note that you send this letter to majordomo@umf.maine.edu, the mailing listmanager's address, not to mamle@umf.maine.edu, the address of the mailing list, itself.)

Check your mail. You should soon receive a confirmation that you have been removed from the "mamle" mailing list.

Questions? Contact Mike Muir at mmuir@maine.edu

What's the Big Deal About Graphic Novels?

by Denise De Vito

Visual media is familiar in the daily lives of adolescents. Video games, television, print advertising, cartoons, computer graphics, and graphic icons are familiar non-texts that feature visual images for these visual consumers. With such consistent exposure to images, it is not surprising that graphic novel sales and readership are on the rise among adolescents in the United States.

Using images to convey storytelling is highly cinematic with each scene visually separated and presented in sequential order. This type of pictorial narrative is referred to as sequential art and most commonly known in comic book writing. Certainly graphic novels have foundations in the comic book genre as well as the traditional prose narrative way of storytelling. Graphic novels are essentially the combination of comic books and the conventional novel.

Although the United States has been reluctant to embrace graphic novels, the popularity of graphic novels has a sustained, respected tradition in Europe and Japan. For example, France and Belgium have been producing Tintin and Lieutenant Blueberry series since the latter part of the nineteenth century. Asterix and Obelix have been used to teach history and language acquisition since 1963 while Italy's Corto Maltese has produced historical adventure since 1967. In Japan, graphic novels are used both in educational and employee training settings. The Japanese graphic novel, *Manga*, is so popular that it has become commonplace within American adolescent language.

Manga sales in the United States are in such high demand that readers are learning Japanese because they do not want to wait for the release of translated publications (*Using comics and graphic novels*, 2005). Adolescents in the United States are comfortable with visual pictures that present information; this is the norm in the digital and visual world of the 21st century. Sales of graphic novels in the United States were \$120 million in 2003 (Raiteri, 2003) reflecting the comfort level of adolescents with visual literary formats.

Will Eisner, creator of the comic book hero *Spirit*, coined the term graphic novel in 1978 when he penned *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, a collection of stories about

a poor crowded Jewish Bronx neighborhood. Eisner asserted that the graphic novel was the "literary form of comics" (Kennedy, 2003, p.10). Harvey suggests that "pictures are to graphic novels what words are to poetry" (Harvey, 2005, p. 8). Traditional book publishers, like many educators and librarians in the United States, have been reluctant to embrace this visual medium, but the comic world has not. Authors such as Art Spiegelman, Neil Gaiman, and Jeff Smith were published first by the comic industry. American reluctance in embracing graphic novels as a widespread valid and legitimate instructional medium is embedded in the view that popular culture comic book narrative is substandard to literary narrative. Many have viewed sequential art storytelling as pulp or junk, lumping comic books and graphic novels into the same realm. Certainly comic books are precursors to contemporary graphic novels and have a rich and diverse history in their own right. However, graphic novels are not comic books.

So What's the Difference Between a Comic Book and a Graphic Novel?

Comics

Comics are created as disposable entertainment on paper not created for long term preservation. They appear daily in newspapers or are serialized in comic books and published monthly. Comic books are the folklore of the time. They comment on the concerns of contemporary society and reflect current societal thought (Eisner, 1996). Those published in the United States celebrate the "common man" and confront the worries and fears of the average American. Comic Books very much reflect and magnify popular culture. Spiderman, The X-men, and the Hulk, are examples of comic book characters created at a time when American society was concerned with mutations from industrial toxic waste. Little Orphan Annie during the Great Depression addressed social issues within the

Denise De Vito is an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Maine at Farmington where she teaches content literacy, English, and language arts in the Secondary Education Program.

United States. Dick Tracy fought organized crime during the height of syndicated crime concerns.

Time in comic art is very different from traditional narrative storytelling. Traditional storytelling has a beginning, middle, and an end. Events can be relayed either spatially or chronologically. In comics, dramatic narrative is open ended; the action is always *in medias res*. The comic world has no beginning and no end. Change never encroaches upon the comic world and the characters never age. Peanuts will always be in second grade with Charlie Brown continually seeking the courage to speak to the little red haired girl. Diana Prince, known to the world as the Amazonian Wonder Woman will perpetually battle evil as a twenty-something wielding bulletproof bracelets and a magic lasso.

Graphic novels present readers a wonderful bridge to the picture books they enjoyed in their younger years as well as tapping into the reader in- and out-of-school literacy experiences.

Time has no effect on the lives of these comic characters. Many characters remain static rather than growing and developing due to conflict or experience. Comics feature a set of recurring characters that periodically retell their history in encapsulated form, allowing new readers to understand and participate in the plot at any point in the character's publication history. Seriated comics also rely upon formulaic repetition where the same events occur with the same outcome. For example, in the Archie Comic series the character Betty consistently tries to become Archie's girlfriend, while he continues to date Veronica.

Conversation in comics occurs through the use of balloon ovals with dialogue kept to a minimum because of panel spacing issues. Onomatopoeia encourages new words to be created when necessary for conveying sound. Wow, zowie, bam and whap have all been added to the English vocabulary by comic contribution (Inge, 2004, p. 12). Ideas that cannot be conveyed with the written word have developed into visual symbols in the comic world "such as bubble balloons for silent thoughts, stars to show pain, drops of water to express labor or worry, or radiating lines to convey pride or enlightenment" (Inge, 2004, p. 12). Images convey action in comic books. Plot

and character movement with the written word are subordinated to visual images.

Graphic novels

Graphic novels, unlike the impermanence of comics, are printed like a book, bound in a permanent cover. These publications are usually substantial, self-contained narratives, published in large, bound volumes of anywhere from 50 to 300 pages (Clute and Nicholls, 1993). Like comic books, graphic novels use boxed pictures, or panels, with text to relate information to the reader. Both comic books and graphic novels rely on a pictorial narrative to convey plot. The dynamic of the graphic novel may contain many more boxed pictures than a comic book. Readers of graphic novels must decode the words and illustrations, identifying what is happening between the visual sequences (Bucher & Manning, 2006). For example, *Stuck Rubber Baby* (Cruse, 1995) forces readers to carefully make inferences regarding the protagonist's quest for identity against the backdrop of the Civil Rights' Movement through facial expression, body language, page layout, artistic detail, and panel composition.

