



MIDDLE LINK

Maine Association for Middle Level Education

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MAMLE Migration

Sandy Nevens

MAMLE operations will be relocating to Thomas College in Waterville by the end of this school year. The college has graciously invited MAMLE to be centered at Thomas. As you will see on upcoming communications, MAMLE's new address will be Thomas College; 180 West River Road; Waterville, Maine; 04901. Our new telephone number at Thomas will be 859-1362. This number will reach the Academic Affairs Office during business hours year-round. Your questions will be answered or messages forwarded to Wally Alexander, MAMLE Executive Director and Assistant Professor of Education at Thomas.

Such a move of course happens with a mix of emotions. We at MAMLE are excited about our new home, but we owe a great deal to the University of Maine's College of Education and Human Development where we have been housed since 1987.

The University of Maine has supported the Maine Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE) even before it was Maine's professional association for middle level education! Beginning in the fall of 1985 and continuing for several years after, the University of Maine sponsored its own Fall Conference on Middle Level Education, held variously at the Bangor Civic Center, Bangor High School, and the University of Maine. This conference has laid an excellent foundation for the MAMLE conferences to follow.

When MAMLE officially began on October 13, 1987, 219 educators signed a Proclamation in honor of its founding. Ed Brazee was MAMLE's first executive secretary. It was a natural fit for MAMLE to be situated in Ed's office at the University of Maine and College of Education Dean Bob Cobb agreed. For nearly 20 years, MAMLE was supported by the College of Education and Human Development, continuing when then doctoral student, Wally Alexander, took over as Executive Director in 1998.

MAMLE, the most stable of the New England middle level professional associations, has benefited greatly by its connection to the University of Maine. Dr. Cobb's tireless support

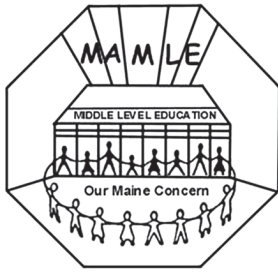
over the years earned him one of MAMLE's most distinguished honors when he was awarded the Friend of Middle Level Education Award at the annual conference in 1998.

We appreciate the University of Maine's generosity for our nineteen year stay, and we thank Thomas College for welcoming MAMLE to their campus in Waterville.

MAMLE wholeheartedly thanks the University of Maine, the College of Education and Human Development, Dean Cobb, Dianne Avery, Sue Russell, Cindy Plourde, and the terrific support staff in the College of Education and Human Development – all of whom have assisted MAMLE over the last 20 years.

We at MAMLE are proud of our accomplishments: the Annual MAMLE Conference at Sugarloaf USA; mamleonline; the Janet Nesin Reynolds Outstanding Middle Level Educator and Exemplary Practice Awards; MAMLE publications - *Mainely Middle* and *Middle Link*; Scholar Leader Awards, regional conferences and support to schools, and a strong professional voice for middle level education at state, regional, and national levels.

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Middle Link

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Middle Link editor: Dr. Wallace Alexander

From the President's Desk

Dear MAMLE Members,

After one of the mildest Maine winters in recent years, the sounds and smells of Spring are in the air. This reminds me of how quickly this school year is passing by. I recently was notified through National Middle School Association that a document will be released in early May that we should all become familiar with. *Success in the Middle: A Policymaker's Guide to Achieve High Quality Middle Level Education* will be released Tuesday, May 2nd at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

The document will serve as a guide for policymakers and speaks to the important role policymakers have in promoting and supporting middle level schools. The final document will be 36 pages in length and will be released around April 10th, 2006. The guide identifies 5 goals that everyone who works in the field of middle level education should become familiar with. The 5 goals are:

1. Ensure that all middle level students participate in challenging, standards-based curricula and engaging instruction, and that their progress is measured by appropriate assessments, resulting in continuous learning and high achievement.

2. Support the recruitment and hiring of teachers and administrators with strong content knowledge and the ability to use research-based instructional strategies and assessment practices appropriate for middle level students.

3. Support organizational structures and a school culture of high expectations that enable both middle level students and educators to succeed.

4. Develop ongoing family and community partnerships to provide a supportive and enriched learning environment for every middle level student.

5. Facilitate the generation, dissemination, and application of research needed to identify and implement effective practices that lead to continuous student learning and high academic achievement at the middle level.

We are fortunate to have a strong network of Maine middle level teachers, administrators and advocates. In order to promote best practices in our schools, it is our responsibility to share these goals with Maine policymakers, including the Governor and Commissioner of Education. Please join me in the work of becoming an advocate for our young adolescents.

Sincerely,

Carol A. Weeks, MAMLE President

The Learning Curve

A column by Todd Nelson

Value Education

Our Sixth Graders had been learning math by running an in-school bank, buying cars from the newspaper classifieds, paying rent and utility bills and taking out consumer loans from the 7th grade loan corporations. The Duck Loan Company, for instance, is writing unsecured loans at 1.5%. They've also been holding auctions, a fun side-line in which to exchange white elephants from home. However, they're also aware of the larger world of values as established at auction. Events at Sotheby's have had an interesting effect on this economics curriculum.

Jimmy, the auctioneer, surveyed the gallery of bidders and called them to order by holding up lot #1 for their inspection.

"What am I bid for this fine example of Big League memorabilia?"

He was speaking, of course, about Ned's Johnny Damon baseball card.

"It's not just any baseball card – it's a piece of history," advised Jimmy. He had an immediate bid from the second row and then a brief contest between Bob and Jane in the back row before Susan's bid of \$2.75 carried the day. Pre-auction expectations had been exceeded by \$1.20, despite the fact that "memorabilia" was not a word in their vocabulary.

