

MIDDLE LINK

Maine Association for Middle Level Education

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MAMLE Announces The First Professional Development Series for Maine Middle Level Leadership Teams

MAMLE is pleased to offer a series of daylong workshops designed specifically to meet the needs your school's leadership team. We will coach and support your team in its efforts to build its capacity for collaborative planning and decision-making so that your Leadership Team may work even more effectively with your entire staff to address your school's mission and vision.

We suggest your team have at least four members in attendance to ensure an effective working group. There should be representation from administration and teacher-leaders at each workshop. Although preferable, it is not necessary that all members of your leadership team attend each workshop in the series. We realize resources are limited in all schools. MAMLE facilitators will be pleased to discuss possible configurations with you.

MAMLE board members and consultants Jill Spencer and Chris Toy will facilitate this series of four workshop sessions. Jill and Chris bring over 60 years of combined middle level teaching, leading, and consulting in Maine and beyond. Their workshops are interactive and relevant to the needs and interests of middle level teams and characterized by extensive modeling of effective practices that work with both adults and young adolescents. Chris and Jill will encourage you to be active, open, reflective, and they will provide time for your team to plan and problem solve in a supportive setting.

Based on input from participating teams, topics may include: involving the entire staff in school improvement issues, developing and maintaining effective teams, integrating literacy skills across the curriculum, improving the school culture for teachers, parents and students, increasing student learning and achievement, and transition to and from middle grades.

Jill and Chris are also certified to provide access to NMSA's *School Improvement Toolkit* and NASSP's *Breaking Ranks In The Middle* programming.

The series of four workshops are scheduled with one series in the north at United Technologies in Bangor and another in south at the Region 10 Technical School in Brunswick beginning in January. Each workshop session in the series has three components: Improving How Leadership Team Can Work Together, Implementing Effective Middle Level Practices, and Planning Time For Leadership Teams.

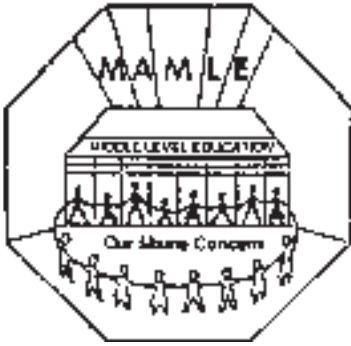
The first session in January will set the stage for the Leadership Team Series and will focus on Middle Level leadership, Vision, and Goal Setting as a way to identify high priority topics for participants. Schools interested in attending the Leadership Series must send representatives to the first session to join the cohort for the series. Please see the enclosed insert of check mamalonline.org for more information.

5 Great Reasons to Attend This Series as a Leadership Team

- Leave each session with strategies to energize professional development in your school and instructional practices in the classrooms.
- Build a rapport within the Leadership Team that enables you to work in a dynamic and powerful way.
- Refine the ability of the Leadership Team to discuss and problem solve thorny issues that keep your school from moving forward as quickly as you desire.
- Improve each member of the group's facilitation skills so that leading school improvement efforts is a shared responsibility.
- Develop a viable plan of action that will be implemented in an effective manner as the Leadership Team helps the entire school achieve its goals.

Annual MAMLE Conference!
October 18 - 19, 2007 @ Sugarloaf USA

Registration materials have been sent to your school and are also available at mamleonline.com. Go to mamleonline.org for more information, or contact Wally Alexander at wally.alexander@umit.maine.edu



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MAMLE Editor: Wally Alexander

From the President's Desk

Well, it's that time of year again. After suffering through the stretches of hot, humid weather that the South seems better prepared for, the state fairs are now in full swing, you can feel the air start to change, and sweaters and jackets are starting to come out for the evening. These are most of the signs of the end of summer and the approach of fall. For us, the other major sign is our own heading back into school to get our classrooms ready and meeting up with our colleagues who are starting to do the same.

Knowing that the kids will be back soon, we're touching up our units, projects, and activities. We're working to make our rooms inviting and attractive. We're thinking about how we're going to connect with our students while setting expectations and the tone for the year. We're thinking about how we're going to apply what we learned at summer professional development and the professional reading we caught up on over the summer. It's a time for a fresh start and new beginnings.

It's not just that way in Maine's schools. The National Middle School Association is getting a fresh start, as well. They have a new Executive Director. After years of strong leadership, Sue Swaim has retired (to Maine! Sue and John are our newest MAMLE members!). We're very fortunate that NMSA has named Bette Edwards as the new Executive Director. According to the announcement, she has served as a middle level teacher, assistant principal, district curriculum director, Kentucky state department director of curriculum and assessment, and associate director of a national, non-profit organization, as well as being a past president of both National Middle School Association and the Kentucky Middle School Association.

In the Executive Director's Note in the recent issue of *Middle Ground*, Betty Edwards, challenges us to use NMSA as an avenue for growth and involvement. I extend the same invitation to our membership to use MAMLE as an avenue for growth and involvement. How?

- Read these newsletters and our journal, *Mainely Middle*
- Explore MAMLE's website (mamleonline.org)
- Attend our annual conference at Sugarloaf USA
- Run as a MAMLE Board member
- Vote on Board Elections
- Volunteer at the annual conference
- Submit an article for the newsletter or journal

We need your expertise and involvement. Every time you do, not only do you grow, but you contribute to making Maine's middle grades programs strong for all students.

Mike Muir



The Learning Curve

A column by Todd Nelson

Schoolville

Part of the charm of working with kids is the serendipity of any given school day. And every so often, it's good for a principal to inject a little administrative zest.

Like the other day, when the "code enforcement officer" of Schoolville – me – realized that the merchants and construction companies working out back by the playground sandbox had not taken out the required permits. So I paid a visit to the supervisors at their place of business: Mrs. Pelletier's grade 2-3 classroom.

