

MIDDLE LINK

Maine Association for Middle Level Education

Volume 20 No. 1

Fall 2008

MLEI On The Move!

Mark Your Calendars!

2009 Middle Level Education Institute

Week of July 13, 2009

Thomas College, Waterville, Maine

"You know I'm really tired at the end of the school year, but then I come up to the Institute. Within a couple of hours of arriving, I'm rejuvenated and ready to go again."

These are words spoken by a participant at the 2008 Middle Level Education Institute (MLEI) at the University of Maine in Orono. This sentiment reflects the positive energy that is generated year after year at MLEI. Many schools return repeatedly because the Institute allows them to reflect on the latest research about learning, chat one on one with national and international middle level experts, and focus on a school, team or individual project with coaching from a talented Institute staff. After 24 years, Dr. Ed Brazee, the visionary director, has decided to retire from the Institute. Wanting to ensure that the MLEI would endure, the Board of Directors of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education voted unanimously to assume responsibility for the Institute and to move it to Thomas College in Waterville.

The Middle Level Education Institute has had a profound affect on participants and their schools. Since its earliest days, the Institute consultants and speakers challenged participants to be innovative and risk-takers as they addressed the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical developmental needs of Maine's young adolescents. In 1988 *Schools In the Middle* was published by the Maine Department of Education. It outlined the characteristics and learning needs of middle level

grades and suggested changes in the traditional curriculum and programs of middle level schools. Teams of teachers came to the Institute back then to learn about heterogeneous grouping, interdisciplinary teaching, teaming, and advisory programs. These experiences helped the teachers and principals transform their schools. Later, Ed brought Jim Beane and Barbara Brodhagen to Maine, and Institute participants learned to plan curriculum with students. Teachers went home and never taught the same way again. As Chris Williams from Bucksport said recently, "James Beane's approach changed my thinking about teaching dramatically. After working with him at Orono, my world opened up as my views of teaching expanded. He is the reason student self-assessment is so important to me." Recently, Scott Love (developer of NoteShare) and MLTI personnel have been part of the Institute, and participants have become much more fluent with the software on their MLTI laptops and developed strategies for effectively integrating technology into their teaching. The Institute has helped countless middle level schools become better places for young adolescents to learn and to grow socially and emotionally.

The concept of the Institute actually dates to the late 1970's. Ed Brazee recalls:

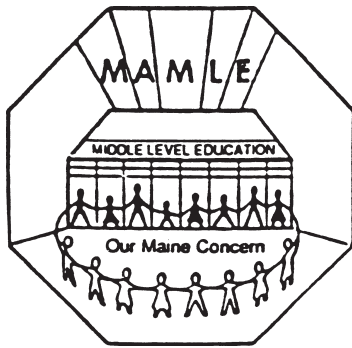
John Swaim and I started our first middle level summer institute at the University of Northern Colorado

(Continued on Page 4)

Sue Swaim & Ed Brazee to Keynote!

Annual MAMLE Conference!

October 23 - 24, 2008 @ Sugarloaf USA



Middle Link MAMLE Directors

Mike Muir (President)

Michele Demkowicz (President-Elect)

Carol Weeks (Past-President)

Dennis Carr (Treasurer)

Ed Brazee

Sue Caron

Carol Duffy

Rick Green

Tom Leonard

John Keene

Sandy Nevens

Jeff Rodman

Jill Spencer

Chris Toy

Wes Marble

Wally Alexander (Executive Director)

Middle Link is the official newsletter of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education and is published three times each academic year. Subscription to *Middle Link* is included in MAMLE membership dues.

MAMLE Editor: Wally Alexander

From the President's Desk

August 2008

As I'm writing this I can't believe that it is early August. The Skowhegan State Fair is around the corner, which always seems to indicate that summer is over. Out come the jackets. Stores have school supplies. And teachers start sneaking back into their rooms to get ready for the return of our students. (And it hardly seems fair! It's early August! Don't we have weeks of summer left!?!)

Well, even if it isn't fair, it is time to start thinking about our students. And sometimes it's hard to think about our students when we have so much pressure to meet standards and do well with testing.

I work with a group that designs schools to motivate kids. It seems that most of the districts that want to work with us have kids they are afraid will fall between the cracks or students who have already not experienced success in schools. We try to have students experience success by helping them get interested in the material before we try to teach the material.

I learned that trick, in part, from my wife, Tammy. She's one of the best English Language Arts teachers I know. She uses high-interest, young adult literature to get students interested in reading before she tries to teach comprehension strategies, parts of speech, or other topics important for students to learn, but often not very captivating to students.

If we really care about our students learning important content, or even doing well on tests, shouldn't we try to interest them? Does it work? Tammy recently looked over her data from last year. Not only did her NWEA scores go up on average, but the number of books each student read over the year went from 4-6 to 20-35! (Yes – apiece!)

Tammy uses high-interest, young adult literature. We use high-interest community-based projects in our schools.

What are you going to do to get your students interested before you teach them?

Mike Muir
President, MAMLE

*Together We Can
Make A Difference*



The Learning Curve

A column by Todd Nelson

True Story

It occurred to me, as Mrs. McFadden and I were working with the 5-7th graders in a language arts workshop this week, that a writing prompt is like fuel: without ignition and oxygen, the combustion of creativity doesn't produce forward motion... much less a bang.