Lot #2 was Andrea's X-Box game: "Blitzkrieg II."

"I'm told on good authority that this game was actually used by Andrea's older cousin who once saw Jessica Simpson at a store in New York City." This galvanized the audience. Bidders conferred. A hand was raised.

"Three dollars!" exclaimed Wendy.

"Three fifty!" chimed Bart, waving his paddle with the number 11.

Stan rose from his seat, dashed next door to the 7th grade and returned with a bid of \$5.00. It seemed that a long-distance bidder from one of the loan companies was getting into the market. Speculation was strong that future auctions might even advance on the levels being achieved today. Bart prevailed at \$5.57. "Blitzkrieg II" was staying in the 6th grade.

The sixth graders were catching on.

Lot #3 came and went for another record price \$2.68:

Linda's Cat Woman comic donated by her orthodontist, whose former clients included a Hollywood actress with numerous movies to her credit and who now headlined in her own musical show in Vegas. She had very nice teeth.

Lot #4 was the autograph of one of the DJs from the last dance. She had told the kids that she was the sister of a local NBA athlete. There were several autographs extant from that night, but this was the only one on letterhead; the only one turning up at auction. The winning bidder was an anonymous 8th grader.

Much anticipation was attached to Lot #5: the peace symbol earrings worn by Kathrine's mother at Woodstock I. Cindy didn't mind paying top dollar for these. Her mother hadn't been able to go to the concert, so this was her only way of connecting to such an icon of greatness.

"I came today hoping to buy a piece of history," she told the reporter from the *Middle School Weekly*. "The earrings looked good in the catalog, but I didn't know they would have the original mud still clinging to them. I haven't decided if I'll actually wear them around school or put them in the safety deposit box and wait for their appreciation. I guess I don't have a choice until my mom let's me get my ears pierced."

The items moved briskly for the next forty minutes. Dog-eared books from far off, exotic airports, carried home from a parent's business trip; a paper coffee cup with the Mayor's lipstick; empty plastic film canisters which had held the rolls of publicity shots for a rock concert story in the local paper – all came up on the block and were quickly carried off by happy bidders, happy to have been present on the day that their auction became a shining spot of outlandish spending.

Lot #16 was Susan's little sister's Kennedy half dollar. The cognoscenti exchanged glances. Analysts thought this item might return prices to normal levels. The bidding began tentatively and then took off at a pace that would have made even Sotheby's envious. Provenance was smiling down upon them.

Todd Nelson is Principal at the Adams School in Castine, Maine.

Annual MAMLE Conference
Sugarloaf USA October 19 - 20, 2006



Eye On Research

Using the latest information to shape and validate our practice

Strategies That Work

Over the past twenty years an incredible body of research has emerged on how people learn and what strategies are particularly effective in increasing student achievement and learning. Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock in their book *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (ASCD) describe nine strategies that are effective in helping students master new ideas and concepts. Below is a summary of their findings on three of these strategies. These strategies are not new, but their research has unearthed some additional ways to structure these familiar strategies to make them more effective.

1) Looking at how things are similar and different helps students go beyond literal understanding of ideas and concepts.

- Increase student understanding by showing students how to identify characteristics that make ideas/concepts similar and different.
- Give students independent practice in recognizing those characteristics that make two ideas/concepts similar and different.
- Use graphic organizers to help students visualize the similarities and differences.
- Use a variety of strategies:

- Analogies
- Classification practice (matrix graphic organizer)
- Metaphors
- Synectics

http://edweb.sdsu.edu/Courses/ET650_OnLine/MAPPS/Synectics.html

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/literary-techniques/lesson-plan/6688.html>

<http://www.literacymatters.org/lessons/textstructure.htm>

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=275

2. Summarizing and note-taking force students to go beyond a surface reading.

- To help students become good summarizers, teachers must show students how to:
 - * Delete unnecessary information.
 - * Substitute general terms for specific examples.
 - * Identify and keep the vital information.
 - * Identify the text format of a particular type of reading (narratives are in chronological order, arguments have a stance and evidence, etc.) so that they all of the important parts in their summary.

- To help students become better note-takers, teachers must show students how to

- * Learn to synthesize as they take notes and not write everything verbatim.
- * Continually revisit notes, adding and clarifying information.
- * Use notes to prepare for test taking.
- * Fill their notes with as much information as possible (this idea is different from the usual advice to be brief).
- * Practice various note taking strategies and find out what works best for them

Outline

Webbing

Combined note taking (mix of outline form and graphic representation e.g. double entry with one side outline form and the other side has pictures, webs, charts, etc.)

Author aside: Teaching students how to take good notes and to use them effectively is one strategy that teams really ought to work together on to build student competency across curriculum areas.

3. Non-linguistic (non-text) representations help students add to the knowledge they already possess about a topic by having them translate that information into another medium - visual, physical, musical, etc. They have to really think about the topic in order to translate what they've read into another format.

- Ask students to explain and defend their thinking of their nonlinguistic representations.
- Use graphic organizers and/or have students create their own. The graphic organizer should support the text format being used: descriptive, cause & effect, chronological order, etc. For examples go to:

<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

<http://www.graphic.org/>

- Physical models
- Kinesthetic activities (skits, tableaux, etc.)
- Pictures and pictographs (Pictionary®, etc.)

Next newsletter: Reinforcing Effort & Providing Recognition, Homework and Practice & Cooperative Learning

Eye on Research is written by Jill Spencer

It's All About Writing @ Maranacook

Margy Burns Knight
Author - Winthrop, Maine

Dear Parent and Other Community Members,

Do you write at work, at home or just for fun? If so, we invite you to Maranacook Community Middle School for one hour to share your knowledge of writing with us.