"We can't have retail stores doing business and large-scale public works projects under way without proper permits," I told the kids. "It'll be mayhem. Fortunately, I have the official paperwork right here."

As soon as I handed out the regulation forms to the surprised crew of sandbox contractors and engineers, and the proprietors of the Big Stump Variety Store, there was a flurry of paperwork. To my surprise, an economic boom had started. Schoolville had been incorporated.

Everything was going well down at the permit office until the new applicants read the line on the permit application that required proof of insurance. No one had bothered to secure the required liability coverage.

"What's an insurance binder?" asked Jacob.

"What if someone tripped and fell in your store, or you lost your inventory to fire or theft?" I explained in my best CEO manner. The business owners saw the point. Fortunately, third grader Byron, the local insurance agent was on hand: Dossett Accident and Indemnity, Inc., to the rescue. The policy he was promoting was pricey (11 pine cones for two months!), but covered just about everything – except, specifically, hurricanes, floods, and other "acts of God."

This flung wide the door of economic opportunity. Bankers arrived on the scene, offering favorable rates on minimum deposits of 7 pinecones, and offering building loans and investment capital below prime. Could realtors be far behind? Ian, of Henderson Realty, presented his card and went to work on the creation of a new sub-division. Luxury condos in Schoolville were on the horizon. Good news for all the builders in town.

In the next few days, the municipality positively buzzed. One job after another expanded the economy and labor force, or was required by the economy and workforce as it expanded. Along came Deputy Colson, Parking Warden Spinazola (she consented to handing out only warnings – at least to current residents. No guarantees for newcomers), Harbor Master

Griffiths, and even Plumbing Inspector Hassett. Beyond the sedate trappings of village life took shape. Hannah became librarian, Jen wanted to be lighthouse keeper, and Charlotte opened up her Veterinarian and Large Animal MD practice. Tyler imagined himself as Commissioner of Hockey, Savanna as Superintendent of Ballet. The Commissioner of Agriculture is the new first grader named Apple.

Even a lawyer, with a practice limited to civil suits and playground law, found acceptance and a livelihood: Jacob Witting, Attorney at Law. And how many attorneys advertise their prices right out front on their "shingle?" Witting does:

Small claims (under 20 pine cones)	4 pine cones
Disturbance of the Peace mediation	5 pine cones
Arbitration and mediation	pine cones
Property and boundary disputes	6 pine cones

Schoolville is a very special legal environment indeed.

The playground town grew and prospered; other diverse roles were invented and filled. By the end of the week there was a fire chief, Japanese restaurant owners, even a stunt coordinator. A few gaps remain. There is as yet no justice of the peace or Postmaster. Schoolville still needs a Director of Recyclable Resources and Sanitation Department Head. As of yet, there's no tax collector – but it's probably only a matter of time. Somebody has to pay for the new sewer plant.

And Schoolville isn't perfect. It looks like attorney Witting may have some lawsuits on his hands, as the parking warden has extended her authority over the town line. It seems a certain green car had overstayed its welcome in her neighborhood, so she ticketed it – and had Deputy Colson tow it away. The owner, her dad, has filed a grievance. He's looking for relief from the 4-pine cone fine and 3-pine cone-a-day storage fee. The lawyer is the only one who stands to benefit from this one. We may need a judge in town before long. Alas, at press time Witting was quitting his practice to run for political office: mayor of the playground.

I just hope the real estate bubble doesn't burst. I think I got in at the bottom and naturally I'd like to get my equity out at the peak. Buy low, sell high, as the kids say. My new broker – a bright-eyed third grader named Max – is recommending pinecone futures. I don't need to corner the market. School currency has a promising future. I just need a little "Argent de poche," as the French say.



Eye On Research

Using the latest information to shape and validate our practice!

Teaching Students to Remember

- 54% of the material read in a textbook was remembered after 1 day
- 35% of the material read in a textbook was remembered after 7 days
- 21% of the material read in a textbook was remembered after 14 days
- 8% of the material read in a textbook was remembered after 21 days

(Original source: Keely, M. (1997). *The basics of effective learning*. Unpublished manuscript, Bucks County College {online}. Available: <http://www.bucks.edu/~specpop/memory.htm> Quoted in Springer, M. (2005). *How to teach students to remember*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 126.

This one research study certainly reflects the reality of many classrooms where both teacher and students are frustrated by the lack of retention of new knowledge even though the teacher has used “best practices” during the unit. Marilee Sprenger, an expert in connecting the latest brain research to raising student achievement, offers in her book *How to Teach Students to Remember* a framework for instructional planning to increase students’ ability to remember and apply new knowledge. This framework is based on the latest neurological and cognitive research. Below is a basic outline of the framework. Needless to say, her book offers the more detailed description and examples needed to fully internalize her ideas.

The Framework -- 7 R’s of the Learning/Memory Cycle:

- Reach
- Reflect
- Recode
- Reinforce
- Rehearse
- Review
- Retrieve

Reach: The teacher must engage the students so that s/he has their attention. Students who are able to “control irrelevant stimuli,” “notice important stimuli,” and to “shift from one stimulus to another” are paying attention (15). Sprenger offers a variety of strategies for teachers to use to engage his/her students:

- Make sure basic needs are met; students must feel physically and psychologically safe, must feel a sense of belonging and of being valued, and have some sense of power and choice.
- Use emotional hooks that speak to the students’ sense of fairness, attraction to novelty, and personal interests
 - Start the lesson with a story.
 - Play music related to the topic or theme.