The artistic images in graphic novels support character development and plot movement. Each sequential art frame is both visual and demands a high level of complex concentration from the reader. Readers must make inferences by relying upon pictures and a small amount of text. Graphic novels depend upon a fully integrated and balanced combination of word and pictures for maximum effect (Inge, 2004). "The most significant difference from a comic is that the graphic novel's text is both written and visual" (*Using comics and graphic novels*, 2005). Conveying a story through visual metaphors and visual images, particularly images of action, is a technique called cinematographic narrative (Clute and Nicholls, 1993). For example, Thompson's *Blankets* often contains montages to depict the protagonist's struggle with first love, bullying, poverty, and his family's fundamental faith.

Graphic novels, like conventional prose novels are told spatially or chronologically and have a beginning, middle, and end as well as a main character that develops throughout the plot. The story is complete in itself and does not need several successive parts published separately to complete the action. Some titles like Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986), which confront the Holocaust in Poland, and Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003), a biographical memoir of a young woman growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution, have drawn such critical and popular acclaim that the stories have been furthered in a second volume.

Graphic Novels and Their Place in Young Adult Literature

Young adult literature bridges the gap between childhood and adult reading by allowing the processes of critical thinking

Graphic novels further literacy development of adolescents by providing opportunities for reader discernment, psychological development, and emotional maturation in an environment that allows readers to have vicarious experiences with the characters as well as seeing themselves in the literature they read.

by allowing the reader to examine concepts and ideas. Graphic novels present readers a wonderful bridge to the picture books they enjoyed in their younger years as well as tapping into the reader in- and out-of-school literacy experiences.

Some assert that the fusion of text and images requires readers to use more complex cognitive skills than traditional text based books (Bucher and Manning, 2006; Schwartz, 2002). Readers “decode facial and body expressions, the symbolic meanings of certain images and postures, metaphors and similes and other social and literary nuances” (Simmons, 2003, p.12). Graphic novels further literacy development of adolescents by providing opportunities for reader discernment, psychological development, and emotional maturation in an environment that allows readers to have vicarious experiences with the characters as well as seeing themselves in the literature they read.

Selecting Quality Graphic Novels

Quality graphic novels address important themes for young adults and their adolescent development. These themes include issues of acceptance, prejudice, social injustice, coming of age, triumph over adversity, and personal growth. Graphic novels can feature controversial themes or present content more appropriate for discerning, mature readers even though adolescents may be reading them as popular works. Because of this, selecting graphic novels can seem a bit daunting.

Selecting graphic novels is much like selecting quality adolescent literature. The overall artistic quality should be determined along with the impact to the curriculum and the

needs and interests of the students. When evaluating the visual artistic components of titles, consider visual impact, the blending of text and art, whether or not color enhances or distracts from the story and the appropriateness for the adolescent audience. For example, *Ghost World* (2001) presents a story of friendship self-identity and growing up with some very frank discussions regarding sexual curiosity. The protagonist even visits an adult book store which is graphically illustrated. Although *Ghost World* (2001) is a very popular graphic novel amongst young readers, the appropriateness for the classroom setting is highly questionable.

Realism of the plot, character appeal and development, a compelling theme related to the human condition and interest of the setting (Bushman & Haas 2001) are traditional means for assessing young adult literature. Content, language, sexist and other cultural stereotypes, and appropriateness to the maturity of the reader are strong considerations for graphic novel assessment beyond traditional evaluative measures. The presentation of issues such as diversity, the addressing of individual development, identity with power, authority and governance are concerns as well. Social issues such as AIDS is highlighted in *Pedro and Me* (Winnick, 2000). *The Four Immigrants* (Kiyama, 1999) examines the lives of four Japanese immigrants in San Francisco. A look at the attacks on the United States on 11 September can be found in *9-11 Artists Respond* (2001) and *9-11 The World's Finest Comic Book Writers and Artists Tell Stories to Remember* (2002).

The best graphic novels, like good prose narratives, provide powerful images that are dramatic, memorable, and invoke strong emotions in the reader.

The best graphic novels, like good prose narratives, provide powerful images that are dramatic, memorable, and invoke strong emotions in the reader. There are numerous types of graphic novels including realistic stories, science fiction and fantasy, historic fiction, Manga, satires, humor, nonfiction, biography, autobiography and adaptations of classics. The qualities that define that genre should be the considerations when selecting the graphic novel titles to best represent the genre. An example for biography might be Ottaviani's *Dignifying Science* (2003) which highlights famous female scientists; or *Two-Fisted Science* (2001) which discusses Newton, Einstein, and Galileo. For historical fiction Miller and Varley's *300* (1999) tells the Battle of Thermopylae as viewed by the Spartans, while Shanower's *A Thousand Ships* (2001) tells the

MAINLY MIDDLE

story of the Trojan War. David Wenzel's graphic presentation of Tolkien's the *Hobbit* (2001), Heut's version of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (2001) and Kuper's rendering of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (2003) are examples of classical texts in sequential art form.

Numerous resources in book, magazine, journal, and Internet form contain lists and reviews of graphic novels. Internet resources continually monitor and reflect the changing landscape of graphic novels with the most up-to-date information, aiding in the selection of quality titles. [Http://lists.topica.com/lists/GNLIB-L](http://lists.topica.com/lists/GNLIB-L) is an unmonitored discussion site that allows librarians a forum to share views and resources. [Www.TokyoPop.com](http://www.TokyoPop.com) contains the most current information regarding Manga and www.noflyingnotights.com/index2.html offers annotated webliographic information about popular graphic novels and comics.