You can talk with us about the writing you do and then have us practice it with you. For example, if you write letters to the editor, read us a few letters and tell us how and why you write them. Then, for the second part of the workshop, have us write a letter to the editor. Similarly, if you are a firefighter, demonstrate how you record information, then lead us through a fire scenario and have us record information with you.

We would like to meet authors, bakers, custodians, doctors, editors, farmers and more. Do you keep a journal, write poetry or songs? If so, please return the reply card by November 15th. The workshops will run from January 2006 to mid-May.

*If you have any questions about your workshop, please contact Margy Burns Knight, a local author, at 377-2031 or me. Margy, along with teachers and students, is coordinating, *It's All About Writing @ Maranacook*.*

Thank you, and we look forward to welcoming you to our school.

The above letter was just one of the steps ten students, staff and I took to launch, *It's All About Writing @ Maranacook*. Together we named the project, had a logo designed, invited the writers, scheduled them into classes of the 300 plus middle school students, greeted the guest writers, gave them a gift and even made sure they had a good parking space. Writers have asked students to write thank you notes, congratulatory speeches and EMT reports. They have talked to students about college essays, poetry and physical therapy.

Several years ago a middle school student asked me if I had written or hoped to write anything but illustrated books. I said that I would stick to illustrated books but added that there were probably many people in the community that could come in a talk to the students about their writing. It was from this conversation that I thought of the idea for a school-wide community writing project. Guest writers have told me that they were thrilled to be invited in the middle school and love sharing their knowledge of writing with students.

Writing is everywhere and this writing project is a fantastic way to demonstrate to students that it is essential to develop strong writing and communication skills. It is also a great way to involve the community in a middle school.

MAMLE Is Going High Tech!

Recent changes with our printer are allowing MAMLE some exciting ways to better serve its members. MAMLE's publications, *Mainly Middle*, our journal, and *Middle Link*, our newsletter are now going to be available electronically.

For now, we will continue to send you our print copies, but they will also be available in PDF format on our Web site (www.mamleonline.org). Further, over the next months we will be building an email database of our members and soon we will be able to send the PDF version to you, as well!

Imagine being able to share as many copies of the newsletter or journal with any colleague you think may be interested! Now, a principal only receives a couple copies of each periodical to share with the entire school, but soon she will be able to forward it to her entire staff.

Winthrop Math Challenge

Deanne Buuck
Winthrop Middle School

This year Winthrop Middle School took the plunge into a sea of challenge, math challenge that is. We had for years challenged our students in the language arts with enrichment programs in reading and writing. But beyond acceleration and differentiation in class, there was very little in the way of math challenge for middle level students. About four years ago, we initiated enrichment classes in math for grades six and seven. This program offered some project work and accelerated lessons but it lacked consistent rigor in problem solving. Then along came a parent who suggested we look into *MathCounts* as a way to engage kids in math problem solving. And along with the parent came a very gifted child who, of course, needed the challenge in math.

We looked at *MathCounts* problems on the web, gulped and asked, "Can our kids do this? It looks pretty hard!" We tried it. Kids in grades six and seven enrichment math began working challenging word problems from the *MathCounts* web site. It was assigned as homework. Generally, a week was given for students to work a page of three current events related word problems. Some of the students got their parents involved. At school, the kids argued over who got the latest problems right. The level of engagement was nearly 100% every time the problems were assigned. To our amazement, the kids were mostly successful at solving the difficult problems. The problems forced the students to think and to think hard. Various and creative approaches emerged for solving the problems, and the kids loved showing off their methods on the board in front of their peers.

As our confidence surged with the *MathCounts* problems, the math department decided to offer problem-solving sessions to students beyond the enrichment class. Our math teachers offered *MathCounts* problem-solving sessions during activity period and after school. Extra credit coupons were offered to any student attending. All math teachers in the building honored the coupons adding the extra points to the students' math averages. We served food too. 'Feed them and they will come' was our tactic, and it worked. Several local businesses supported our cause and donated generously when we begged for food or funds.

By late fall, some of our students expressed an interest in competing in the Central Maine Math League. So we put together a combined sixth and seventh grade team and a team of eighth graders. Using the *MathCounts* booklet and released questions from old math league meets, we began coaching the kids. We had a mock math meet at our school using *MathCounts*

questions. The principal served pizza. It was fun! We attended our first math league meet in December, but did not place. We went back to school and practiced some more. In January, we competed and took third place in both our six-seven division and our eighth grade division. The eighth graders went on to take first place in the final meet in February.

... we learned that kids like to be challenged in math. We had to get over our fear that the work was too hard for them.

With our confidence thus buoyed, students decided to give the *MathCounts* regional competition a try. We practiced even more. Many kids still participated in the sessions even though they were not part of the team. They just wanted to do challenging math. Our competitors approached the *MathCounts* regional meet with chins up. We figured we'd make the best of the meet even if we did not place; we came out top in the division. Then the real pressure was on to get to the state *MathCounts* meet. We practiced the hardest questions we could find. A math-savvy parent worked with the team when the teachers were too busy.

We competed at the state level and did not place. But the experience was all well worth the effort. As a school, we learned some valuable lessons. First, we learned that kids like to be challenged in math. We had to get over our fear that the work was too hard for them. Left alone, they found their own ways to figure out the hard stuff. We also learned that by offering the problem solving sessions to all interested students and rewarding their efforts, we engaged a significant proportion of our students in rigorous math work. All types of students bubbled up to try these problems. And most importantly, we realized that an effort like this takes teamwork. The buy-in of the entire math teaching staff, the administration, parents, and community were the keys to success. Without these supports, our plunge into math challenge might not have been the swimming success it turned out to be.