- Ask students to make a choice based on ideas in the lesson e.g. Would you have rather been a T Rex or a Raptor during the Age of Dinosaurs?
- Make sure everyone’s learning style is addressed during the lesson/unit.
- Build relationships with and among students.
- Find a way to make the topic relevant to students’ lives – look for connections between the topic and what’s in the news. e.g. The potential for the spread of Avian flu and a unit on viruses and bacteria

Reflect: In order for new information to find its way to students’ “active working memory,” they must be given time to think about the new information and make connections to information they already know. The brain likes to organize information into patterns and needs time to do so (40). Therefore it is imperative that teachers build time into their lessons for students to think about what they have just seen, heard or read. Strategies that work include:

- Wait time – pause for at least 10 seconds after asking a question and before calling on anyone, after a student responds to see if there are other ideas, and before answering a student’s question to model thoughtful responses.
- Some habits of a highly reflective classroom
 - Questions that focus on what is key to understanding concepts
 - Visualization – pictures, diagrams, etc.
 - Reflective journals
 - Using thinking directives
 - Think about
 - Think back to a time
 - Think of a comparison
 - Using PMI—what’s positive about this idea, what’s negative, and what’s interesting (<http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/>



- newTED_05.htm)
- Collaboration

Recode: “Recoding is the ability to take information from different sources and generate it in our own language (61).” New knowledge is remembered better when students have had to restate it in their own words (written or oral) or represent it in a non-linguistic (image or physical) representation. Some strategies to consider include:

- Summarizing
- Giving examples
- Classifying
- Paraphrasing
- Explaining
- Comparing
- Inferring

Reinforce: Reinforcing is all about giving feedback that identifies what the learner is doing well and some specific steps to take for improving the quality of the work. Sprenger discusses 3 types of feedback: positive, negative, & informational. To not give any type of feedback evidently can impede student learning (85).

- Positive
 - Give immediate feedback.
 - Acknowledge improvement and growth as well as a job well done.
 - Be specific (not “Good job!” rather “Your computation is much more accurate.”)
 - Always reinforce new positive behaviors
 - Reinforce good habits randomly.
- Negative – use a neutral tone and don’t assess blame
 - Address the assignment.
 - Review the original goals or requirements.
 - Identify the student’s responsibility.
 - Restate what components student must address in the assignment.
 - Suggest or ask the student for a new plan of action.
 - Check back on results of redirection.
- Informational – visual representation of how the student is progressing
 - Goal/outcome focused (homework completion, pages read, etc.)
 - Immediate
 - Graphic – bar graph, chart, line graph

Rehearse: Rehearsals are practices. When learning a new skill it takes most of us 24 practices to achieve 80% proficiency (103). Harry Wong in his book *The First Days of School* describes how he had his high school students rehearse all of his procedures until they were second nature and then he addressed content. Rehearsing for demonstration of new

content knowledge is the same idea. Rehearse facts, procedures, and thinking processes. Here are some ways to build in rehearsal time:

- Encourage students to get enough sleep – the brain continues to process information while we sleep.
- Assign homework
 - Based on information students already know.
 - Students might try a new way to use information they already know.
 - Specific guidelines are in place.
 - Purpose of the assignment is crystal clear to students.
 - Feedback is provided on the homework.
- Use mnemonics.
- Provide time for mental and physical rehearsal – modeling for students how to review ideas or procedure in their minds and giving them time to do it. Provide time in class for student to physically practice for presentations and demonstrations.

Review: It’s time to rethink the “when” of reviewing. Traditionally, review time is spent right before an assessment. The latest learning/memory research suggests that concentrated review should take place after the initial instructional, some additional review about half way through the unit and then again right before the assessment.

Retrieval: “Retrieval is the ability to access long-term memories, bring them into working memory process, and solve problem.” (142) Here are some things Sprenger suggests be considered when planning an assessment:

- Assess what’s been taught – check the outcomes of the unit against any district or grade level assessment standards.
- Use the same vocabulary that was used during the unit, don’t spring new vocabulary during the assessment.
- Use the same level of complexity in the assessment that students have rehearsed/ practiced beforehand. e.g. Don’t ask student to evaluate if they have never practiced that thinking process in class.

Cognitive and neurological research is unfolding at a dizzying rate. What is applicable and useful in school is sometimes difficult to discern. Authors like Sprenger help the practitioner sort through all of this information. The book this article draws information from can be found at <http://shop.ascd.org/>.

Work Consulted

Springer, M. (2005). *How to teach students to remember*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Eye on research is written by Jill Spencer



Connecting With Students On A Maine Hiking Trail

Lynn Bonsey
Surry Elementary School

Tuesday, a few days before April vacation, is a Maine beauty: blue, crisp, and clear. As my colleagues and I board the school bus with 37 middle-schoolers, we marvel at our continued luck with the weather, with our students, and with the supportive little community where we work. This is our fifth monthly hike at Acadia National Park, and today we'll add seven more miles to our goal to cover all 57 miles of carriage trails by the time our sixth graders finish eighth grade.

Our students scramble off the bus and zigzag into action, a kaleidoscope of whirling arms and legs. Many of these teens are fit, but at least one third of them are overweight or out of shape. Today will be a challenge for them – and for me.

Adolescents don't hike. They soar and swerve into each other, snatch baseball caps, steal snacks, and even make plays for my walking stick.

Yet despite their natural exuberance, these students are well-behaved and respectful of each other and other hikers.

We walk three miles then stop for a healthy snack at a glorious scenic vista: Thunder Hole. I gaze out over the crashing surf of the Atlantic shoreline and I still can't believe we get to be here as part of our jobs -- or even that we are physically able to do so. Just five years ago, my colleague Peter Loiselle weighed 753 pounds and could barely walk from his truck to his classroom, let alone hike several miles with three dozen spirited teenagers. Through healthy eating, exercise, and extraordinary determination, he has lost more than 500 pounds. His transformation is the inspiration for the fitness and nutrition unit we've chosen to teach together. Despite time constraints and the individual demands of teaching math and English, Pete and I have taken this on so we can expand and enrich our students' lives.