We had the fuel. We had been imitating a paragraph by Mike Perry. The opening paragraph from his new book, *Truck: a Love Story*, gave us some clever technique to imitate. The prompt was to find an ancient photograph of oneself, something buried in the family album that had as high embarrassment potential as possible (the more humiliating, the better the material for writing). Got the notorious image in mind? Now write a reflection or description of it from the vantage point of the present time.

Perry writes, "The story begins on a pile of sheep manure the size of a yurt." He is a kid standing atop this offal Everest when his father snaps the photo. We talked about surprise factors, bringing visual detail into writing, leading the reader along and then ambushing them. (Perry: "My hood is up, my pants are tucked inside rubber barn boots, and I am leaning on my sawed-off pitchfork as if it were an alpenstock. I am grinning like the hick spawn of the devil and Sir Edmund Hillary.")

As we reviewed other opening sentences, technique began to emerge. Ira Glass talks about creating the moment in radio at which the listener is hooked and helpless, no chance of turning the dial – the moment when you simply must hear the next sentence. Paul Klee, the artist, talks about "taking a line out for a walk," as his drawing method. But this advice gets you only a few feet off the ground. We wanted geosynchronous orbit.

I remembered one of my favorite opening sentences: "This is all true, even if it never happened." And there's the faulty gap on the spark plug: these diligent students thought they had to tell the truth, since they were working from a photograph, and trying to imitate the word choice and syntax of a real writer. There's a difference between truth and authenticity, in writing.

"Hey kids, it's not a question of being accurate. You don't have to tell the truth here," I pointed out. "It's not as if you were a journalist or scientist. 'Never let the truth get in the way of a good story!'" Ignition. Lift-off. Red planet, here we come. No one else would be able to verify whether our descriptions were realistic or not. Besides, Perry too was just sharing his latter-day recollection of a photo, the way the photo made him feel... from the vantage point of time and maturity. Good student imitations started to emerge. They were catching

the spirit of writing with a hook. Soon Wilber the talking dog was making an appearance in class. Golf cart Nascar episodes were going on record.

The impending arrival of the Notorious Aunts was being chronicled. And then there was the sixth grader on a perilous quest to find the Writer's Temple: "It existed, that I knew. I would find it," she wrote, "and my writer's block would be cured!"

The exercise in class that day made me feel as if I should revise a recent account of another event at school. Perhaps you have seen or heard the report of a weasel at school, two weeks ago? There was a photo in the paper of attempts to trap him. As I recall, I might have embellished the truth, just slightly.

I lied: it wasn't a weasel. He was a stoat, named Dinsdale. And he made this very clear to me when I went downstairs into the school basement, Monday, to see if the Hav-a-Heart trap had worked over the weekend. Had you heard him speak, his accent would remind you of the Geicko Gecko.

"Oy mush," he said, as I peered through the cage bars. "These biscuits are stale." English stoats call crackers and cookies biscuits, for some reason. Nothing like being reprimanded by a stoat jailbird. He blew smoke in my face.

"I'm so sorry," I murmured. "Did you at least like the peanut butter?"

"Rubbish," he stoated. "And I'm a bit thirsty. Hasn't my mate Rifkin posted bail yet?"

I consulted my rap sheets. "Nope. And it looks like a guy with your history of breaking and entering can look forward to remand at the arraignment."

"It's all a big misunderstanding," Dinsdale pleaded. "I was just picking up something for a friend. A punter I met on a ship. Honest."

"Tell it to the judge," I said. I'd heard it all before. Never trust stoat sailors.

"Really! I was in Gibraltar, minding my own business, down the local, when a couple of weasels grabs me," said the fast-talking stoat. "Next thing I know, I'm here in the colonies! True story!"

"I know, I know. I suppose, 'It's all true, even if it never happened,'" I said. "I read that one too."

"Can I at least call the trouble and strife, tell her I'll be late for tea?"

Next.

Perhaps you have not yet heard the one about the saber tooth butterfly we found out back, in the milkweed plants by the back door? Or the bear that went to France in a box! True story.



MLEI On the Move (continued from Page 1)

in June of 1979. We didn't have a clue what we were doing or how the institute would turn out... but it did very well and participants gave it rave reviews as the middle school concept was taking off across the country. Over the next few years, we refined the institute, moved it to ski country in the Colorado mountains, and continued to attract participants from across the country. We also noticed that schools who sent teams seemed to gain the most benefit from attending... certainly a 'no-brainer!'

When I moved to the University of Maine in the fall of 1984, Maine seemed to be fertile ground for a middle level summer institute which I began in the summer of 1985 with 30 attendees – teams from four Maine middle level schools, and four separate principals who were checking us out!

The Maine Middle Level Education Institute was founded to provide a significant professional development experience for Maine teachers, administrators, and parents to learn about all aspects of young adolescent growth and development and establishing and improving middle level schools. In addition to providing top-notch consultants from around the country, a program based on the needs of the teams attending, and all in a stimulating environment... the most significant decision was to organize and ask schools to send teams of people, not just individuals. That was the key to the 24 years of successful Middle Level Education Institutes at the University of Maine.