MEAs Online

Carol Duffy

Lamoine Consolidated School

MEAs online are easier to take because it's faster when you type. I would choose the online ones over the pencil and paper ones because you don't have to write and your hand doesn't cramp up.

When surveyed, 82% of my eighth grade students preferred the online tests to the paper versions. They found it easier to change answers and to manipulate the testing environment. Students who did not like the online testing cited difficulties with computers failing and wait time for logging on.

The March 2006 MEA tests were my third experience with the online tests. The MEA online testing environment has steadily improved over the past three years. In March 2004, we were all ready to do the writing assessment online. Practice test sessions ran smoothly, but when I pressed the begin button on the proctor computer, the test session wouldn't start. After spending an hour or two on the phone with the Measured Progress helpline, we abandoned the online testing. The students and I were disappointed since they preferred to write on their laptops. The second year was successful. There were problems transmitting test scores from the proctor machine the first two days, but then everything went smoothly. Students contributed to the success by not being absent during any of the testing periods. When we received the test scores, students had scored at least as well as expected and several students had scores higher than anticipated. The school's administration and teachers decided to continue with online testing.

This year's testing went fairly smoothly until the last two test sessions. The students were able to log into the tests without difficulties and we didn't lose contact between the student computers and the proctor computer at all this year. The test sessions closed smoothly and I was able to check online that the test data had been sent for all the students. I let my guard down a bit and put away my 50-foot telephone cord that reaches from the phone jack in my room to the end where the proctor machine was connected to the internet.

During the last science test session, one student's computer froze and, despite our best efforts, we were unable to log her in. Digging out my long phone cord, I called the helpful people at Measured Progress. It was decided to close the test session

when the rest of the class was finished and to reschedule the student for another testing session. I had my doubts about being able to reschedule a student for a started test, but the data system allowed me to do that. The student was able to restart and finish the test during a make-up session.

The only other difficulty arose during the writing field test session. One student started working on the prompt, managed to get disconnected with the proctor computer and couldn't be logged back on. Once again, the decision was made to have the student complete the test during a make-up session. Again it was easy to reschedule the student for another test period. It wasn't so easy to get him logged back on. Out came the 50-foot phone cord for a series of calls to Measured Progress. Everything should have worked, but it didn't. After we pursued a number of possibilities, the tech person at Measured Progress opened up the student's test and discovered the problem. So much doodling had happened on the note pad that the test was too large to open. The tech person erased the student's note pad, and then he was able to log on to complete his writing piece. Once again, I learned not to panic because one way or another tests can be opened and completed.

The main difficulties this year were the age of the student computers and the high absentee rate. Over 50 percent of the students had to make up from one to six test sessions. We really needed that third week of testing and we finished the testing on the third Friday. The aging laptops had a lot of technical issues develop right at testing time. Borrowing laptops from seventh graders was necessary so the eighth graders would all be able to take the tests simultaneously.

The testing system was more user-friendly this year. The data management system was easy to use. Slow typing on the constructed responses was a common complaint from students last year. This year the typing went much faster while in the testing environment. The faster typists still complained that, "it doesn't pick up if you type more than 15 wpm."

Lamoine School intends to continue to do the eighth grade MEA tests online. Now that we have learned how to use the testing environment, the process runs smoothly. As one of my students wrote, "I liked it better because you don't have to fill in those annoying bubbles. You press a button and move on."

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 wally.alexander@umit.maine.edu.

Teacher From the Sidelines

Mary Gagnon
Auburn School System

It's six a.m. and the phone rings. Someone, somewhere needs my help! "Where?" I say to my contact on the other end. "Okay, I'm on it." I jump out of bed, pull on my clothes and I'm out the door. What will be waiting for me? I never know, but it doesn't matter. Moments later I pull the up to a brick building and step into room 103. Twenty-two pairs of eyes turn to me. "Hello," I say. "I am your substitute teacher."

Whenever I tell people that I substitute teach, I watch a shudder go up their spine. "Wow," they say, wide-eyed, "I could never do that. What grades do you do?" "Third through high school, but I'll do K, one and two if they're desperate." They shake their heads and then ask me where I like to sub the most. – this is the kicker – "Middle School," I say and wait for their reaction. Without fail, they take a second look at me, seeing me with new eyes. "Is she insane or just desperate?" "You are braver than I am!" they'll say. I smile smugly. "I think they're funny."

People generally think if they had to sub, they'd prefer the early grades. Not me. I only substitute in the first three grades if there IS NOBODY ELSE. I have my reasons. To begin with, these children are not grounded in reality. Big Bird is just as likely to come through the door as the principal. They also believe their teacher is omnipotent.. So if they misunderstood her to say, two plus two is six, nothing I say will dissuade them from their belief. Such certitude is unnerving, cute, but unnerving.

Once kids get up to third grade you can reason with them. "Mrs. G," they say, "Ashley's not supposed to be reading on the floor." I say, "Ashley broke your pencil, and spilled your snack. She's has been in time-out twice for calling you a big fat liar. Right now she is content and quiet. Do you *really* want me to put her back at your table?" End of discussion.

Yes, the elementary kids *are* adorable. No argument. But it's a hard day because you have the same kids all day and if you have two or three Ashley's, which isn't that unusual, by snack, while they're eating their granola bars, you're popping Excedrin Stress tabs.

Then there's unraveling the teacher's plans – a job in itself. My biggest problem is figuring out which book she or he is referring to. Every subject seems to have at least two books; even math now has a workbook *and* a reference book. When I finally find everything I need, I'm usually good for the day, (assuming that Ashley spends part of the day with another teacher.)