Pete and I integrate the hikes into our classes, but we've discovered these outings are valuable for reasons that extend far beyond penning nature poems or following field guides, and even beyond the obvious fitness benefits.

Nowhere do we connect more with our middle school students – or with each other – than when we are hiking together. We swap tales, talk music and sports, and take turns ambling with the slower walkers. Sometimes we sing silly songs. Other times we share what we're reading or talk about our families. Occasionally the talks turn serious, but mostly we laugh and tease one another. This conversational

camaraderie, which rarely happens in the formal confines of our classrooms, flows almost magically, allowing all of us to communicate and connect.

One year as he hiked beside me, I asked the new eighth grader if he'd ever done anything like this in the South. "No ma'am, it's really different here," he responded with a soft drawl. "And Miss B, you're the weirdest teacher I've ever had." I chuckled. "But it's a good weird," he added. In middle school parlance, this meant I was okay in his eyes and he wanted me to know it. Back at school tethered to his desk, he would not have uttered those words, but out here in a casual talk on a casual walk, he felt more free to speak. Later this brief connection helped us to navigate some difficult terrain at school.

*...when the laughter fades and
we've caught our breaths, we'll
stroll back to our classrooms,
where we'll sit at our desks,
our hearts beating strong,
and write down the poems
that are dancing in our heads.*

Nearly four decades ago my junior high school gym teacher, Miss Jones, affectionately nicknamed me Clod. She did so partly because of my given first name (Claudia), but mostly because she saw there was a misfire between my brain and my body, and she wanted to help me deal with it. Humor, especially sarcastic humor, doesn't work with all kids, but Miss Jones knew me well enough to recognize it would work with me. Besides humoring me, she created a "special" class for me and a few other athletically challenged girls. We walked laps and tracked our progress, something I could do without pressure or embarrassment. Miss Jones connected with me, personalized my curriculum, and showed me how to handle



my klutziness with humor, if not grace. Now I try to do the same for my students and they respond in kind.

The day after the Red Sox won the World Series, we headed out for our monthly hike. I struggled on an uphill climb until a group of eighth grade boys raced up behind me. "Come on, Miss B," one of them urged, "if the Red Sox can do it, so can you." They started singing a silly cadence to keep me moving. When I stumbled on a tree root, we all laughed for a moment, and then one of the boys took my arm and gently helped me up the trail.

Today two students and I are the last to reach the bus. One boy has whined for the last two miles complaining about his aching feet and lamenting the fact that his mother made him come. "Your mother," I tell him, "is a wise woman." He's not buying it, but he sees I'm struggling too, so he keeps shuffling one foot in front of the other. Finally the two of us straggle

onto the bus. Generally the last arrivals are greeted with a few cheers, but today most of my students are happily ensconced in their seats, headphones blaring, lips yapping. I ditch my walking stick and collapse into the front seat. Pete smiles and says I'm taking the blame for our late return.

Recently, we've added twenty minutes of daily exercise to our curriculum, so tomorrow Pete will lead our students on a quick walk outside, and the next day we'll all be in the gym doing laps, or "Sweatin' to the Oldies" with Richard Simmons. Laugh if you like, but most of us revel in the foolishness that erupts when we can't stay in sync to old rock 'n' roll. And when the laughter fades and we've caught our breaths, we'll stroll back to our classrooms, where we'll sit at our desks, our hearts beating strong, and write down the poems that are dancing in our heads.

Extended Think-Pair-Share

Advisory, bullying, challenging curriculum, grouping for instruction, homework – all issues we rush to design policies to address. How often do we make sure everyone shares the same definition or sense of purpose before we tackle writing a plan of action? We don't. We assume that the entire staff has the identical perception of what bullying is or what the purpose of advocacy should be and then are frustrated when the policy or plan doesn't do what we expect of it.

This strategy is designed to help a group develop a common understanding of a concept or term or process. It uses the Think-Pair-Share format but adds clarifying of ideas, negotiating, and consensus building to the process. It can be used in a staff meeting to build the necessary common understanding of an issue before designing the solution. Below are the steps:

- 1) Decide on the precise language of the idea, concept, or term about which you want the group to develop a common understanding.
- 2) Have each person write down his/her own definition or understanding. It's important to put it in writing because each person will be sharing it with another.
- 3) Pair up the group and have them share their ideas. Each pair then writes a definition with which they both agree.
- 4) Each pair joins another pair. They share and discuss their definitions. The group of four then collaborates on a definition they all can agree with.
- 5) Each foursome joins another foursome. They share and discuss their definitions. The group of eight then collaborate on a definition they all can agree with.
- 6) As the groups get larger, the facilitator needs to monitor time and conversations carefully. If groups are getting bogged down, the facilitator might need to do a bit of coaching.
- 7) Depending on the time frame a group has for this process, keep combining groups to further refine their understanding/definition. The ultimate goal is to continue combining until there is just one group and one definition. Sometimes time constraints prevent this outcome.
- 8) At whatever point the process must end, save time to chart big ideas from the groups to be used in further discussions.

Adapted by Jill Spencer from BRIM training with NASSP



Trying to Change Paradigms is Hard Work!

Mike Muir

University of Maine at Farmington

We're trying to implement project-based curriculum in the school I'm working with. All the teachers chose to work there and be part of our program. Many of them said, "All I know is that what I've been doing doesn't work with a lot of kids." They are simply acknowledging what I have pointed out elsewhere: some kids need more than direct instruction.

But project-based learning is new to most of the teachers and we're getting some push-back.

Not because they are difficult, but because paradigms are hard to change.