As a result of Ed's decision to organize MLEI around teams, team – planning time is one of the defining characteristics of the Institute. This time is invaluable to the participants because they have uninterrupted time to brainstorm, argue, reflect and finalize their ideas for an initiative they desire to implement back at school. This type of time is a luxury not afforded by school schedules.

Up until three years ago Kathy McAvoy worked closely with Ed to plan the Institute and ensure that everything went smoothly. After Kathy moved to Virginia, Gert Nesin joined Ed as a Co-Director. In addition to the people already mentioned, there have been other spectacular consultants who have inspired Maine middle level teachers to develop practices to help their students be more successful. Comments such as, "We thought we had our unit all done and then we went to Nancy Doda's session. We left there determined to go back for another look at our unit and figure out how to bring in more student voice." or "I just love Mark Springer; I go to all of his sessions!" are typical responses to the interactions with Institute consultants.

Another aspect of the Institute is that it has been an incubator for Maine middle level educators who were interested

in working with teachers and schools in new ways. Former homegrown Institute consultants like Jerry Lynch, Judy Enright, & Mike Muir have gone on to consult nationally. Also, other Maine middle level educators have had opportunities to work at the Institute. The "Staph" T-Shirt signifies the enthusiastic Maine educators and young adolescent helpers who attend to details and "infect" the participants with enthusiasm and good cheer. Ed always made it a priority to include exemplary teachers as presenters and consultants. MLEI has influenced the thinking of hundreds of middle level educators in Maine, and as a result thousands of students' educational experiences have more closely reflected the most effective practices for young adolescents.

The focus of the Institute will continue to be young adolescents and their intellectual, social, physical and psychological needs. Participants will be encouraged to come in teams, however individuals are always welcomed.

As stated earlier in the article, after 24 years as Director of MLEI, Ed has decided to retire from running the Institute. The Board of Directors of MAMLE, many of who are former participants and/or staff members of the Institute, felt compelled to take responsibility for running the Middle Level Education Institute. The Board appointed Wally Alexander, Jill Spencer, and Chris Toy as Co-Directors – it takes three people to fill Ed's shoes! Because Wally is actually Professor Alexander at Thomas College, the decision was made to move the Institute to Thomas College in Waterville. The 2009 Institute will also be held later in the summer to avoid conflict with school schedules stretched out by snow days.

Thomas is located on the outskirts of Waterville and has a great, compact campus. Similar to the living accommodations at the University of Maine, the teams will be housed in suites, and the suites are air-conditioned. For those who remember sweltering days and nights at the Doris Twitchell Allen Village Community, the air conditioning is going to be a real bonus. It is important to the MAMLE Board that emphasis on collaboration at the Institute be continued, and thus the suite configuration was an important attribute to consider. Other positive aspects of Thomas are that they have excellent dining facilities and good-sized meeting rooms. As has been the practice in the



last few years at the Institute, the campus will be wireless. The University of Maine has been a great host for the first 24 years of the Institute, and it will seem a little strange not to be located there. But with the change in Directors, the move to Thomas makes a lot of sense. The Thomas staff is excited to welcome the Institute to their campus.

Year 25 of the Institute, at its new location and time, promises to be an engaging, meaningful, and powerful experience for all involved.

The focus of the Institute will continue to be young adolescents and their intellectual, social, physical and psychological needs. Participants will be encouraged to come in teams, however individuals are always welcomed.

There will be familiar faces among the consultants and staff as well as some new ones. The Institute will continue to build on the innovative and creative thinking of Maine educators by introducing ideas that are timely and provocative. The format will be similar in that a large chunk of time will be allotted for team planning. Afternoon concurrent sessions will offer ideas and strategies based on the stated needs of the participants, networking and community building will be encouraged among participants, and optional evening programs will add a unique dimension to the Institute. As usual teams and individuals will be organized into "Super Teams" and

will meet with staff to share ideas, concerns and resources. Graduate credit will be available.

There are huge challenges facing those who work with young adolescents. *How do we balance the need for accountability with what research says are the most effective practices for 10-15 year olds? How do we shift our curriculum and instruction so that we are focusing on 21st skills and learning? How do we address the physical and emotional health problems of young adolescents that seem to be growing exponentially? How do we help new teachers and administrators with little or no training in the developmental needs of young adolescents understand what teaching and learning is all about in the middle grades? How do we keep the Arts as an integral part of the curriculum when there is so much pressure to slash budgets?*

It's very difficult for schools to address these challenges by themselves and in the time allotted during the school year. The beauty of the Institute is that it provides the resources, the connections, and the time to tackle these issues in a thoughtful and reflective manner with support from some of the best thinkers in middle level education. Year 25 of the Institute, at its new location and time, promises to be an engaging, meaningful, and powerful experience for all involved.

Look for more information in future MAMLE publications, on our website (www.mamleonline.org), and in brochures available this fall. Also you may contact any of the Institute Co-Directors:

Jill Spencer: Phone: 207-353-2746
spencerj51@yahoo.com

Chris Toy: Phone: 207-653-3163
christoy.net@gmail.com

Dr. Wallace Alexander: Phone: 207- 589-1111
wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu

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
Links*

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

Download 2008 Annual Conference information and registration



Professional Development Strategy: Web 2.0 Part 2

Web 2.0: a term introduced in 2004 to characterize design patterns in a constellation of new generation Web applications that may provide an infrastructure for more dynamic user participation, social interaction and collaboration.

www.csa.com/discoveryguides/scholarship/gloss.php

Microsoft spends over 5 billion dollars a year on research and development of new products and upgrades to keep its business competitive. Can you imagine what schools would look like if they had a budget proportional to Microsoft's to support curriculum research and development. Units would be fresh, engaging, and academically stimulating because they would be based on the best information research could provide, and they could be continuously upgraded because time and materials would be available. But alas, schools will never have that type of budget so staffs have to use all of their ingenuity to make the time to review and revise curriculum, check out the research that might be advantageous, and create the materials that will challenge and engage students. Web 2.0 tools are making this endeavor more doable.