The exact opposite of this day is subbing at the high school. The kids are pretty autonomous, so generally the plans left by the teacher go like this, "Let them work on their projects for the

period." Occasionally, I get to show a movie. But it's mostly, "Have them read this, then have them do that." Yawn.

If people stereotype elementary kids as *cute*, and high school kids as *easy*, middle schoolers are considered *difficult*. Well, *duh!* Just last week I was in an eighth grade study hall and I consciously thought, "This is hell. I am in hell." One boy just wouldn't be quiet and three others thought he was hysterical. On top of that, it was last period... on a Friday... before a vacation. EARLIER in the day I'd had one class that was icky; off task, noisy, rude... At the end of the period, one of the girls came up to me and apologized for her class's behavior, then hugged me. And this is the charm of middle school, you never know what to expect.

One day I had a girl in class not doing the task at hand, just sitting there. I suggested that she might get to work. She looked at me and said as dismissively as possible, "I'm not going to work." Instead of responding to her dismissive tone I asked, what the problem was, did she feel okay? Well, no she didn't. Did she want to go to the go to the office and call home? Do you know what she said? "*Maybe.*" She wanted it clear that *she* was in charge of *her* universe and I was just an annoying bug. In her own timeframe, she quietly took the office pass and left. I had her in class the other day – all smiles and happiness.

Middle school kids are passionate. This is what makes them my favorites. They hate and they love, sometimes alternately, sometimes at the same time. I've had kids apologize to me for earlier behavior and kids I thought I had a good rapport with knock my feet out from under me and enjoy watching me fall. In those moments, my mantra is: "It isn't me, it could be anybody." I try to remember that they want to be liked, need to be liked. If being mean to the sub gets their peers to like them more, then that's what they'll do. It isn't personal.

Yeah, middle schoolers, or young adolescents as the academics call them, are big on celebrating all bodily functions, but rarely are they dirty. They can be mean, but deeply loyal. Their stories can be heartbreaking, but their choices, heart-warming. Watch them try on identities: One day they're a famous athlete, another day their dad, another some music idol. Enjoy the ride. Too soon they'll have picked one and the petticoats over jeans will be gone.

When that look of horror comes after I've identified myself as a sub, I bask. While it isn't for the feint-hearted, (and there are probably easier ways to make \$62.63 take-home a day) my days are never predictable. And tell me – in what other job does an average housewife get to work with (future) world leaders *and* save the day?

Must-Read Books:

The Ten Faces of Innovation: Let's Invite Them In

Reviewed by Jill Spencer

Shouldn't middle level grades be hotbeds of innovation? Our students go through more physical, intellectual, and social changes than any other group of students. They are in transition from concrete to abstract thinking. More than any previous generation, they will be expected to achieve at high levels and manage information from a multitude of sources.

It would seem that innovative thinking would be second nature to middle level educators because of the conditions mentioned above. But alas, how many times is a new idea greeted with the words, "Well, just let me play Devil's Advocate here," and in a flash a new idea is squelched and an innovator silenced. Having seen this scenario played out many times over the past 35 years, I was intrigued when I heard Tom Kelly from IDEO (a design company) on MPR talking about how his company overcame the Devil's Advocate mentality. I was intrigued and went home and fired up the computer for an Amazon search.

His book, *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, arrived and I was hooked. His premise is simply that in order for his company to stay competitive they have to provide innovative thinking for their clients. Innovative thinking does not thrive in a culture dominated by the Devil's Advocate. It's not a stretch for me to think that middle level educators need to be innovative in order to create learning environments that engage and educate young adolescents in a culture that provides little support and all sorts of distractions. Surely, I thought, there are ways to apply his ideas to our middle level world.

What was exciting was that some of the ideas Kelly discusses are accepted practices in exemplary middle level organizations. For example, Kelly gives the reader a grammar lesson on nouns and verbs. Innovators, he says focus on verbs – the experience. Others, less innovative, focus on the nouns – things – the product, the profit (dare I say standardized test scores). One example he gives is the Apple iPod. Apple concentrated on the experience the consumer would have with their product and developed a device that has captured a generation. Wow! I thought to myself – that's what great middle level teachers do – they create lesson plans that actively involve the students in the learning process and as a result get the product (noun) they desire – student achievement.

Kelly has categorized the behaviors he has observed among the IDEO staff's creative process into 10 personas. They have named them and make conscious use of the roles of each

"face." So instead of hearing, "Let me just play Devil's Advocate," they hear "Let me I assume the role of anthropologist or hurdler or experimenter."

I'll just share a couple of my favorites of the 10 faces. The anthropologists are the folks researching the experience from the "consumers" point of view. It might be videotaping 24 hours in a hospital patient's stay and noticing all of the intrusions that interrupt the rest of a recovering surgery patient – that video provided new insight for the hospital staff. I immediately saw the connection to John Lounsbury's shadow studies where teachers shadow a student for a day and experience school from that point of view. The anthropologists contribute to the innovative process by bringing in a fresh look at the familiar. I wonder how schools might change if we had a resident anthropologist who helped us see our schools from the student or parent perspective, not just our own.

Another favorite persona of mine is the set designer. Kelly maintains there is a connection between the physical attributes of a workspace and the thinking that goes on there. Most offices suffer from "underload" of sensory stimulation. Sounds like the typical teacher's room to me. The set director works at creating a stimulating space that invites conversation and is full of materials that encourage the sharing of ideas – post-its, chart paper, etc. Could teacher's rooms become project rooms where staff collaborate, problem solve, and create? It seems each classroom ought to have a set director also.