Bibliography

- 9-11 *Artists respond* (2002). Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics.
- 9-11 *The world's finest comic book writers and artists tell stories to remember* (2002). New York, New York: DC Comics.
- Bucher, K. & Manning, M. (2006). *Young adult literature: Exploration, evaluation, and appreciation*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson.
- Bushman, J. & Haas, A. (2001). *Using young adult literature in the english classroom*, 3rd edition. New York, New York: Merrill.
- Clowes, D. (2001). *Ghost World*. Seattle, Washington: Fantagraphics Books.
- Clute, J. & Nicholls, P. (1993). *The encyclopedia of science fiction, 2nd edition*. New York, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Cruse, H. (1995). *Stuck rubber baby*. New York: Paradox.
- Eisner, W. (1978). *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*. New York, New York: Titan Books.
- Eisner, W. (1996). *Graphic storytelling*. Tamarac, Florida: Poorhouse Press.
- Harvey, R. (September 2005). In Graphic novels, the pictures are the story. *The Council Chronicle*. 15(1), 8.
- Heut, S. (2001). *Remembrance of things past*. New York, New York: NBM.
- Inge, M. (Summer 2004). Where are the comics? *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*. 84(3), 11-14.
- Kennedy, M. (2003). Wisdom from the old master: Will Eisner discusses the graphic novel. *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, 62(5), 110-111.
- Kuper, P. (2003). *The metamorphosis*. New York, New York: Crown.
- Kiyama, H. (1999). *The four immigrants manga: A Japanese experience in San Francisco, 1904-1924*. Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press.
- Miller, F. & Varley, L. (1999) *300*. Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics.
- Ottaviani, J. (2003). *Dignifying science*. Ann Arbor: Michigan: G.T. Labs.
- Ottaviani, J. (2001). *Two fisted science: Stories about scientists*. Ann Arbor: Michigan: G.T. Labs.
- Raiteri, S. (2003). Graphic novels. *Library Journal*, 128(14), 138.
- Satrapa, M. (2003). *Persepolis*. New York, New York: Pantheon Press.
- Schwartz, G. (2002). Graphic novels for multiple literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 46(3), 262-265.
- Shanower, E. (2001). *A thousand ships*. Orange, California: Image Comics.
- Simmons, T. (2003). Comics books in my library? *PMLA Quarterly*. 67(2), 12, 20.
- Spiegelman, A. (1986). *Maus a survivor's tale: My father bleeds history*. New York, New York: Pantheon Press.
- Thompson, C. (2005). *Blankets*. Marietta, Georgia: Top Shelf Productions. Using comics and graphic novels in the classroom. (September 2005). *The Council Chronicle*. 15(1), 2, 8.
- Wenzel, D. (2001). *The hobbit: An illustrated edition of the fantasy classic*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Winnick, J. (2000). *Pedro and me: Friendships, loss, and what I learned*. New York, New York: Henry

Where are we going?

by Chris Williams

As I listen to my colleagues air their concerns about the impact of *No Child Left Behind* on their students, I sense their frustration is growing. At times, I hear a tone of anguish in their voices. Carried upon their backs is the additional burden of implementing an authentic reliable local assessment system that aligns with the federal and state regulations. Many educators feel the mandates steal valuable time and energy from all members of the learning community.

Assessing student progress is critical; however, constantly evaluating young adolescent learners is counterproductive. The time taken from class to assess, means less time for students to participate in their learning. Lost are the voices of the students, as the various mandated assessments force teachers and their students to move on before the learning is complete.

In a responsive middle school setting, students expressing their thoughts and empowering them as learners is vital. The integrative curriculum model assists students in taking a more active role in their learning. Educators mired in paperwork because of the various educational directives find their students' voices are muted.

After reading articles by James Beane and Elizabeth Pate about the status of today's middle schools, I wrote this poem to recapture the many voices of teachers and young adolescents in today's middle schools, faced with challenges that at times seem hard to define. Limits set by the mandates occur only if we give up our voices. Make sure that your voice and the voices of your students will rise above the mounds of paperwork

References

- Beane, J. (2004). Creating quality in the middle school curriculum. *Reforming Middle Level Education*, Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Pate, E. (2001). Standards, students, and exploration: Creating a curriculum intersection of excellence. *Reinventing the Middle School*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

Chris Williams teaches young adolescents at Bucksport Middle School in Bucksport, Maine. In 1996 her work was acknowledged by MAMLE as she was presented with an Exemplary Practice Award.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Where are we going?
Where have we been?
Lost in a quagmire of standards and high stakes assessments
Set by some airheads, political experts I hear
Too distant from the reality of young adolescent learners
To know is to understand
Yet, assessments of isolated facts fosters, disparities degrading to the core.

Where are we going?
Where have we been?
Where are all the children?
They are lost, each and every one –
Thus, our battle cry should begin; yet our voices too muffled by the debate.

MAINELY MIDDLE

No longer an embracing conversation
that is socially responsible and intellectually challenging
For the children are becoming robotic
The assessments strangely appear contrived
Enduring knowledge is a torch without an eternal flame –

Disheartening rhetoric RESOUNDS loudly amplifying the nonsense
The political dialogue bellows over the voices of reason
Yes, airheads do speak, yet their spoken word is twisted
Where are we going?
Where have we been?

Rise above continual clamor
For we must listen carefully
If we do not children will vanish
into the twilight zone of the endless data collected.

Mandated standards will bring all down to a bottomless pit,
darkened by the loss of curiosity.
Children's tears shall stain the worn textbook pages
Claims that the mandates level the playing field, symbolizes shrink-wrap
as the young adolescent brains, hibernate
during the winter months when school is in session.

It feels as if Alice from Wonderland has moved to the Wizard of Oz.
Now who hides behind the silk curtain?
Housed in the cauldron of power is a wizard's magic solution
Yet no one knows which key shall open the door.

If the critical questions are not asked
And the tracks never derailed
Then learners will become mere students
Marching forward into infinity...factoids
Where are we going?
Where have we been?

Has the debate about our failing Middle Schools,
created a modern day version of Gulliver's entrapment?
Has anyone noticed
that the voices of the young adolescents are silent?

7th Annual Middle Level Scholar Leader Awards Banquet

May 25, 2006

Augusta Civic Center

Watch for registration materials at your school

Staying Between the Sheets, at Least a Little While Longer

by Michael R. Vieth

Millions of students go to school every day too tired to think well or participate in classes – and it is all due to sleep deprivation. The busy, daily schedules of children and teens are not allowing them to get enough sleep. Less sleep is unhealthy according to the most recent research. As teenagers move through the teenage years, they need increasing amounts of sleep; nine hours per night is the necessary amount to avoid behaviors associated with sleep deprivation.

Among other things, sleep deprivation is causing students to sleep during class instead of being awake and alert. When students sleep in class, they are not learning. Researchers have now shown that the majority of adolescents retain more information later in the day. Contrary to this information, America's school systems are programmed to begin early in the day; however, according to the sleep rhythms of most teenagers, they should still be sleeping (Final Report Summary, 2001).

Early Morning Discrimination

Lack of sleep for most teens is not caused by choice. Many do not choose to stay up late at night because they are out having fun. The body's circadian rhythms generate internally and without any social or environmental cues. Adolescents experience a natural circadian phase delay; therefore, they tend to stay up and sleep in later than in preadolescence (National Sleep Foundation, 2000). The opening and closing schedules of schools are not based on these rhythms but are based on the business world and what is best for adults.

School schedules should be adapted to the unique needs of pupils; thus the administrator must not bear the sole responsibility for planning class schedules (Final Report Summary, 2001). The teachers, who see how often their students fall asleep and what times of the day they fall asleep, should have input on the schedule. In constructing the daily timetable, the first task of the teacher is to provide adequately for the core subjects. These should be allotted the periods of the day that are most favorable for the type of work involved. In a study of peak work times for students, all subjects' performance rates peaked in the afternoon. Afternoon reading instruction produces the greatest increase in reading scores as compared to morning instruction. Perhaps due to findings of this nature, administering the SAT only in the morning may discriminate against some

students (*School Start Time Study*, 2001).