They had 16 years of training (K-12 plus college as students) in what school is "supposed to" look like, and were well trained in how to teach. But really they were well trained in direct instruction.

And we're working with a population that needs a whole lot more than direct instruction. These kids want to know the why before the what. They want to learn by doing. Our teachers largely haven't experienced learning that way and weren't really trained to teach that way.

The teachers are enthusiastic and really trying, but this is new to them.

Sometimes the new approach is just too unfamiliar and they push hard to return to what they are familiar and comfortable with - traditional teaching. Sometimes they think about the high stakes state test and they feel that they need to return to coverage and direct instruction. Sometimes their content director comes over from the central office and tells them that they should be using the textbook or the pacing guide.

Who could blame our wonderful teachers for pushing back under these conditions? It's only human nature.

It just means that we need to work smarter to help them through paradigm change and to fully implementing our school

program.

We didn't have much lead-time before school started to fully train teachers or to develop curriculum. We started with really good informational workshops (well, of course! I led some of them!). But good information doesn't change practice (at least none changed just because we shared good information with them).

So now we have a model project-based unit for them to work on. We've given them the skeleton of the plan and are modeling with them how to develop the unit and how they might work with students. And their enthusiasm (and their students') is slowly rising! They clearly need models. (and now I'm planning on tracking down some good videos of teachers teaching using projects so they can see it in action.)

We also have applied to the state to use portfolio assessment, instead of the high stakes test.

And we got the Area Superintendent to say (in person) that our program was a project-based program and that the teachers' job right now was to get good at teaching through projects.

And we developed teacher practice rubrics and classroom observation forms that will let us focus on the key teacher practices we want to make sure teachers are using: connecting with kids, learning by doing, using higher-order thinking skills, applying learning to real-world situations, etc.

And we're in the process of setting up a meeting with the curriculum directors so that they know more about our program and how we can work together (and not end up giving mixed messages to our teachers!).

Changing paradigms is hard work, but we believe that with clear expectations, lots of training and support, some positive pressure, a lot of clear communication, working to remove barriers, and good models and modeling, we're going to make

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. For more information, contact Wally Alexander at wallyalexander@umit.maine.edu.



MAMLE Announces Its 2007 Exemplary Practices Awardee

Each year the Board of Directors of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education calls for nominations for the Exemplary Practice Award. This award is designed to recognize individuals, teams, and schools across the state of Maine who are incorporating “best practices” into their curriculum and instruction, and whose educational practices exemplify excellent middle level education. By recognizing such practices, MAMLE hopes to share and promote high standards of middle level education across the state. MAMLE will recognize these exemplary practices in Maine schools at the Annual Conference in October at Sugarloaf USA. Exemplary practices must reflect one or more of the following core values of MAMLE:

- Meets the developmental needs of young adolescents
- Promotes local professional development
- Promotes healthy work environment for both students and teachers
- Exemplifies high standards based on research
- Invites active participation by students, parents, and/or community

Since 1995, MAMLE has made 37 Exemplary Practice Awards. This year, MAMLE is pleased to make one new Exemplary Practice Award.

Sara Gilfenbaum, Dan Allen, Marsha Bird, & Julia Hegan Thomaston Grammar School

The exemplary practices and leadership of this team of sixth grade teachers at Thomaston Grammar School have been instrumental in our middle school having become an even more vibrant and effective “temple of learning.” These teachers seek to strike a balance of rigor and responsiveness in partnerships with parents and the community, and to collaborate in the interests of providing learning experiences that are engaging, full of meaning, and designed to provide evidence of what students know and can do over time and across a continuum of learning. While they seek to integrate various disciplines and the arts in joyful and coherent ways, they are also aware of the potentially lifelong impact of doing well by each student in the fundamental areas of literacy and numeracy. Team members realize that relationships matter. Each teacher serves as an advisor to a small number of students. Their interest in the “whole child” is easy to see as they take the time to know and speak to each child as an individual. This is a teacher team remarkable for attempting to “walk the walk,” continuing to grow through the years by staying receptive to new research-based ideas about instructional practices that reliably yield better results for students.

Is there a team or a teacher who has a practice that you think should be nominated for MAMLE’s Exemplary Practice Award? You can learn more about MAMLE’s awards and download nomination forms, on MAMLE’s Web site (<http://www.mamleonline.org/mainesbest.html>).



Must-Read Books:

Teacher Teams that Get Results: 61 Strategies for Sustaining and Renewing Professional Learning Communities

Reviewed by Jill Spencer

A middle level interdisciplinary team is the original professional learning community. A small group of teachers share a group of students and meet regularly to plan educational experiences that will address the needs of all of their students. Teams have been the heart of the middle school for over 30 years and yet have often been neglected in professional development plans. Time is not devoted to building the capacity of teams to problem solve, use data effectively or develop a culture that is supportive to teachers, students and parents. Other teams – leadership, SAT, school improvement – also suffer from this failure to attend to developing them into dynamic problem-solving groups. Lin Kuzmich and Gayle Gregory, in their new book *Teacher Teams that Get Results: 61 Strategies for Sustaining and Renewing Professional Learning Communities*, offer a solid approach to helping teams function in ways that help their schools proactively address the myriad of issues they face.

The authors have collaborated for many years. Previous books of theirs include *Differentiated Literacy Strategies for Student Growth and Achievement in Grades 7-12* and *Data Driven Differentiation in the Standards-Based Classroom*. They are both international presenters and committed to improving education for all students. Lin was recently in Maine presenting for the Center for Educational Transformation at two of their Summer Literacy Academies. Participants were wowed by her depth of knowledge and charmed by her approachability.