"Sacred cows, cardinal rules, call them what you may. There's comes a day when the Experimenters (another face of innovation) need to break new ground by challenging some key assumptions." (57) Now let me just play the Devil's Advocate here, you may be thinking. Schools are not about products – they are about students. We can't be using students to experiment on. I would counter that in many schools 20-30% of our students do not read well enough to meet standards, similar numbers leave the middle grades unprepared for higher level math classes, and too many them cannot figure out how to succeed in school. In an economy that is requiring more and more post-secondary training in order to procure a decent job, we cannot continue to teach the same way we always have. All of our students, not just the easy to teach, need to be more proficient and highly skilled than they did twenty years ago.

Our curriculum and instructional experimenters should be valued members of our faculty and at the hub our conversations about teaching and learning. We can tap their knowledge in order to stimulate our innovative thinking so we can create schools that really do meet each student's learning needs.

A fourth persona is that of the hurdler. This is the person who won't take no for answer – jumps the hurdles that often keep a great idea in a locked box. The hurdler is also the person who sees problems as challenges and can find the positive in most situations. Kelly characterizes the hurdler as one who helps the group overcome any pressures “to just do the job,” find a way through the bureaucratic maze, and not be demoralized by initial failures. Every team ought have a hurdler on board to bring to fruition the proposals generated in team meetings.

Cross pollinator, collaborator, director, experience architect, caregiver, storyteller – these are the other six faces of

innovation. Each has a role in the creative process. Educating young adolescents is a creative endeavor. Helping 10-to-15-year-olds navigate the years of rapid change and the perilous, seductive pressures of their peers and the media while at the same time engaging them in a challenging curriculum designed to increase their skills and knowledge is not for the faint of heart. The middle grades need to show the Devil's Advocate the door and invite in other personas to help stir up the cauldron of innovation. Innovative thinking about teaching and learning should be the mainstay of our school culture.

(Author's note – I'm playing the role of cross pollinator – introducing ideas from another venue that may have value in our own situation.)

Kelly, Tom with Littman, Jonathon, *The Ten Faces Of Innovation*, Currency-Doubleday, 2005

22nd Annual Middle Level Education Institute June 25 - June 29, 2006 University of Maine “Simple, But Deep”

WHY THE MLEI?

The Middle Level Education Institute is intended for schools ready to improve. Veteran schools. Schools new to the middle level concept. Schools who are trying to solve complex problems.

During the past few years the focus on standards, standardized tests, AYP, Highly Qualified Teachers, and common assessments has pulled many middle level schools away from their commitment to meeting all the needs of young adolescents. There is no doubt that the balance between the many national and state mandates and what research tells us middle level students need is tricky to achieve. This year's MLEI will provide assistance – and give you the time and expertise – to provide the very best learning community for your students and teachers.

While we all want to improve the learning of every young adolescent – which is much more than merely improving academic achievement – every good middle level educator knows that the academic and learning needs will grow and flourish only when we also provide for the compelling physical, social, emotional, and moral needs of young adolescents as well.

WHAT'S NEW AT THE 2006 MLEI?

Just About Everything!

This year's MLEI has changed in both format and content. If you have not been here for several years – or not at all – this is the year to attend. If your school has issues that are driving you crazy; if you are concerned about AYP; if behavior issues are consuming too much time and energy; if your school's climate has worsened instead of improved; the Middle Level Education Institute will help you grapple with these issues.

For information, contact: Cindy Plourde, Institute Coordinator, at 207/581-2412 or cindy.plourde@umit.maine.edu.

* Enrollment is limited to 200, so register early to reserve space in the 2006 MLEI.

* Registration DUE by May 18, 2006

Reading Between the Lines: "That's NOT What I Meant!"

Maggie McKinney
Maranacook Community Middle School

As a school counselor I often have the opportunity to help people process conflicts they have with others. Many situations escalate beyond our control and we sometimes say things we regret. I've learned that people who have the opportunity to talk about the progression of their conflict in a step-by-step manner usually discover misunderstanding and misperception to be at the root of their disagreement.

Recently, a 7th grade girl I'll call Sue ended up visiting with me in our Wellness Center after she had been asked to leave a classroom by her teacher. Sue and I worked together to reconstruct the situation that had led up to her removal. We started with her describing a step-by-step record of the incident, including her actions and feelings at the time. Then we recorded what the teacher did and what she thought his reasons were for his actions. We began writing and she continued adding details and feelings until we had a clear picture right up to the moment when she exploded and he asked her to leave the classroom. I have attempted to capture both the process we used and the essence of what we learned.

Sue walked into her classroom already, in her words, "feeling dumb." A series of cause and effect interactions followed.

1. Sue feels "dumb" most of the time anyway.
2. Her teacher assigns seats, placing her with three other students who she considers to be extremely smart, even scary smart. They are not people she associates with or feels accepted by.
3. Now Sue is isolated from all her friends and feels even more stupid. Frustration builds inside of her.
4. The teacher assumes the girl will do more work when she is surrounded by students who often succeed academically.
5. Sue believes she will do more work if she sits with at least one friend who helps her feel adequate and safe.

6. She knows if she sits with all her friends she will do no work, so she is not asking for that.

7. Sue became frustrated so she left her group and went to help a friend make up some work. Sue felt smart because she had already completed the work and could help her friend.

8. The teacher assumed she had quit doing her work and was simply fooling around. He became frustrated with her.

9. He told her to go back to her seat!

10. Sue got MAD!!! She tossed her notebook onto her bag. She threw it harder than she intended, it landed on the floor, and all her papers flew out.