In a study by Allen and Mireable (1989, as reported in *School Start Time Study*, 2001), students were on average least alert at about 10:00 AM, while 50% of the students reported being most alert after 3:00 PM. Thus, most students were in school during the period they reported being least alert and were released from school at the time they were reaching their peak alertness (National Sleep Foundation, 2000). Since this research does not apply to all students, schools should administer flexible scheduling.

More schools should look into this research and see if a change to their schedule would improve students' grades, attendance, and lack of tardiness.

The purpose of school is to teach the students and have them comprehend the information they are learning. There are two fundamental types of schedules: conventional and flexible. In practice, conventional schedules are more common. In theory, flexible schedules are considered by many educators to be the best way to provide a balance of control and freedom for staff and students. The ability of the school administrator to schedule teachers' and students' time so each receives the most from each school day has become an essential skill (*School Start Time Study*, 2001). If administrators are unable to make the decision of when to schedule classes for the benefit of students,

Originally from Chicago, Michael R. Vieth has a degree from the University of Iowa, and is now pursuing an M.Ed. from the University of Maine.

there is another alternative. A study conducted by Lorraine Ammons (1995, as reported in School Start Time Study, 2001) indicated that the majority of students could accurately predict their preferred time of day. This is why the success rates from college are so high; college students are able to create their own schedules by picking certain classes and when they want to take them. Most college students realize within their first semester that they learn much better later in the day. The students feel more rested, awake and motivated to go to class and learn later in the day.

Sleep Deprivation Linked to Poor Grades

Some studies have noticed that students who get less sleep also obtain worse grades (Lawton, 1999). This would make sense because the students are sleeping through class; they are not retaining the knowledge. Sleep deprivation can be associated with information processing, memory, and memory deficits; increased irritability, anxiety, and depression; hypersexuality; decreased creativity; and ability to handle complex tasks. The specific loss of REM sleep may also result in memory loss (School Start Time, 2001; National Sleep Foundation, 2000). With all these symptoms of sleep deprivation, it is impossible to learn efficiently. To add to the students' problems of sleep deprivation, everyone around the students are irritated as well due to this lack of sleep. This enhanced irritability creates negative learning and teaching environments for everyone.

Later Start Time Improves Grades

If schools opened later, it would help the grades, attitudes and health of the students. An experiment conducted in seven high schools in Minneapolis showed just that (Minneapolis Public Schools Start Time Study, 2001). The entire school district changed their starting time from 7:15 to 8:40 AM, and the dismissal time from 1:45 to 3:20 PM. Not only did this small change improve grades and attitudes of students, a significant increase in attendance rates in grades 9, 10, and 11 occurred (Wahlstrom, 2002). The Minneapolis School District found that the results of their experiment were significant enough to keep the new hours. Minneapolis students now get an hour more sleep each school night or obtain five more hours sleep per week than students whose schools begin an hour earlier (Minneapolis Public Schools Start Time Study, 2001).

Additional Concerns Arise

Other school districts should view the results from Minneapolis' experience with the schedule changes and see how the same type of alterations would affect their schools; one district in Kentucky did just that. The notion of changing the time that school starts in the morning inflamed parents and community members in the Fayette County Public Schools. In the space of

three months, the school board voted three separate times, reversing itself twice, before it made up its mind (Lawton, 1999). This district soon discovered after making their changes, that any planned adjustment of school start times becomes entangled in other issues such as bus transportation, interscholastic athletics, student jobs, before-and after-school child care and even juvenile crime. The board finally settled on ringing first bells one hour later for high school and middle school students while elementary students start their day up to 90 minutes earlier (Lawton, 1999). Family schedules and time spent together were disrupted by the changes. Parents had mixed feelings about the impact of the changes on their child-care arrangements. Parents whose elementary students started at 7:40 AM were pleased about not having to arrange for before-school childcare. However, since teenage students were getting out of school later than elementary students, the teenagers were not around to baby-sit in the afternoon (Lawton, 1999). The transportation system also had to be altered to accommodate its students. Because of the later openings for middle school and high school students, most parents were already at work; therefore, they had to rely on the bus system to transport them to school. This meant the district had to purchase more busses and hire more bus drivers. Even with the moderate setbacks of the new system, the overall results of the experiment outweighed the unwelcome adjustments (Lawton, 1999).

By making it easier for students to get up and go to school, they will be able to achieve more while they are there.

A Personal Example – and Summary

Commuting 45 minutes to 1.5 hours (depending on traffic and driving instead of using public transportation) each way to high school was necessary, but when school started at 7:55 AM, that meant I was on the road at 6:30 AM at the latest. Some of my friends had a commute of a minimum of two hours. It seemed unfair at the time, and still does to this day that school started early enough that my friends and I had to leave home before the sun rose. One friend had swimming practice before and after school, so he had to be there at 6:30 AM. After researching this topic, the data from Minneapolis supports the data from the National Sleep Foundation that high school students learn better with more sleep (National Sleep Foundation, 2000). This is obvious to most students, but it still seems that outside influences determine when the school day starts. Parents need someone to look after the children before schools start later in the day, but this does not mean that the school does

not open its doors before the opening bell. Athletic and scholastic sports might start practicing before school. These two would gear the students mentally and physically for the day. More schools should look into this research and see if a change to their schedule would improve students' grades, attendance, and lack of tardiness. By making it easier for students to get up and go to school, they will be able to achieve more while they are there. This would be an advantage to us as a nation. While research has shown that a later start time can improve grades, there are many other factors that must also be taken into account.

References

Lawton, M. (1999). For whom the school bell tolls. *The School Administrator Web Edition*. Retrieved December 7, 2005, from http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1999_03/lawton.htm

National Sleep Foundation. (2000). Adolescent sleep needs

and patterns: Research report and resource guide. Washington, D.C. Retrieved December 7, 2005, from http://www.sleepfoundation.org/_content/hottopics/sleep_and_teens_report1.pdf.

The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). (2001). School start time study: Final report summary. Retrieved December 7, 2005, from http://education.umn.edu/carei/Programs/start_time/default.html

Wahlstrom, K. (2002). Changing times: Findings from the first longitudinal study of later high school start times. *NASSP Bulletin*. 86: 3-21.