In the spring issue we discussed how Web 2.0 tools could help a school staff share ideas, discuss policy decisions, and explore new ideas using NoteShare and wikis. In this issue we will look at social bookmarking.

Before we delve into social bookmarking, I would like to share a site that is very helpful in understanding all of the new web-based tools like Podcasts, Nings, Second Life, Twitter, RSS, etc. It is the "7 Things You Should Know" page (<http://www.techlearning.com/showArticle.php?articleID=180204035>) on the *EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative* website. According to their website, EDUCAUSE is a "community of higher education institutions and organizations committed to advancing learning through IT innovation." (<http://www.educause.edu/eli/16086>) This is a site worth checking out and tagging at your social bookmarking site.

What is social bookmarking and how might this tool be utilized to further professional and curriculum development goals? Simply defined, social bookmarking is a way to share favorite websites with others by giving them your URL (This is not a password). For example if you go to <http://del.icio.us/jill1000> you will be at my del.icio.us site, and you can see sites that I have bookmarked.

The right hand column lists the "tags" or categories that I have used to organize my sites. As you can see I have 10 sites in the category of assessment. Someone visiting my site merely has to click on the assessment tag to find them. The specific sites are also clickable.

There is a great little video on YouTube that describes the del.icio.us site and how to use it. Social Bookmarking in Plain English -- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x66lV7GOcNU>

The "7 Things You Should Know" site mentioned above has an article on social bookmarking also. It's under the 2005 menu.

A benefit to social bookmarking is that the bookmark site is available through any internet browser so it is accessible from any platform. Individuals do not need to be in the MLTI one to one computer environment to utilize this tool.

Here are ten ways individuals, teams, and an entire staff can use social bookmarking:

del.icio.us/jill1000	tags
your bookmarks/your network/subscription/links for you/post	1 2.0
« earlier / later » page 1 of 3	10 assessment
7 Things You Should Know About... EDUCAUSE edit / delete to technology, web 2.0 ... saved by 35 other people... 2 hours ago	1 blogs
Native Americans - American Indians – The First People of America; History of Native American Tribes edit / delete to NativeAmericans, nativeamerican ... saved by 73 other people ... on June 25	1 design
WorksheetWorks.com - Graphic Organizers edit / delete to graphic organizers ...	2 differentiation
	6 formative



- Teachers can create a site that corresponds to the current unit being taught. S/he can post sites that students will use for research or for text based-discussions.
- Teachers can differentiate by posting sites with different levels of complexity and reading difficulty that address the same essential question. Students can read appropriate material for themselves; yet participate fully in discussions focusing on the essential question.
- Teachers can share with one another sites with content related information and/or effective strategies related to their subject area.
- Teams can share articles with parents/guardians that explain the developmental changes their children are experiencing which might be leaving the parents feeling like they have arrived in Never-Never Land.
- Teams can use a social bookmarking site to gather and store great sites useful in upcoming interdisciplinary units.
- Teams might tag sites that would be really useful for addressing social issues on the team that need to be discussed during advocacy or advisory period.
- Principals could post an article that will be discussed during the next staff meeting. Staff can access the article at school or from home, and paper is saved because 50 copies haven't been run off and discarded after the meeting.
- Staff could **easily** access **24/7** videos that show technology skills and/or teaching strategies they want to practice and master.
- When a Leadership Team is going to be introducing a new plan or process or concept to the entire staff, they can build prior knowledge by posting a variety of articles for folks to read. If they combine the bookmarking site with a wiki, they can allow staff to explore and comment on the topic before the actual meeting.
- A staff can share their social bookmarking site with the community. This strategy is an opportunity to share with the community information on issues facing the school. It also demonstrates that the staff values intellectual discourse and reflective thinking.

Social bookmarking is a simple tool that allows a school community to share content and pedagogical information, explore issues from different perspectives, and build a common understanding of the big ideas that guide the decision making process of the school.

Congratulations to the Following Middle-Level Mainers

Linda Bleile is the new President-Elect of the Maine Principals' Association. She is the principal of Wiscasset Middle School in Wiscasset.

Bette Manchester recently retired from the Maine Department of Education where she oversaw MLTI for seven years is the new Executive Director of the Maine International Center for Digital Learning.

Jeff Mao has been named State of Maine Learning Technology Policy Director and has assumed responsibility for the Maine Learning Technology Initiative.

Mike Muir, president of MAMLE has been elected East Region Trustee for NMSA. He has also been named VP for Development and Support at ResulTech Educational Services. Mike will maintain his affiliation with the University of Maine at Farmington through his ongoing position as Director of the Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning.