The book opens with a helpful introduction that succinctly summarizes the research on adult learners and the dynamics of teaming. For example, there is a chart that organizes and compares the categories developed by many of the experts on learning styles – Gregorc, McCarthy, Silver/Strong & Hanson and others. The reader can see how Gregorc's *Abstract Random* compares to McCarthy's *Type 1* and then to Silver/Strong & Hanson's *Interpersonal*. There is also a short synopsis of adult learning principles as well as phases of group development. A crash course is provided in what's important in understanding how to help teams grow, plus there is a road map for further research. This foundational knowledge helps us understand why it is important to pay attention to the information in the rest of the book.

The authors maintain that there are five aspects to “grow-

ing” teams that get results. They are:

- Creating a Growth-Oriented Culture
- Sharing Knowledge and Skills
- Building Resilience and Creating Solutions
- Determining Priorities and Creating Excellence
- Putting Everything Together

As educators we must become more effective problem solvers and collaborators because of the growing complexity of our culture and its challenges.

Each section has numerous strategies a team can use to develop their knowledge and skills in each area. The strategies are formatted in a way that makes them accessible to anyone, even if s/he feels uncomfortable with group process activities. The description of each strategy includes the following:

- Purpose
- The Basics
 - * Number of participants
 - * Time needed
 - * Room arrangement
 - * Difficulty level (e.g. low risk, easy)
 - * Brain bits – how it relates to cognitive and emotional processes
 - * Brain's natural learning system
 - * Adult learning principle
 - * Materials
- Process directions
- When to use the strategy



- Examples and uses
- Specific references

Some of the strategies are easily recognizable: JigSaw, Give and Go, Parking Lot, etc. However there are many more and the format helps identify the best strategy for the specific situation. These strategies are useful to anyone responsible for leading a group – principal, team leader, superintendent, committee chair (in and out of school), scout leader, etc. I've had the book only for a short time and have already used material from it three times this summer. *Teacher Teams that Get Results: 61 Strategies for Sustaining and Renewing Professional Learning Communities* is always on my desk or in my book bag! Even better, each of these strategies will work in a classroom of young adolescents. Building the capacity of young adolescents to understand content and to effectively

work collaboratively is a worthy goal.

As educators we must become more effective problem solvers and collaborators because of the growing complexity of our culture and its challenges. We all know that time is a precious and limited resource in our professional lives, and therefore we have to use it in efficient, dynamic ways to get the results we want. *Teacher Teams That Get Results: 61 Strategies for Sustaining and Renewing Professional Learning Communities* will help us accomplish this goal and ought to be a resource referred to on a regular basis in each of our schools.

Gregory, G. & Kuzmich, L. (2007) *Teacher Teams that Get Results: 61 Strategies for Sustaining and Renewing Professional Learning Communities*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Corwin Press

Becky Brink, MPA Middle Level Principal of the Year

Becky Brink, principal of Sanford Junior High School, was named 2007 Middle Level Principal of the Year by the Maine Principals' Association. MPA cited her commitment to developing a culture of collaborative leadership, increasing the effectiveness of the school's curriculum and instruction, and providing for the personalization of educational opportunities for all students as reasons for her selection. Becky feels that one of her biggest accomplishments was to help the staff take a fresh look at the schedule. Changes in it have allowed for more time for students to read, more time for departments to meet, and time to offer academic support during the day. As a result

of these changes, behavior issues have diminished greatly.

Becky began her career in Maine as a math teacher at Sanford Junior High School. She has also held administrative positions at Wells High School and the Carl J. Lamb School in Sanford. She is a graduate of the University of Maine and holds a Master of Science from the University of Southern Maine.

MPA honored Becky at their Spring Conference Awards Banquet on April 26, 2007. She will also attend the Principals' Institute in Washington, DC this fall where all of the State Principals of the Year are recognized. MAMLE congratulates Becky Brink, MPA's Middle School Principal of the Year!

mamleonline.org
Newly Redesigned

The Maine Association for Middle Level Education website has a new look. We have tried to provide you with information and resources related to middle level education in Maine and across the country. Stop in and find:

Teacher Resources
Journal Articles
Membership Information

News
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Information about MAMLE
Maine's Best - Award Winners
Professional Opportunities & More

Download 2007 Annual Conference information and registration materials



Interview with Karen Hawkes

Maine Center for Sport and Coaching

Karen Brown Hawkes is director of the Maine Center for Sport and Coaching at the University of Maine. A University of Maine graduate in Kinesiology and Physical Education, Karen also has an M.S. degree in Recreation, Parks, and Sports Leadership from Virginia Commonwealth University. Karen's work as director of the Maine Center for Sport and Coaching is diverse, but she spends much of her time coordinating, promoting, implementing, and marketing Sports Done Right, which she explains below. An outstanding advocate and role model for young athletes, Karen Hawkes work with middle level schools in Maine is essential. *Middle Link (ML)* thanks her for her advocacy of young adolescents and for her time to do this interview.

ML: Give us a short description of what Sports Done Right (SDR) is and what it stands for.

Sports Done Right is a UMaine initiative that provides schools and communities with guidelines for evaluating and improving the overall sports experience for student-athletes at the youth and interscholastic level. Shaped by the perspective of Maine's student-athletes, Sports Done Right advocates for community partnerships and community conversations to discuss and identify shared values concerning athletic programs.

ML: What has happened in schools and communities since its release?

Since its release in January 2005, school districts in Maine and across the country have continued to contact the Maine Center for Sport and Coaching (MCSC) for more information and for assistance with implementation. The program launched a pilot phase from March 2005 to June 2006. During that time, the MCSC worked with 13 school districts to refine the implementation process. Since the conclusion of the pilot phase, three school districts—MSAD 5 (Rockland, South Thomaston, Owls Head), MSAD 51 (Cumberland, North Yarmouth), and Winthrop Public Schools—have completed the accreditation process and are now official Sports Done Right school communities. Many other Maine school districts are in the process of community engagement and hope to seek accreditation by the end of the 2007 - 2008 school year.