Wahlstrom, K., Davison, M., Choi, J., & Ross, J. (2001). Minneapolis public schools start time study: Executive summary. Retrieved December 7, 2005, from <http://education.umn.edu/CAREI/Reports/docs/SST-2001ES.pdf>

2005 Janet Nesin Reynolds Outstanding Middle Level Educator Awards

Argy Nestor

**D.R. Gaul Middle School
Union, Maine**

Elizabeth (Betty) Bickford

**Mattanawcook Junior High School
Lincoln, Maine**

Transition Between Middle and High School

by Michael A. Aldrete

What happens when the middle school student is ready to move on to ninth grade or his freshman year of high school? From the school's organization, curriculum, and teachers – to the needs and interests of the middle level student – a transition period is about to begin (*This We Believe*, 2003). On the road to success, the student encounters the 'highs' and 'lows' of middle school life.

The middle school years are unique and students go through different developmental stages before moving to high school. Young adolescents today frequently have a difficult time making the transition into high school (Mizelle and Irvin, 2000).

Now one might ask, what could be so difficult for these young adolescents? Could it be that they have to learn new class schedules, memorize their new locker combinations, or have to deal with an entirely new school building? All the energy needed to prepare students for middle school developmental changes takes a back seat as s/he is ready to leave for high school. As the transition process unfolds, the student will generally experience an impersonal, more competitive, and grade-oriented environment than experienced in middle school. Different teachers, new friends, the choice of new curricular and extra curricular activities will become the norm.

In 2001, a survey was taken of eighth grade students from Nebraska, Georgia, and Pennsylvania on their concerns as they were about to enter high school. Here is what they said:

2001 Top Ten Concerns

1. Getting good grades.
2. Preparing for life.
3. Taking tests and final exams.
4. Preparing for college.
5. Having a lot of homework.
6. Taking different classes.
7. Getting work turned in on time.
8. Being successful in class.
9. Organizing my time.
10. What my parents will expect of me.

I conducted my own survey of new freshmen at a nearby high school:

2005 Top Ten Concerns

1. Having more privileges.
2. More responsibilities and freedom of choice.
3. Having to pay more attention to homework.
4. Being able to show feelings towards someone.
5. Preparing for college.
6. Wasn't prepared well for knowing how to study.
7. Having to learn a new schedule of classes.
8. Worried about what upper classmen think.
9. Making a good first impression.
10. Having to learn to organize time better.

These lists show that concerns about entering into high school are nearly the same in different parts of the country.

During the transition period, students making the transition from middle level are both excited and concerned about high school. With the transition period will come more freedoms, more choices, new friends, and being able to participate in extra curricular activities.

How One District Handles Transition

Our school district has an orientation process that helps students make the transition. It includes...

- a) providing student and parent information about the high school,
- b) providing students the social support and,
- c) bringing personnel together to learn about each school curriculum via vertical meetings.

We show the incoming ninth graders what the high school is going to be like. The students and their parents attend a "Freshmen Orientation" day. This is on the first day of school

Michael A. Aldrete teaches history and psychology at Mattanawcook Academy in Lincoln, Maine. He is currently finishing his graduate studies in Educational Leadership at the University Maine.

and there are no upper classmen present. The new ninth graders attend their normal classes, learn to work their locker combinations, and get to know which teachers they will have. All students, parents, and teachers come together in an assembly. This is where the teachers are introduced and school rules are mentioned. They are encouraged to do well in their classes and take part in extra-curricular activities.

Reinforcing the Need for Transition

During my years as a high school teacher, I have seen that a well-run transition process is very important. Although I don't teach freshmen, I may have had an older brother or sister, which I feel helps in the transition process. As students enter into their freshmen year, most are very quick to adapt. They find out that the transition wasn't as tough as they first thought it to be. It usually takes the others more than half the year to make the transition. By the time these freshmen enter their

senior year and they think their once difficult concerns from eighth grade are gone, as seniors, they now inherit more difficult *adult* concerns as they are ready to leave high school.

References

- Maute, J. & Brough, J. (2002). The next best step. *Middle Ground*, 6(1), 16-19.
- McAdoo, M (1999). Studies in Transition: How to help adolescents navigate the path to and from middle school. *Middle Ground*, (3). 21-23.
- Mizelle, N. & Irvin, J. (2000). Transition from middle school into high school. *Middle School Journal*, 31(5).
- National Middle School Association. *This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents*. (2003). Westerville, OH: Author.

MAMLE Exemplary Practice ***2005 Award Winners***

**Heather Wakelin, Fred Eder,
Ann Putney**

Notables

Biddeford Middle School

Debra Bishop

Oral History Service Learning

Orono Middle School

The Merits of Advisory Programs: Differing Views and Different Results

by Lowell Oyster

It is the first period of the day in two different schools. In one, a group of twelve students excitedly sit in a circle as Mr. Smith enters the room. Although he does not have any of these students in classes during the day, he sees them every day at this time. Before he opens the discussion, a student airs a concern about something he saw on the news last night. Some other students saw it as well and begin to offer their own personal opinions and feelings. Observers can't help notice that all the members of this group participate with confidence and honesty, free of the fear that their words will be followed with ridicule or laughter.

You exit and hurry on to a neighboring school. Here you witness a larger group, maybe 20 students, fidgeting at their desk, their eyes trying to avoid those of the teacher. No one seems involved in the "conversation," and those that are clearly do not want to be sharing. The teacher soon gives in and the students play board games for the rest of the time they are together. What you have just witnessed are two different advisory programs, a common aspect of many successful middle level schools. Why are these two programs so vastly different? Why has advisory become such a hot topic in middle schools? What is known about successful advisory programs that could be useful to teachers and administrators?

An advisory program generally involves one adult in the school who is responsible for a small group of students, meeting with them regularly and providing an opportunity for peer interaction, guidance, and advice. The concept is that with this arrangement, every student inside the school will be well known by at least one adult, thus providing each with a needed advocate. When implemented in an effective manner, advisory programs frequently promote the following objectives (National Middle School Association Research Summary #9, 1996):

- They promote student-teacher relationships.
- They address general self-esteem and competence beliefs.
- They provide social exchange and peer recognition in a safe environment.

- They can link parents with the school.
- They help mediate between academic and social concerns.

The manner in which these objectives are met varies between schools and groups based on the adults running the program, how the program was implemented in the school, the number of students in the group, and many other factors. Some of the more common activities of advisory center around student-led discussions, question and answer sessions, and planned group actions. Frequently, academic concerns can be addressed here as well. *Turning Points 2000* (2000) summarizes – "advisory enables educators to provide responsible adult guidance and extra support as middle grades students undergo normal, yet often turbulent, developmental changes that directly and indirectly affect learning" (p. 144).