Cathy Thibodeau from Otis, Maine is the new President-Elect of the National Middle School Association. Although New Hampshire will want to claim her because she taught there for many years, Cathy and her husband have recently moved to Maine. Many people have met Cathy at the MAMLE and NELMS conferences.

Bill Wise from Greeley Middle School was honored by the International Reading Association for his children's book *Louis Sockalexis: Native American Baseball Pioneer*.

Marguerite Lawler-Rohner, an art teacher at Cape Elizabeth Middle School, is the 2008 recipient of the Maine Art Teachers Fellowship.



MAMLE Announces Its 2008 Exemplary Practices Awardees

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 38 Exemplary Practice Awards. This year, MAMLE is pleased to make two new Exemplary Practice Awards.

Caryn Hayden & Grace Davis *Pi Day: An Integrated Celebration of Mathematics* **Bonny Eagle Middle School**

How can a middle school beat back the doldrums of winter while challenging students to extend learning and appreciate the many intricate applications of mathematics? For the past fifteen years, Bonny Eagle Middle School has connected March 14 (3-14), Albert Einstein’s birthday, to the value of Pi (3.14). The purpose of the day is to foster creativity, extend thinking, and celebrate mathematics. The “Pi Day” contest encourages students to apply their knowledge of math in imaginative, alternative ways. Because applications of math are evident in many content disciplines, students are urged to connect their projects to art, music, social studies, science, language arts, even math. Most importantly, students with all levels of ability are encouraged to participate. In fact, since its inception in 1993, this annual event has grown so that all students take part in one way or another,

Beginning in early February, all math teachers receive a special instruction package. A contest theme, participation guidelines, and project divisions are included. Last year’s theme was “The Beauty of Mathematics.” In an effort to foster interdisciplinary activities and different modes of learning, longtime organizers Grace Davis and Caryn Hayden have divided the competition into the following categories: Famous Mathematicians or Math Topic Posters, Geometric Sculptures and Models, Math Puzzles and Games, Mathematics Projects, and Math Essay/Song/Poetry/Video.

In their math classes, students are given instructions, product descriptors, idea sheets, and lots of encouragement from their teachers. As the long-awaited day approaches, different projects are brought to school for



final assembly and testing. Each team then chooses its representatives for the final, school-wide competition. A special team of judges rates the projects at each grade level and selects the category winners.

The result of all this learning is celebrated on March 14. Many teachers wear special “Pi Day” Tee-Shirts. Students are called down for grade-level assemblies for certificates and awards. After these presentations are completed, the customary “no food” rule in the gym is waived to officially commemorate Albert Einstein (a “perfect” mathematician) and Pi (the heart of nature’s most perfect geometric circle) by serving the students a piece of pie (one of the world’s most perfect desserts – mathematically speaking, of course)! Parents have given tremendous support to this school-wide project and bake hundreds of pies for the event.

At Bonny Eagle Middle School all teachers, students, and parents will agree that our official recognition of “Pi Day” is one of the important ways we link learning and discovery to fun.

Debbie Burnett

Fun After School Program

Winthrop Middle School

Debbie Burnett understands the needs of young adolescents and goes beyond fulfilling them. The Fun After School Program (FAS), under Debbie’s direction, provides a safe place for students to go after the school day ends. Its success is all due to Debbie. Debbie’s day begins with her meeting with all the teachers to find out students’ assignments, both current and those that are overdue. Then every day, Monday through Thursday, the FAS program starts with a study hall. She schedules high school students to provide needed individual help for the FAS students. After a healthy snack, the students break into their favorite part – participating in one of several clubs. Choices are numerous and include sports, cooking, art, crafts, dance and various games. Speakers are often invited to present as well. Students are also involved in community service projects and activities with the grade school and high school, as well as field trips. Recently Debbie took the students to a Sea Dogs game in Portland.

Since Debbie Barnett has managed the program, student participation has increased from 14 participants in 2000 to 100 in 2006, resulting in 65% academic improvement. Debbie works well with teachers and parents alike, and all students love her. The success of FAS is all because of Debbie. Everyone at Winthrop Middle School feels that Debbie Barnett should be recognized for all she does to meet the needs of young adolescents.

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>).

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.



Must-Read Books:

Inviting Positive Classroom Discipline

by William W. Purkey and David B. Strahan

Reviewed by Jill Spencer

Classroom management and discipline is huge worry for pre-service teachers as well as new teachers. They imagine classrooms out of control, students ignoring them, and feeling totally helpless to deal with discipline challenges. They need to develop an inner vision of how they want their classroom to operate and learn strategies to bring that vision to fruition.

The climate of some schools is so negative that teachers and students seem to be in constant confrontational mode. Adults snap at one another and everyone blames the students for the behavior problems in the school. These institutions need an attitude adjustment where the adults take a hard look at their own behavior before they expect student behavior to improve.

The adults from both of the groups described above will find Purkey and Strahan's book *Inviting Positive Classroom Discipline* an invaluable resource if they do not allow their minds to be clouded by worn out teacher adages such as "Don't smile until Christmas." and "I don't care if they like me as long as they respect me." Purkey and Strahan maintain, "Good classroom discipline is no accident; it is the result of respect, trust, and optimism, *intentionally* designed to ensure that each student is invited in some way each day." This book provides both specific strategies as well as a philosophical framework that should guide both the efforts of new teachers and their school as a whole.