ML: What are the implications of SDR, especially for middle school athletes?

If you were to ask student-athletes at any level if they have ever been asked what they liked and disliked about

their athletic program, the majority would respond by saying "no". Fortunately, as schools begin the SDR program they recognize the value and importance of student feedback and opinion. This is one of the most significant implications of SDR. Student-athletes are being given some ownership of the sports program while being given an opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills.

ML: Talk about several activities/events under SDR and how school's have implemented them? What schools? What have been outcomes?

One of the most significant changes taking place in SDR school communities are the partnerships forming between school districts and local parks and recreation departments. Several school districts, including SAD 5 (Rockland, South Thomaston, Owls Head), SAD 51 (Cumberland, North Yarmouth), Winthrop Public Schools and Augusta Public Schools are now working with their parks and recreation departments to offer additional athletic opportunities for students. In addition, these parks and recreation departments are using the SDR language to educate parents, making the SDR philosophy a common language throughout the community.

Another event that has been successful includes the formation of a student-athlete athletic council. This is becoming a common step as SDR schools strategize ways to involve student-athletes in the implementation process. In most cases, the group is a student-facilitated committee that examines possible strategies for making improvements to the athletic program. School districts that have established student-athlete athletic councils include Wells-Ogunquit Community School District and Lewiston High School.

ML: What would you like to see for all middle level schools in Maine in regards to sport? If every middle level school in Maine did one or two things to improve their sports programs what would you like to see?

The first thing I would like to see is an increase in opportunity to play. This could mean a school implements an intramural program, institutes a no-cut policy, establishes expansion teams, or partners with the local parks and recreation department. There are too many students at the middle level who would like to play sports but are not given an opportunity to do so.

The second thing I would like to see is policy development requiring all middle level coaches to be certified using the MPA standards established for high school coaches. Having a coach



who understands children, has knowledge of the sport, and is well versed on adolescent development is key to offering a positive experience for student-athletes.

ML: How can SDR help in that regard?

SDR provides a set of recommendations that can guide the community discussion. The report stresses the importance of opportunity to play, community partnership, and coaching education. As school districts begin to use SDR as a guide for improvement, these recommendations will be discussed. Therefore, SDR provides the motivation to have these discussions as well as the support to implement policy.

ML: In SDR schools what kind of connections are you seeing between middle level and high schools? What should the relationship be between these two levels?

In many communities, middle level athletic programs are viewed as feeder programs for the high school sports teams. As a result, there is often significant pressure at the middle level to be competitive. In other words, to win. Too often the “elite” players are labeled by parents and/or community members before the students even reach middle school. Such labels put enormous pressure on the “elite” athletes while the confidence of other students often causes them to drop out of sports altogether. There is a failure among many to understand and recognize adolescent development. Many parents, community members, and even coaches fail to understand the role development plays on perceived athletic ability.

SDR has encouraged many middle schools to have important and long-overdue discussions about the true intent of a middle level athletic program. By fostering a middle level sports program that is shaped for the “elite” athletes, middle schools are reinforcing the concept of a feeder program. When using SDR as a guide, middle schools are being asked to evaluate the purpose of athletic programs and to establish a program that is learning based. The concept of a feeder program is out-dated and inappropriate at the middle school level.

ML: What about some of the contentious issues like “cut” systems, one-sport specialization, travel teams, over-emphasis on competition to the detriment of learning skills?

All of these issues have become so common, they are

expected and accepted. When I go into communities and talk about changing these ingrained traditions I often hear, “why bother, it will never change.” With that attitude, it can’t change. The number one question that should feed any discussion about these issues should be, “is this what is best for our kids?”

I often remind adults and student-athletes that it is okay to want to win and it is okay to play to win. However, It is not okay to win-at-all costs. We need to keep competition in perspective and remember that interscholastic athletic programs should be learning-based. Athletic programs are offered to our student-athletes for the educational benefits and not necessarily to bring home the gold ball.

With that in mind, if we can gain control of the desire to win-at-all-costs while focusing on the well-being of student-athletes, many of the other issues we face today that are negatively affecting the athletic experience will be addressed.

ML: What was your own sports experience when you were in middle school?

I am extremely fortunate to be able to say that my best athletic experience took place while I was in middle school.

A teacher, Dewey Kane, was my soccer and basketball coach. He had a passion for sport and teaching, and treated all players with respect and fairness. Coach Kane held us accountable while making the experience extremely enjoyable.

I often tell this story when asked about the best coach I ever had.

When I was a freshman at Endicott College, I played basketball and was having a very difficult time adjusting. My confidence kept suffering with each passing game. No matter how much I practiced, I still couldn’t make a shot when it was game time.

I remember coming home for Thanksgiving break and crying to my parents about my collegiate basketball experience. Before I knew it, Coach Kane was calling to ask me to meet him at the middle school gym. Of course, I couldn’t turn him down so I met him that afternoon. We worked for over an hour on my jump shot. It was a wonderful day and I returned to college with a new-found confidence. During the next basketball game, the first shot I took was three-point shot and it was all net.

I credit my middle school coach for the pride I felt that day.

**Angus King & Jack Berckemeyer to keynote
Annual MAMLE Conference
Sugarloaf USA
October 18 - 19, 2007**



Notes from MiddleTalk

Chris Toy

Every so often especially thought-provoking questions are posted on the NMSA MiddleTalk listserv. Several Maine middle level educators are active participants, regularly contributing their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. One recent question posed to the online group was "Who do you stand for?" Following is an especially touching response from Jacquie Leighton, a middle level teacher from Hancock Grammar School. She graciously agreed to let Middle Link share her posting with other Maine middle level educators.