While it sounds good on paper, and research proves it can be effective in meeting its outlined objectives, even *Turning Points 2000* says it is *potentially* an important time of the day for the students. It is potentially important because this has become one of the more difficult structures to place effectively in a school for many reasons.

First, research shows that these groups should meet every day for at least twenty minutes. Schools that do not allocate or prioritize the time to do this do not see the same results. The size of the groups seems to be as critical as the time needed to meet. These are intended to be small groups, anywhere from 12-15 students, and one adult. Schools with ineffective or dysfunctional advisory groups often cite this as the problem.

Where advisory really becomes an issue, however, is in the concerns of the parents and community and the effectiveness of adults in the program. Parents often see this time of the day as

Lowell Oyster is a full-time graduate student at the University of Maine in the Middle Level Education program. After he earns his M.Ed., he plans on joining the teaching profession in the fall of 2007, somewhere in the state of Maine.

an intrusive, forced entry into the personal lives of their children. They view it as a time where the students have no choice but to share, and some research available shows that students often echo this sentiment (Brown & Anfara, 2005). Rather than a chance for “student mingling” it becomes a time for “teacher meddling.” Teachers can also be reluctant for the same reasons. They can feel uncomfortable in this open setting and because of this lessen the program’s grasp and success by substituting quality conversations based around students’ concerns with card games or homework time. This does not build trust or respect and does not give these students their needed advocate.

Any advisory program can be as effective as Mr. Smith’s with two things – the proper professional development for the adults involved, and their willingness to put that development opportunity to use.

It is easy to see that advisory groups can be both effective and useful, uncomfortable, and misused. When implemented in the proper manner they can be eye-opening and developmentally appropriate. They become necessary if we believe that middle school students’ academic success is enhanced by also

meeting their social and emotional needs. Students need and should be given this time to bond with their peers and an adult in a safe environment, developing relationships that support learning. Advisory programs could be crossed off the “contentious issues” list in middle level education if there was more time spent training teachers and adults how to effectively host the valuable time given during the advisory programs.

Any advisory program can be as effective as Mr. Smith’s with two things – the proper professional development for the adults involved and their willingness to put that development opportunity to use. Though difficult, the results are great, seen as students’ confidence grows and relationships are strengthened.

References

- Brown, K & Anfara, V. (2001). Competing perspectives on advisory programs: Mingling or meddling in middle schools. *Research in Middle Level Education Annual*, 24.
- Hopkins, G. (2004). Advice about middle school advisories. *Education World*. Retrieved November 6, 2005 from the World Wide Web: www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr127.shtml
- National Middle School Association. (1996). Research Summary #9 – Advisory Programs. Retrieved November 6, 2005 from the World Wide Web: www.nmsa.org
- Davis, G., & Jackson, A. (2000). *Turning points 2000*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

mamleonline.org

Check it out!

The Maine Association for Middle Level Education now has a Web site offering information and resources related to middle level education in Maine and across the country. Stop in and find:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Teacher resources | News | Journal articles |
| Information about MAMLE | Award winners | Links |
| Professional opportunities | Membership information, and more. | |

YIKES – Homework!

by Shelly V. Chasse-Johndro

Everyone has a strong opinion about homework – students, parents, and educators – and no one is hesitant about expressing his or her viewpoints. Is homework the missing link or the ruin of American childhood? Homework has been around since the 1850s and from that point on there have always been strong pros and cons (Gill and Schlossman, 2004). The vast range of criticism that homework presents includes:

Parents being concerned with the amount of time homework involves,

Teachers wondering if homework is necessary for their classrooms, and

Most students not enjoying homework.

Where is homework’s place in the American school system? Perhaps knowing some of the history about homework will help us understand its usefulness and its challenges.

The history of homework can be traced back to the 19th century when it was not viewed as a problem (Gill and Schlossman, 2004). The amount of homework that was common for a high school student, during this time frame was 14 to 21 hours weekly (Reese, 1995). The number of hours for weekly homework did not become a hot-button issue until the 1920s.

For the next two decades it was perceived that homework and child labor were the “Chief causes of the high death and morbidity rates from tuberculosis and heart disease among adolescents” (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). Another reason why homework was seen negatively was because the time homework takes to complete deprives children of outdoor play, which is needed for a healthy development (Gill and Schlossman, 2004). An additional negative factor that critics had against homework was they felt that learning should involve more than just schoolwork. They claimed that the time needed to complete homework took away from non-school activities, such as going to the town library and the local museum (Gill and Schlossman, 1996).

The views from parents before the 1950s differed from the views previously mentioned. Parents believed that daily studying at home kept their children and adolescents involved in their education as well as providing parents the opportunity to observe what schools were teaching (Gill and Schlossman,

2003). Parents also felt that homework fostered good character traits, kept children home in the evenings, and that children who completed homework learned more. These are just a few of the pros of homework that parents mentioned.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, homework was reformed because the United States was losing the Cold War to the Russians who had schools that were achieving more and children who were working harder (Gill and Schlossman, 2004). At this point parents felt that students should receive more homework to learn more. During this time homework was seen more positively and school boards attempted to abolish the limits that had been set about how much homework a teacher could assign (Gill and Schlossman, 2000). Some other changes that followed this reform were no homework on the weekends, setting a maximum time limit to spend on a homework assignment, and making sure that only one test was given to students on a particular day.

Later the backlash to homework began to re-develop. From the early 1990s to the present, individuals against homework have been strong advocates for their position. Their argument states that not enough research on homework has been conducted and the findings have not been consistent. So, who is to say that homework creates smarter students? Educators still believe that there is value in doing homework. They feel that reinforcing daily learning and fostering the development of study skills is needed in the school systems (Bempechat, 2004).

Homework has evolved over the century and the notion that parents are not capable of assisting their children with homework is not accepted anymore. In the 21st century there are a number of Web sites that can offer assistance to students with their homework. However, this help may not be nearly as beneficial to students as a parent, mentor, or teacher would be. The Web sites range from A+ Math (www.aplusmath.com) to Homework Help (www.about.com/homework); all of these are at most students’ fingertips. Some of the Web sites provide students with free homework help while others request \$1.00 per question asked. There are also Web sites aimed at parents – Hey

Shelly Chasse-Johndro is a graduate student at the University of Maine. Shelly’s undergraduate work was at the University of Maine at Farmington in Elementary Education with a concentration in Mathematics.

Frustrated Parents: Homework helper: Quickly and easily get your kids to do their homework guaranteed every single night without a fight, an argument or even a reminder. (www.homeworkmotivator.com – located from a *Yahoo Search!* for homework)

Homework is definitely changing with the times. Avram Goldstein (1960) said that homework should clearly be required in all schools. Studying and completing homework should be reasonable, should have attainable goals, and should be productive for the student. I do not feel that students should be doing fifty math problems a night just for the heck of it. But the old phrase “practice makes perfect” is something that I find true.