William Purkey is Professor Emeritus of Counselor Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has written widely on school climate, classroom management and personal growth. His co-author, David Strahan, is the Taft B. Botner Distinguished Professor in Elementary and Middle Grades Education at Western Carolina University. He also is a distinguished author. He co-authored *Promoting Harmony: Young Adolescent Development and School Practices*, one of NMSA's top sellers. These two authors with a depth of understanding of adolescent development argue that all aspects of a school—its people, places, policies, programs, and processes will either add to or negate efforts to create a climate that positively influences adolescent development. They are very persuasive and provide the research to substantiate their stance.

One of the most convincing pieces of evidence they cite is a study that showed a connection between personal growth and academic achievement (44). The students whose achievement increased the most shared these three views:

Inviting Positive Classroom Discipline is not a canned program for classroom management. Rather, it offers a philosophical filter that teachers and entire schools can use to assess their practices, policies and interactions with the students.

- They believed their teachers viewed them in a positive light.
- They felt they received emotional support from their teachers.
- They thought their classes were meaningful.

Obviously there is a important connection between positive teacher-student relationships and academic growth, a strong argument for looking closely at Purkey and Strahan's ideas for creating classroom and school climates that find positive ways to support students, even when they are being their most difficult.

One aspect of the book, which will be particularly helpful to new teachers, is that interspersed among the chapters are graphics that look like blue index cards. Each of these cards offers a specific strategy for implementing the practice being discussed in the text. For example, in the section discussing how to handle rocky times in class, the blue card encourages the reader to "ESTABLISH A ROUTINE. Have a systematic routine for all classroom procedures..." The message, of course, is that routines help keep a classroom on an even keel.



It emphasizes developing within students a sense of self-discipline rather than relying on a punitive culture that rarely changes behavior.

These cards contain solid advice for everyone.

The major thesis of the book is that educators should be intentional in their practices. Intentional in building a respectful climate where students can trust that there will be a “pattern” of being accepted and treated well even when they mess up. The authors use a metaphor to explain their approach. Think of a yellow card at a soccer game – it’s a caution to the player. Purkey and Strahan ask the reader to think in terms of orange

and blue cards. The colors themselves mean nothing; they are just a mental image for the reader to use. Orange card behavior is negative and is not beneficial to the young adolescent. On the other hand, blue card behavior is that which transmits “a positive feeling that the person is able, valuable, and responsible.”

The authors explain this metaphor in depth. Readers will at times think, “Oh, I do that!” and feel pretty good about their management style. Other times, the reader may grimace as a negative or orange card behavior is described and inwardly moan, “I wish that wasn’t me, but sometimes I am so guilty of that response.” The authors’ point is not to make people feel guilty, but rather to help the reader be more reflective in his/her practice.

Inviting Positive Classroom Discipline is not a canned program for classroom management. Rather, it offers a philosophical filter that teachers and entire schools can use to assess their practices, policies and interactions with the students. It emphasizes developing within students a sense of self-discipline rather than relying on a punitive culture that rarely changes behavior. It’s an excellent guidebook for beginning teachers and a thought-provoking rubric for entire school staffs to use to self-assess their school climate.

Sue Swaim & Ed Brazee to Speak at Annual MAMLE Conference

Sue Swaim served as executive director of the National Middle School Association from 1993 to 2007. Prior to joining NMSA, she was a middle level educator in Colorado for over 20 years. She taught middle level language arts, social studies, and reading and was an elementary and middle school principal for 8 years. Ms. Swaim also taught off-campus graduate courses for the University of Northern Colorado in content reading and writing, classroom management, and middle level instructional strategies.

Throughout her middle level career Ms. Swaim has been a primary consultant to numerous school districts as well as a workshop presenter and keynote speaker at middle level conferences and institutes nationally and internationally. She was a member of the primary writing team for *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* and led the development of NMSA’s *Success in the Middle* Policy Guidebook. Recognized for her knowledge of young adolescent characteristics and the research-based practices that are keys to students’ academic achievement in developmentally appropriate learning environments, Sue brings a practitioner’s voice to middle level professional development.

Ed Brazee is professor of middle level education at the University of Maine where he directs the middle level concentration of the master’s degree program and teaches graduate courses in middle level curriculum, organization, and teaching,

A former middle and high school teacher in New York and Colorado, Ed has consulted with schools throughout the U.S.; he has been the principal or co-principal evaluator for 40 middle schools in Bermuda, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Colorado, and Maine. One of Ed’s favorite activities is the Middle Level Education Institute (MLEI) which runs every summer at the University of Maine; as founder in 1985 and now co-director, he has had the privilege of working with thousands of middle level educators from Maine to Indonesia.

An unabashed advocate for young adolescents and middle level schools — and for middle level teachers and principals — Ed is now working valiantly to keep up with the terrific challenges that technology affords learners of any age.



Not Too Late!

Registration Still Open for Leadership Teams Professional Development Series

For the second year, MAMLE is pleased to bring you a series of daylong workshops designed specifically to meet the needs of 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.

This year we will have two cohorts based on previous leadership team PD experience with us:

Cohort 1: School leadership teams who are attending this professional development series for the first time.

Cohort 2: School leadership teams who attended last year or were a CSR school during 2005-2007.