11. The teacher told her to Get Out! and go to the office.

12. Sue missed the rest of the class.

When Sue and I met to process the incident, she instantly showed a sense of relief that I understood how she felt. She wasn't simply being "bad" nor was she intentionally disruptive. She felt inadequate and very uncomfortable sitting with the "smart kids", as she called them. She intuitively did whatever she could to feel better about herself, even at the risk of her teacher's anger with her. Sue does not have the skills necessary to resolve conflicts so she escalates from frustration to explosion rather rapidly.

Sue and I met with her teacher to discuss what we had learned and he was very open to the process we had used together. It became clear immediately that they were now able to understand each other's point of view better. There are always two sides to any situation, but once emotions become high, it's difficult to see any solution other than removal from class.

Sue and I developed a plan for us to meet and repeat the process if she was asked to leave class again. It hasn't happened yet, but we are prepared.

mamleonline.org
check it out!

What Do Sports Actually Teach Our Kids?

Sue Wentworth
Indian Island School

Sports is a hot topic in schools these days. For young adolescents in middle level schools, the issues are both challenging and vexing, and often center around such hot button issues as money, kids, politics, publicity and kids' futures.

Not surprisingly, money is often first on the list of priorities when anything related to schools is discussed. School boards must set priorities and then decide how the amount of money they have will be spent to achieve their educational goals.

In many towns in Maine, school districts tuition their high school students to area high schools when that town or district does not have its own high school. High school tuition is set by the state, and towns pay an amount quarterly for each student to attend, so this becomes a fixed amount that must be taken from the town's overall education budget. When the town has families with high school students move in, it can directly affect the elementary school's budget in that town. The town must spend the required amount of money for tuition to high school for all of its students.

In the small town where I live, I was on the school board for four years. We often had to cut programs from the elementary school if we had an increase in the number of high school students. Since the high school tuitions could not be cut, the elementary school bore the brunt of any budget shortfalls or cuts. This sets up the townspeople to look for financial savings from students dropping out of high school so that the elementary school won't have to cut things like sports, music, drama, or other programs. This is not a good situation for the town, the high school students, the elementary students, anyone working in the elementary school, or society as a whole.

Contentious is defined as "likely to cause argument" in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Sports is a topic that is very definitely likely to cause argument; thus sports is a contentious issue in education today. The *Bangor Daily News* ran a column throughout the high school football season with several sports writers predicting what they thought would be the outcomes of football games each week. They also invited a weekly guest *predictor* to have a go at it. This was an extremely popular feature in the paper, as it pits one town or school's football team against another.

Many people take sports very seriously. Money talks. Newspapers publish stories about many sports, and they also publish many sports scores. Parents often hope that their child earns a college scholarship based on the child's sports abilities and achievement. Coaches devote many, many hours of their lives to the sport that they coach and the kids involved in that sport. Money changes hands in the form of admission fees,

team sports paraphernalia, food sold at games, uniforms, and uniform accessories.

Sports can, and often does, have a great impact on a student-athlete's life.

McDonald's restaurants have a policy where they give a free meal to one bus driver and one coach per team bus for traveling sports teams. Burger King has a comparable policy whereby they will give free meals to three adults accompanying at least 15 student athletes. If two teams (say a boys' team and a girls' team) travel for a sport, and there are thirty kids or more, Burger King will provide free meals for six accompanying adults. If commercial establishments actually have a policy for this type of situation, you can be certain that they take it very seriously!

Many people take sports seriously in other, not so positive ways. I know one man who thinks it is absolutely preposterous that area high schools invest in night lighting for their sports' fields. He comments about this regularly, stating that the kids should play during the day and that the town's taxpayers shouldn't be paying the local electric company to light these fields; furthermore, these lights should be shut off more, and not have them on very much (or at all!). People complain about the cost of busing students to athletic events, complain about coaches' salaries, and find many other issues about which to complain. Most people have some opinion about high school sports. It usually is in response to how sports directly affect them or their families.

I played basketball in high school. I moved the summer after my sophomore year, in 1972, from Billerica, Massachusetts

Many people are into the WIN mentality, sometimes to the detriment of a program, or the kids.

(Merrimac Valley JV Champions!) to Presque Isle, Maine. It was a huge culture shock for me! At that time, Presque Isle did not even have a girls' basketball team. I asked questions when the Welcome Wagon lady came calling. She asked some questions at the high school, and a girls' team was formed.

They found old uniforms in the attic that we wore for the first two years of the program (my last two years of high school). The numbers on them were numbers like 47 and 84, which were illegal. We adjusted as many of them as we could with tape, but at the beginning of every game, the referees counted up how many of us had illegal uniform numbers, and assessed us that many technical fouls. Such a lovely way to start the game! There were no programs for girls in younger grades, so many of the girls who joined the team had no real idea how to play. We lost every game both years I played! But I had a good time. Years later, I read in the newspaper about Presque Isle girls winning the state basketball championship and it made me smile.

The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching lists the core principles for the program *Sports Done Right* (2005) as follows:

- Philosophy, Values, and Sportsmanship in athletic participation must be healthful, positive, and safe for everyone involved.
- Sports and Learning – Learning and personal growth form the foundation for interscholastic and intramural sports.
- Parents and Community – Parents and community are actively involved in creating and supporting an environment that fosters positive athletic experiences.
- The Quality of Coaching – The coach is the key to making the student-athlete experience appropriate, positive and educational.
- Opportunity to Play – Each student who meets the eligibility standards has the opportunity to participate and learn through sports.
- Health and Fitness – Participation in sports builds self-confidence while teaching good health and fitness habits to last a lifetime.
- Leadership, Policy and Organization – High-quality athletic programs are built upon a foundation of strong leadership, clear policy, adequate resources and effective organization.

I find these principles to be an interesting approach to sports in schools. They sound great, but are they truly believed and followed? Many people are into the *WIN* mentality, sometimes to the detriment of a program, or the kids. I happen

to think that it is important to be on a team and play, and if you win – fine, but it is fine if you don't win too. That is not often the attitude when it comes to school sports.

I have recently started coaching a middle level girls' basketball team. I told the girls that they should not join the team if they didn't want to play. Thirteen girls suited up for the first game. To choose starters, I drew five names out of a hat. I kept a close eye on the clock, and put in five different players after 2 or 3 minutes of play. Then I continued to rotate all players through the game, having them play for 2-3 minutes at a stretch. We did not win the game, but I was so busy watching the clock for time that I had to ask the boys' coach what the score was at the end of the game because I wasn't really watching that. We lost by three points. All of my players, except the girl with the sprained ankle who did not change up for the game, played. They all played for a fair amount of time, and they all were equally sweaty at the conclusion of the game. They had fun, and so did I. The next day, the talk was about how they *almost won* the game, not about how they lost the game.

Sports can, and often does, have a great impact on a student-athlete's life. My son, a senior in high school who played football this year for the first time in his life – for a school team that does not cut players – told me that the team is like a family, and you work to help each other out through the good times and the bad. He learned about football this year, but he also learned a lot about being a member of a team that values all of its members. What a great lesson!

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Helping Others Do 1-to-1 Well By Sharing Our Stories

Mike Muir

University of Maine at Farmington

Schools all over the world are seeing the promise and power of 1-to-1 – having a laptop or handheld device for every student and teacher. Several other states, including Texas, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, have pilot programs in place, and representatives from jurisdictions from all over the world are visiting Maine to see our program in action.

There is more and more information available to leaders working to implement 1-to-1, but if someone hasn't experienced 1-to-1 herself, it can be hard to make sense of the subtleties of that information. Sometimes the best way to convey information about something that others haven't experienced is through stories.

Imagine a free online resource with hundreds of stories and anecdotes that help educators explore the critical components for successful 1-to-1 learning with technology initiatives.

The 1-to-1 Stories Project is an effort to gather those stories to better understand the complexities of successfully implementing 1-to-1, to provide an opportunity for different 1-to-1 initiatives to learn from each other, and to provide those new to 1-to-1 vicarious experiences so they might learn from the experiences of the schools that have gone before them.

Imagine a free online resource with hundreds of stories and anecdotes that help educators explore the critical components for successful 1-to-1 learning with technology initiatives. Imagine being able to browse through categorized stories including teacher practice, leadership, professional development, technology access and support, funding, getting started, and more. Imagine the perspectives of 10, 20, or 50 1-to-1 initiatives. Besides text, the stories can be in the form of podcasts and video clips.

The 1-to-1 Stories Project (<http://www.1to1stories.org>) is a project of the Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning at the University of Maine at Farmington, and is directed by Mike Muir. This project is loosely modeled on Andy Hertzfeld's "The Original Macintosh" project at Folklore.org (<http://www.folklore.org/>).

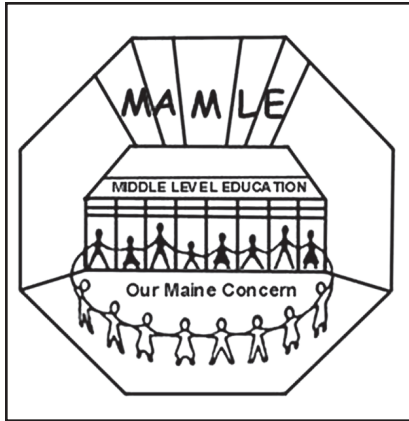
A project of this magnitude has many opportunities for individuals and organizations to participate. At the very heart of the project, of course, are the accounts of educators working in 1-to-1 learning with technology environments. Most importantly, we are looking for people involved in 1-to-1 initiatives who are willing to share their stories.

Representatives from MLTI, the first state-wide initiative; New Bedford Global Learning Charter School, a small charter school with technology and global connections as part of their charter; and Irving ISD, a large, diverse, urban district with a vertical initiative, are currently adding their stories, as well as educators from other initiatives. Eventually, educators in 1-to-1 projects from all over the country and around the world will be involved in contributing their stories (we'd love to have over a hundred authors!). The target is broad representation, not just geographically and demographically, but also in terms of people's roles: teachers, administrators, tech integrators, tech coordinators, higher ed folks, etc.

You can share one story or you can share several! If you just have an anecdote or two to share, you can email them directly to Mike Muir (mmuir@maine.edu). If you have more stories to tell, you can sign up to be an author (look for the author information at <http://www.1to1stories.org>).

Part of the development process is establishing and developing the Web site itself. The 1-to-1 Stories Project is hosted by the University of Maine at Farmington, using WordPress as its backbone, and supports an RSS feed (so you can keep track of new stories as they are added!). The director is currently testing different themes and looks for the site. The site's appearance will evolve throughout the development phase of the project. Do you know how to work with CSS? You could help the Project team develop the look of the site. Or are you in the position to offer technical assistance so we can add media to the project (photos, podcasts, short videos)?

How ever you are interested in participating, there are numerous ways to contribute to the 1-to-1 Stories Project! Of course, you could just be a lurker and read and comment on the stories!



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:

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

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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 Confernces*; 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:

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 25% off regular registration fees. Groups of 20+ receive a 33% discount. Discounts do not apply to housing costs.