For homework to be more effective, each school system should have a homework program. When after-school homework programs are at their best, the results are enormous. Such a program has been shown to be associated with higher educational outcomes (Jordan and Nettles, 2000). Students receive additional help on homework that prevents a decline in the performance of these particular students (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown 2004). Also, after-school programs have built up the self-esteem of the student, as well as providing a motivator for the students to complete homework.

All children, rich and poor, need to be pushed, not pitied, as they struggle to become mature learners.

Bempechat, 2004

This is a good description of the purpose of homework. Homework is the “pusher” of learning. It helps students become responsible for their own learning. Once students discover that learning is something important and something that they control, they become life long learners, and will be able to succeed at anything they put their minds to.

References

- Bempechat, J. (2004). The motivational benefits of homework: a social-cognitive perspective, *Theory into Practice*, 43(3), 189-195
- Cosden, M., Morrison, G., Gutierrez, L. & Brown, M. (2004). The effects of homework programs and after-school activities on school success, *Theory into Practice*, 43(3), 221-225
- Gill, B. & Schlossman, S. (2004). Villian or savior? The American discourse on homework, 1850-2003. *Theory Into Practice*, 43(3), 174-180
- Gill, B. & Schlossman, S. (1996). A sin against childhood: Progressive education and the crusade to abolish homework, *American Journal of Education*, 105, 27-66
- Gill, B. & Schlossman, S. (2003). A nation at rest: The American way of homework, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(3), 319-337
- Gill, B. & Schlossman, S. (2000). The lost causes of homework reform, *American Journal of Education*, 109, 27-62
- Goldstein, A. (1960). Does homework help? *Elementary School Journal*, 60, 212-224
- Jordan, W. & Nettles, S (2000). How students invest their time outside of school: Effects on school-related outcomes, *Social Psychology of Education*, 3, 217-243
- Reese, W. (1995). The origins of the American high school. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Special Group Rates!

Annual MAMLE Conference

October 19-20, 2006
Sugarloaf USA

MAMLE is happy to offer special conference registration rates for groups of 12 or more. Groups of 12-20 receive a discount of 20% off regular registration fees; groups of 20+ receive a 25% discount. Discounts do not apply to housing costs. For more information, contact Wally Alexander at: wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu.

I + YOU = WE

by Alyse Volovick

As teachers, we endlessly concern ourselves with how to better our students' development – academically and personally. There are many issues surrounding which developmental philosophy should be given more emphasis in our classrooms: Which will prepare kids for high school? Are middle schools too focused on social-emotional development? And the issue that pushes the big red button inside me – its not the schools responsibility to enhance personal development!

The issues surrounding the balancing act between academics and personal development are not ungrounded, since the typical educator has only six hours in which to give students exemplary instruction in both. The main concern surrounding this issue is that educators often see it as a battle, with no compromise and no way to integrate both academics and personal development into the curriculum. And yet research and years of observation of the best middle level schools agree that:

The main purpose of middle grades is to promote young adolescents' intellectual development. It is to enable every student to think creatively, to identify and solve meaningful problems, to communicate and work well with others, and to develop the base of factual knowledge and skills that is the essential foundation for these higher order capacities.

(Jackson & Davis, *Turning Points 2000, 2001*, p.11)

All of these skills surround personal development. How can students become fluent in these intellectual capacities if their personal development is not parallel to them? You can't expect a student to embrace higher order thinking skills if their level of personal development in that area won't permit it. This is why I believe academics and personal development go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other if you expect your students to be successful.

Middle level educators are in the unique position to help build many developmental assets, such as, feeling empowered and playing useful roles, building social competence, and developing a commitment to learning.

(*This We Believe*, 2003, p. 51)

Responses to personal development promote intellectual success. Along with the culture and the 14 facets of a successful middle school, *This We Believe* (2003) outlines, adolescents also require seven developmental needs to be met within the

school's daily activities. Keep in mind; I fully believe personal development and academic content cannot be taught without each other, since; *Personal development + academic content = student success.*

The consequences for the lack of responsiveness to personal development impacts intellectual and cognitive well-being. Academics and personal development are a united couple.

What Do Young Adolescents Need?

All students need positive social interaction with adults and peers. Their relationships with both are changing all the time and through a strong classroom community climate, with ample opportunities for interactions, we are meeting their needs. Through small group work, where everyone has an equal voice and responsibility to learn, academic skills are being facilitated through these positive relationships. When a student discovers an algorithm through peers and guided practice, we are instilling the investigative nature of learning that requires many higher-order thinking skills beyond paper and pencil notes and tests. We are also teaching collaboration and how “two heads are better than one” to complete a task.

Adolescents need structure and clear limits. A great way to do this is to involve your students in setting up classroom rules, regulations, and consequences at the beginning of the year. To take an active role in classroom order is to live the idea of democracy and learn how to become a good citizen in any

Alyse Volovick teaches seventh and eighth grade math and science at Warsaw Middle School in Pittsfield, Maine. She also coaches the math team and softball team and has begun to investigate integrating service learning into the curriculum.

setting. This also empowers students to take an active role in their own education, making it meaningful to them. Ownership of a learning task will carry through to any lesson taught and ensure they are doing the lesson well and exactly what is expected, based on classroom goals and mutually agreed upon results.

Intellectual development occurs when students make connections between their own needs, interests, feelings, and new ideas.

Middle level students want to be competent and they want to be recognized for their achievements:

Schools can meet these two needs by emphasizing academics, high-quality instruction, positive expectations of all students, generous rewards and praise, and opportunities for increased independence and responsibility. A variety of teaching methods and a balanced curriculum of basic subjects, high interest exploratory courses, and extracurricular activities help provide diversity so that each student can be successful at something.

(University of Maine, graduate class handout, 2005).

This blends both aspects of academics and personal development exceptionally. When students have high expectations to achieve, they will!

Middle level students need to have an outlet for creative expression and physical activity. Through integrative units that are based on the groups' essential questions, that also embrace various multiple intelligence activities, students have an exploratory curriculum as an avenue to satisfy this need for expression. Again, when students take ownership in a task, they will learn it and learn it well, enriching any content area. Project and standards-based learning puts the creativity into education for the teacher and students.