Each level will be offered in the north (Bangor) and the south (Brunswick). We would also endeavor to offer this series in Aroostook County and/or Washington County if five schools in the region signed up for the series.

MAMLE board members and consultants Jill Spencer and Chris Toy will facilitate this series of nine workshop sessions. 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. The facilitators 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.

Sandy Nevens, principal of Warsaw Middle School in Pittsfield, had this to say about 2008 series:

Count me as one who adds kudos to the Team Leader Professional Development Series developed and facilitated by Jill Spencer and Chris Toy. They do a terrific job of planning engaging meaningful activities, causing participants to reflect on their practices, and helping us to focus and transfer what we learned back at school. Our whole leadership team left each session of the series charged up. We immediately harnessed that energy and substance in our leadership team meeting the following week and planned the upcoming whole school staff meeting with the energy and direction inspired by our work with Chris and Jill. We are psyched about continuing our work with the Leadership Team PD

Series! Sandy Nevens - Principal, Warsaw Middle School, Pittsfield Maine

Materials and other comments from the Winter-Spring 2008 series can be found at <http://mamlepd.pbwiki.com> Invite key mamlepd08.

Thanks to a generous grant by the Horizon Foundation, the cost for this series is reduced significantly for this coming school year.

A total of nine sessions for MAMLE members:

Team of four	\$800
Additional participants	\$200

Nine sessions for non-member schools

Team of four - Total cost	\$960
Additional participants	\$240

Grants will support teams' participation in the October meeting to be held as a pre-conference to the annual MAMLE conference at Sugarloaf.

Dates

North – Bangor Public Library

Cohort 1 (First time participants):

9/18, 10/22 (Sugarloaf), 11/17, 12/11, 1/15, 2/12, 3/26, 4/16, 5/21

Cohort 2 (Returning and CSR participants):

9/19, 10/22 (Sugarloaf), 11/21, 12/12, 1/16, 2/13, 3/27, 4/17, 5/22

South – Brunswick Public Library

Cohort 1 (First time participants):

9/12, 10/22 (Sugarloaf), 11/10, 12/8, 1/9, 2/9, 3/23, 4/10, 5/8

Cohort 2 (Returning and CSR participants):

9/15, 10/22 (Sugarloaf), 11/24, 12/15, 1/12, 2/16, 3/30, 4/13, 5/11

For additional information, contact Dr. Wallace Alexander, wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu



The Ups and Downs of Adolescence: What our students wish we adults understood about them

Angela Fiandaca
Biddeford Middle School

The adolescent years are marked with mood swings, attitudes, awkward behaviors and many drastic changes. When one is in the midst of the teenage years, it can be difficult to find anything good to smile about. For this reason and others, we celebrated the Month of the Young Adolescent last October at Warsaw Middle School in Pittsfield.

One large project we coordinated with our fifth through eighth graders was to ask them to answer the question, "What do you wish your parents/guardians/teachers understood about you that they don't know now?" Their responses were priceless. Just a few are reprinted for you below, along with my expert guidance counselor advice for how we adults can be better connected to the teenagers we have the privilege of working with.

Parents should not try to change us. They should respect us. We are the future.

Let them be who they are going to be, within limits of course! This is the stage that they figure out who they are. Try to respect that. Instead of judging them, ask them questions about why they want to grow out their hair or why they wear certain clothing.

They don't understand that kids need our space. And just because they're older doesn't always mean they're right.

Try to listen to their side. It doesn't mean you have to agree, but try to at least give them a chance to explain their point of view.

Kids need more power.

Within limits! Let them make some decisions and have opinions. It will teach them valuable life-long lessons.

Sometimes I like to be a little kid.

Some kids are not ready to have all the responsibilities and pressures that adults put on them at this age. Have reasonable expectations of what they can handle. This also proves the point that despite their increased want for independence, they still want boundaries.

I need to live my life the way it comes out, not have my

parents choose it for me. I need to be able to live my life the way it's supposed to be, not the way they want it. I need to be able to feel something without it being wrong.

Allow them to be themselves. It's really as simple as that.

They don't get the fact that some people don't grow up as fast as other people do. I will grow up on my own.

Let them go at their own pace. Don't push too much. They experience enough pressure from peers, family and from society in general!

It really will make a difference in their futures if they have strong, confident, supportive adults in their lives.

I am capable of many things.

Yes, indeed! Believe in them. They need your support, especially during these busy and changing years of adolescence. Remember that you may be the only person in their life who is encouraging them to be something great. Treat that as the honor it really is.

Realize that I am not a bad kid at all. That everyone makes mistakes, and I hate being judged for those mistakes.

Don't allow their behaviors to define who they are. Accept that all kids make mistakes. Also, if you make mistakes and accuse them of something they were not doing, don't hesitate to apologize. It will make a difference to your students.

Adults don't understand that I'm growing up.

Try to remember what it was like to be this age! They will appreciate you for it.

I wish my parents would listen to me.

Even if when you ask how their day was they respond



Be there through all those ups and downs of adolescence.

with “fine” and “nothing happened,” they still want you to talk to them and to ask. Try asking questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or a “no” to allow more discussion.

I’m independent. I don’t need help.

They’d like you to think this, and it’s partly true. Give them some space, but not too much!

School isn’t as easy as they think it is.

No, it’s really not, and yes, things have changed since when we were kids! Try to remember that. Appreciate that when they tell you the homework is difficult or the peer pressure at school is challenging, it really is for them.

I am very hard working, even though I don’t get straight As.

Most times kids are trying their best. Have good communication with other teachers and students’ parents to ensure that they are.

Please trust me.

They are begging for some freedom and space. Allow them some, but again, not too much! Let them know that trust is something earned.

I don’t really feel like talking about everything with my parents.

It’s hard, but we adults need to accept that just like we do not talk to kids about all of our adult issues, they are not going to tell us every little thing in their lives either – and that’s both ok and healthy! At the same time, we adults need to make it known that we are there any time our students may need us.

It is complicated being a teenager.

Yes, it really is. Try to remember how tumultuous these years can be! Have patience and understanding.

Dazzling Digital Resources for Everyone!

Here are some great resources to check out whether you are a neophyte or expert in the digital world!

Technology in the classroom for the middle grades: The theme of the August issue of NMSA’s *Middle Ground* is the *Power of Technology*. Find a copy to read articles like “What’s in Your iPod? Mixing Music and Meaning,” “Classrooms Without Borders: Students Teaching Students,” and “Let the Games Begin: Video Games in the Classroom.” These articles are not just for MLTI teachers.

Teamwork skills for students and adults: This site belongs to Tom Heck, a consultant in the business world. He shares a lot of his strategies for free at <http://www.teachmeteamwork.com/>

Maine education bloggers:

1. Jim Moulton blogs for *Edutopia*. Jim taught for years in Bowdoin, Maine and is now consulting in the areas of project-based learning and technology integration. <http://www.edutopia.org/spiralnotebook>
2. Maine ASCD: <http://maineascd.blogs.com/>
3. Bob Sprankle from Wells: <http://www.apple.com/education/profiles/wells/>
4. Learning In Maine hosted by Jim Burke: <http://learninginmaine.blogspot.com/>

Phil “The Pirate” Brookhouse (MLTI state wide mentor) gives this advice:

Here’s a fun site that allows you to play with the laws of physics while constructing cool stuff.- <http://sodaplay.com/creators/soda/items/constructor>

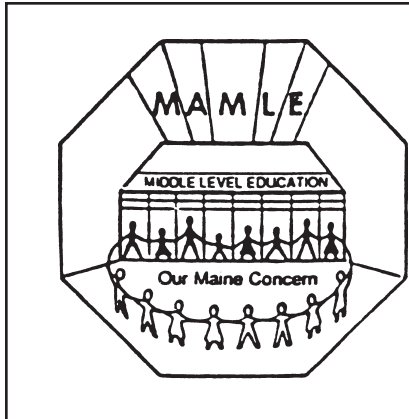
For those folks learning about electrical circuits - http://phet.colorado.edu/simulations/sims.php?sim=circuit_construction_kit_dc_only

And a place where the humor is a little askew - <http://xkcd.com/>

And a pirate booty webmall <http://deadmentellnotales.com/>

Barbara Greenstone (another MLTI state-wide mentor) recommends the following site for learning more about Web 2.0 tools: <http://webtools4u2use.wikispaces.com/>

Helpful YouTube videos: To view additional information on Web 2.0 tools, go to YouTube and search “commoncraft” to see a series of videos on web tools called *In Plain English*.



MAMLE Membership

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

MAMLE Membership Benefits Include:

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

Undergraduate Student Membership (\$5.00) 1st Year Teacher/1st Year Member (\$15.00)
 Individual Membership (\$20.00) Institutional Membership (\$95.00)

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

NAME: _____ TITLE: _____

SCHOOL: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

WORK PHONE: _____ E-MAIL: _____

MEMBERSHIP TYPE: INDIVIDUAL _____ INSTITUTIONAL _____

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____ CHECK# _____ PO# _____

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

Annual MAMLE Conference!

October 23 - 24, 2008
Sugarloaf USA

The Maine Association for Middle Level Education invites one and all to our Annual Conference at Sugarloaf U.S.A., October 23 - 24, 2008. The conference will feature two full days of concurrent sessions, workshops, team presentations, keynote addresses, exhibits, and networking among teams and schools. The Annual MAMLE conference is designed to allow teams of teachers to attend sessions and meet with their team for staff development time. Teams and schools use this conference as a beginning-of-the-year staff retreat, a great way to set goals and direction for the rest of the year. Low-cost, overnight lodging in Sugarloaf condominiums makes it possible for teams to stay and work together. Special features will include:

- A flexible conference format that allows you to attend two full days of conference activities, one day, or some combination.
- A variety of practical and useful sessions, break-out groups, and meetings on topics that are most important in Maine's middle level schools. The conference includes sessions for administrators and team leaders, as well as teachers of all grades and content areas. You will take home many great ideas to help improve your school!
- Exemplary Practice Winners and Janet Nesin Reynold Outstanding Middle Level Educators will be announced and recognized.
- The latest resources from MAMLE, NMSA, NELMS, and other fine exhibitors.
- Networking opportunities with teachers and principals from around the region.

Spend two exciting days with teachers, principals and other practitioners from excellent middle level schools to learn more about: Using Computers in Classroom Instruction -- Implementing Learning Results -- Student-Involved 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.

Registration materials are available at mamleonline.org

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.