I Stand for Kara

I stand up for Kara. She entered our school this year as a sixth grader. We heard her stories long before we met her because a guidance counselor new to our school worked with Kara last year. A decision was made to place her in my homeroom. My first reaction: prayer!

The info we all received was heartbreaking... she's a bully; she's absent a lot; she makes no friends; she failed her classes. Kara's teachers could do nothing with her because she was a compulsive liar, her family lied and in a state of total dysfunction, the father was out of the picture, yadda, yadda, yadda. I prayed again.

More of Kara's story: she bullied classmates and teachers. One girl she bullied to the point the girl transferred. Guess where? Yes, our school. The more we heard from the counselor and the more we gleaned from her records, the more we shook our heads with concern. Kara was assigned to my homeroom. I remember thinking, well, there's a reason, old girl, and it looks like Kara's path is about to cross yours in a big time way. Hold on tight.

So I met Kara in September and my first impressions... she was constantly seeking my attentions, manic almost. She braggadocio incessantly. She interrupted mercilessly. Within two weeks she alienated the entire homeroom. She spent almost every minute proving to everyone she could read better, write better, compute better, and play soccer better. Truth to be told, Kara struggled academically. Her math teacher found her math skills were far below sixth grade standards, her study skills were nonexistent, she struggled with basic comprehension, and her social behaviors were absolutely compulsive and obsessive. She had even begun some stalking behaviors toward a classmate who lived in her neighborhood. This was more than bullying.

During the school day, wherever Kara was, eyeballs began to roll and her classmates avoided her completely. They went into survival mode. We met as a team of teachers and began our journey with Kara, and we met frequently throughout the year trying to unravel this maddening situation. The climate

in my room was toxic at times. I felt like I was the doctor in some kind of emotional triage emergency room and my victims were eleven years old! Fifteen of them. My reactions to

Kara, I sensed, would be how they reacted to Kara. I prayed for the gifts of kindness and patience. I prayed for the tools to help both Kara adjust and to help her classmates adjust. I did receive them and often through stories shared by a colleague who understood Kara's behaviors.

Long, long, long story short – It seemed everyone around me, kids, teachers, parents, guidance, everyone found Kara unbearable and it seemed the tide was leaving with a boat load of people on it. The negative energy was nearly unbearable. At times I had no answers but I believed in her goodness and her place among us... I chose to stay on the shore with Kara.

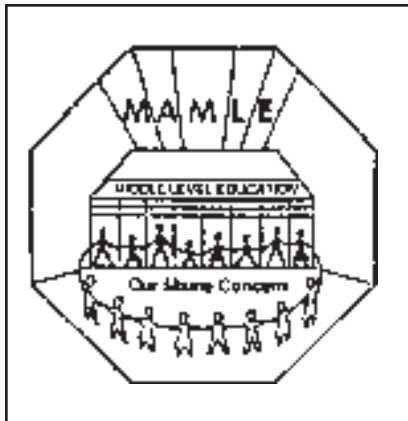
I wanted to but I could not abandon her despite her issues of control, her aggressions, her absolutely crazy and manic way of interacting with everyone around her. I prayed a lot and asked for the strength to forgive her. The more she drove everyone away from her, the more it seemed she obsessed on me. I expected her to begin her patterns in being truant. But she never did. Somehow she had a reason to keep coming to school and I had to be there for her. She was out of sports, band programs, nearly everything. Small town and news travels. Parents were complaining; it was craziness amplified x1000. I prayed and I stayed.

Flash forward to the present.

Kara has two friends now. She's received the services she needs for multiple severe emotional disorders...she responds now to a few cues that help her stop and rewind. I've become aware of several wonderful strengths and traits she possesses. She and I are off with our class to visit the new and amazing Penobscot Narrows bridge spanning a beautiful Maine river, and we'll experience the 420 foot observation tower together...and the miracle...I am looking forward to our day together. Kara has taught me how to listen and trust my inner voice.

I stand for Kara.

Jacquie Leighton
Hancock Grammar School



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)

Individual Membership (\$20.00)

1st Year Teacher/1st Year Member (\$15.00)

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MPA's Middle School Principal of the Year! Institutional Membership (\$95.00)

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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.



Annual MAMLE Conference!

October 18 - 19, 2007
Sugarloaf USA

The 2007 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, NMSA's Jack Berckemeyer and former Governor of Maine, Angus King. Jack Berckemeyer is the current Assistant Executive Director for National Middle School Association. Before moving to this position, Jack was a middle level teacher in Denver, Colorado. During his eight years of teaching, he taught various subjects including; language arts, social studies, health, expression skills, and physical education. He was named outstanding educator after two years of teaching at Scott Carpenter Middle School, and shortly thereafter he was identified as one of the outstanding educators in the Adams County School District. In 2003, Jack received the Outstanding Alumni Award from the Falcon School District. Jack has presented to school districts around the country on middle level topics. He has also presented to middle level educators in thirty different national and international locations. Jack is known for his practical teaching ideas that involve and motivate young adolescents.

Angus King became Governor of Maine in 1995, a position he held until 2003. Elected as an independent in 1994 in his first run for public office, he was re-elected in 1998 by one of the largest margins in Maine history. King lists among his major accomplishments as governor a total rebuild of the State's mental health and corrections systems; major improvements in the State's service capability, including on-line services; a substantial increase in the State's commitment to research and development; the largest increase of lands in conservation in the State's history; and the nationally-recognized program that provides a laptop computer to every seventh and eighth grade student in the State, regardless of location or family income, making Maine's students among the most computer literate in the world.

Spend two exciting days with Jack Berckemeyer, Angus King, 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 – 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:

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

Group Rates Available!

MAMLE is happy to offer special 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.