Students need meaningful participation in the outside community. In my classroom, I have chosen to address this need for personal development through service learning. For example, my science classroom will investigate the damage winter has on a dam in town. We are also going to partner with an engineer

at Chiambro to design the restructuring of the dam and we will make models of what the reconstructed dam would look like. To connect to mathematics, we are planning to do a budget to see the cost of the project and whether it is cost effective to follow through with rebuilding the dam.

Most of all, middle schoolers need self-definition. This comes from developing and focusing on the other six needs. Students who are self-defined have the ability to learn at the capacity appropriate for their age and development and are comfortable with who and what they are. When students are not afraid of being different, they can positively interact, know expectations of them, are competent to achieve, creatively express themselves, allow for physical activity, and participate in meaningful connections to their community.

Pulling It Together – Academics AND Personal Development

Intellectual development occurs when students make connections between their own needs, interests, feelings, and new ideas. The consequences for the lack of responsiveness to personal development impacts intellectual and cognitive well-being. Academics and personal development are a united couple:

Students learn best when teachers help them learn specific mental procedures they can rely on when asked to solve new problems. These structures provide a sense of security when students face challenging tasks and provide a framework for connecting new information to prior knowledge.

(Van Hoose, Strahan, and L'Esperance, *Promoting Harmony*, 2005, p. 42)

These two aspects of students' life in school have to be united to promote success among our children. The basic conclusion is as simple as the equation stated above; Academics + Personal Development = A Successful Student

References

- Jackson, A. & Davis, G. (2000). *Turning points 2000: Educating adolescents in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Van Hoose, J., Strahan, D., & L'Esperance, M. (2001). *Promoting harmony – Young adolescent development and school practices*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.
- National Middle School Association. (2003). *This We Believe: Successful schools for young adolescents*. Westerville, OH: Author.

MAMLE Membership



MAMLE, Maine Association for Middle Level Education, is the professional association of teachers, administrators, and parents who have joined together to support the development of quality programs which serve the needs of young adolescents. MAMLE exists to promote a better understanding of middle grades education in our state. It is a source of ideas, information, and support.

MAMLE Membership Benefits Include:

- Mainely Middle* (annual journal)
- 3 issues of *Middle Link* (newsletter)
- Reduced rates at Annual Conference and regional conferences
- Voting eligibility
- Periodic mailings of information pertinent to middle level educators

- | | |
|---|--|
| Undergraduate Student Membership (\$5.00) | 1st Year Teacher/1st Year Member (\$15.00) |
| Individual Membership (\$20.00) | Institutional Membership (\$95.00) |
| International Membership (\$30.00) | International Institutional (\$120.00) |

Institutional membership entitles the member school to 6 copies of *Middle Link*, 2 copies of *Mainely Middle*, conference discount for all staff in that building, and 2 votes eligibility.

NAME: _____ TITLE: _____

SCHOOL: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

WORK PHONE: _____ HOME PHONE: _____

MEMBERSHIP TYPE: INDIVIDUAL _____ INSTITUTIONAL _____

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____ CHECK# _____ PO# _____

Send this form and check payable to MAMLE (or purchase order for institutional memberships) to:
 MAMLE
 Thomas College
 180 West River Road
 Waterville, ME 04901

Share Your Expertise!

Write for one of the following MAMLE publications.

MIDDLE LINK

This newsletter is intended to keep Maine's middle level educators abreast of upcoming events. We publish announcements of upcoming conferences, institutes, workshops, and classes. MAMLE also invites you to use this as a forum to share stories and information. We encourage you to share your views, exemplary student work, interesting activities, news of middle level educators who have been recognized in some way, quotes, concerns, and especially information regarding effective practices and programs in your school.

Write and let us know what's going on! Articles should be concise, with a relaxed style. No article is too small.

MAINELY MIDDLE

Mainely Middle is an annual journal and an official publication of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education. *Mainely Middle* publishes articles that promote middle level education and contribute to increased understanding of the educational and developmental needs of young adolescents. Articles should specifically relate to the theory and practice of middle level education and speak directly to practitioners in the field.

Mainely Middle invites articles that have not been previously published or are not under review by other publishers. Manuscripts should adhere to the following submission requirements:

- * Should be limited to 10 double-spaced pages with standard margins
- * Follow APA Publications Manual for style
- * Submit a clear copy with a cover page giving author(s)' professional affiliation, home and work addresses and phone numbers
- * Articles submitted via e-mail are welcomed

Please submit articles for these publications or address inquiries to:

Wally Alexander, MAMLE Editor
Thomas College
180 West River Road
Waterville, ME 04901
wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu

Annual MAMLE Conference!

October 19-20, 2006

Sugarloaf USA

The 2006 MAMLE Conference will feature two full days of sessions, workshops, exemplary team presentations, keynote addresses, networking among teams and schools, exhibits, and special events.

This year's Conference will feature two outstanding keynoters, Patti Kinney and Maine's own Chris Toy. Patti Kinney is the principal of Talent Middle School in the Phoenix-Talent School district in southern Oregon. She served six years as West Region Trustee on the NMSA Board and is currently president of the organization. In 2003 she was selected as the Met-Life/National Association of Secondary School Principals Middle Level Principal of the Year. Along with numerous articles, Kinney is co-author of, *A School-wide Approach to Student-led Conferences; The What, Why, and How of Student-led Conferernces*; and a chapter on courageous and collaborative leadership in *This We Believe in Action*.

Chris Toy has enjoyed 27 years in Maine as a teacher, principal, and advocate for young adolescents. With his leadership, Freeport Middle School was named a New England Spotlight School. Chris' school is recognized as effectively implementing Maine's one-to-one technology learning initiative. When visitors from other states and countries ask where they can find a great example of a working middle school in Maine, they are invariably directed to Freeport. Chris serves on a variety of state, regional, and national middle school committees and is an active member of the MiddleWeb listserv. A recipient of the New England League of Middle School's outstanding administrator award, Chris consults with middle schools in Maine, New England, and Canada.

Spend two exciting days with Patti Kinney, Chris Toy, teachers, principals, and other practitioners from excellent middle level schools to learn more about: Using Computers in Classroom Instruction – Implementing Learning Results – Student-Led Conferencing With Parents – Teaming – Portfolios & Performance Reporting – Inclusion Issues – Gifted & Talented & Middle School – Doing More With Less – Advisory Programs – Involving Parents & Community – Middle Level Programs in K-8 Schools – Integrated Curriculum – & More.

For information:

Call the MAMLE office at 207-859-1362

Group Rates Available!

MAMLE is happy to offer special conference registration rates for groups of 12 or more; groups of 12-20 receive a discount of 25% off regular registration fees. Groups of 20+ receive a 33% discount.

Discounts do not apply to housing costs.

E-mail Wally Alexander at wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu.