

MIDDLE LINK

Maine Association for Middle Level Education

Volume 19 No. 3

Spring 2008

The First Couple of Middle Level Education Move to Maine...

Sue and John Swaim are well known to middle level educators across the state, first as long-time consultants to the University of Maine's Middle Level Education Institute (since 1986), as well as John's teaching at the University of Maine during summer sessions and Sue's 13 years as executive director of National Middle School Association (NMSA). Both have keynoted and spoken at MAMLE conferences in the past.

We are fortunate that they have chosen Maine as their retirement home, having "summered" here since the mid-1980s; five years ago they built a year-round log home on Long Pond (Hint: in the town of Great Pond, near Aurora, off Route 9) and in July 2007, following John's retirement from Otterbein College and Sue's retirement from NMSA, they began settling into Maine. We've given them some time off and now we look forward to putting them to work in various capacities, helping us advance middle level advocacy around the state.

And don't forget to take advantage of the opportunity to hear Sue as she keynotes next October's MAMLE conference. John will be there too, presenting on middle school sports and other topics.

The *Middle Link* recently visited with John and Sue...

ML: You both are staying active professionally... would you describe some of the activities you are involved in here in Maine and nationally?

Swaims: Sue... I have continued my consulting with middle schools, however, on a much slower pace than the last few years. I also serve as the NMSA representative to the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. Next fall, I will keynote two conferences – the Maine Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE) conference October 23-24, 2008

at Sugarloaf and the William Alexander Memorial Lecture at NMSA's annual conference in Denver, CO.

On the other hand, John has turned his efforts to writing... I completed a book, *Clearing the Hurdles—Issues and Answers in Middle School Sports* (with co-author Dr. Ken McEwin of Appalachian State University, NC) last fall and I wrote an article that will be published in *Middle School Journal* in the fall of 2008. Both of us are consultants for the NMSA School Improvement Toolkit, which sends us to middle level schools around the country. We are hopeful that some Maine schools will use the Toolkit as an excellent school assessment device.

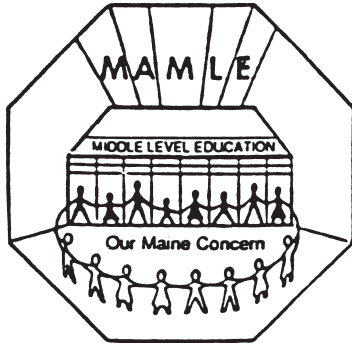
One of our favorite projects is volunteering at the local K-8 school (the Airline School), which is only a few miles from where we live. We have even begun our applications for substitute teaching credentials to help out when needed.

ML: Sue, would you give a brief picture of middle level education nationally... where middle level education is headed... and some of its biggest issues right now?

Sue Swaim: I believe middle level education is at a significant crossroads right now. Like it or not, the visibility and needs of young adolescents and middle level schools are under close scrutiny due to a variety of issues such as NCLB and test results, district growth and consolidation issues, grade configuration debates, and teacher and principal preparation needs. Through practice and research we know now, more than ever before, what needs to be done to ensure a quality education and bright future for our nation's young adolescents; yet those practices are not yet being implemented consistently throughout our country.

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Sue Swaim to Keynote!
Annual MAMLE Conference!
October 23 - 24, 2008 @ Sugarloaf USA



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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

March 2008

I'm collaborating with an architect on an interesting project. A middle school in Alaska is planning a substantial renovation to their building. But before they invest heavily in the updates and changes, they want to make sure that the spaces they end up with will be well suited to the kind of teaching and learning they want to have happen.

They're taking this moment of investing in change to reflect not just on the spaces, but also on teaching and learning in their building. They see this as an opportunity to "renovate" their educational program as well.

The architect and I will start by leading the staff through a process that will have them build a common vision for the future for the students they care about (remember the old MLTI preferred future activity: Where will they be in 2015?). But they also want to explore models of what is possible. To help them with this, we tracked down some resources. For example, the *Edutopia* website (<http://www.edutopia.org/>) has tons of great videos that can be used to help build a vision of what is possible.

No surprise, the National Middle School Association also has great resources that can help teachers build a vision of what's possible:

Fundamentals for Student Success in the Middle Grades is a good place to start

<http://www.nmsa.org/Advocacy/AdvocacyToolstoUse/FundamentalsPresentation/tabid/793/Default.aspx>

Pieces of Middle Grades Education: Fundamentals and Research would make for good follow up

<http://www.nmsa.org/Advocacy/AdvocacyToolstoUse/MiddleGradesEducation/tabid/1300/Default.aspx>

This We Believe outlines the basic tenets of middle grades practice, and NMSA has several other books that expands on TWB. One of the most useful to you would be *This We Believe in Action*. It comes with a DVD of vignettes from 8 real middle schools (check out NMSA's online book store for this item).

Spring is a time of renewal. Are these activities and strategies that would help your staff and school renew, just as the Alaska school is planning?

Mike Muir
President of MAMLE

*Together We Can
Make A Difference*



The Learning Curve

A column by Todd Nelson

The Time and Place for Play

At some point, our societal definition of play managed to turn almost exclusively into the use of things, rather than time and place, the customary ingredients of childhood's most important learning experience. It's too bad, and probably indicative of some other qualities of life that we find in short supply these days. It means that many kids are at a loss for how to play without a thing that defines play. This redefines childhood.

A book I read recently, *Children at Play* by Howard Chudacoff, put these things into perspective for me.

It's no secret that the multi-billion dollar toy-entertainment-industrial complex is in hot pursuit of our children's attention and energy – to say nothing of our money – by dreaming up new playthings. It's not just toys, but whole entertainment systems complete with tie-ins to clothing and fast-food restaurants!

More simply, too much of what we supply to kids for play dictates exactly where, with what, and when play occurs. And many media messages disguise the fact that the where, what and when of play is predetermined, assigned, sold, and masked by commerce. The means of play are predetermined; the ends of play are tightly scripted. Little imaginary discretion is left to the user.

Where's the fun in that?

And yet the magic ingredient, the elusive "it" toy of the moment, the grail of manufacturers and inventors, is as unpredictable as ever. Adult marketing wizards can't reliably pin down next season's "killer toy." And no wonder: play is a quicksilver amalgamation of things and place and time.

It's hard to get all three to dance simultaneously on the head of a pin. I think it's because we focus too much on things, and not enough on the ingredients of place and time – which are in shorter and shorter supply, and impossible to manufacture. Childhood, according to Chudacoff, has been ceding large chunks of its former range of space and time to adults and adulthood.

"The business of keeping kids happy also includes for-profit entertainment centers, media, organized sports, party planners, athletic coaches, and more," writes Chudacoff. "Yet the same society that has taken such great pains to enrich children's play seems also to be making children unfit, dull, and even violent. Some even assert that the undermining of traditional active play styles, combined with mass media and a desire to treat and dress children as adults, has destroyed the entire concept of childhood."

I'm almost sorry that the new playground balls will arrive

here on Tuesday (Officially, "Playground Ball Day"), and the four-square games will resume. It has been interesting to see how recess fares without the things that predetermine play. What we have instead is more "place" to explore, and a different use of time – as determined by kids.

Play is actually the work of children, and it's good work if you can get it. I'm glad we can make time and place for it here. I prefer the autonomy we see out by the stump on the playground.

Take the big stump in our new Blackwood Park, for instance. Apple and Chad discovered it one morning recess this week. Here in a thoroughly rotted old log were crevices to poke at, tunnels and hiding places, perhaps a squirrel (or skunk?) nest. There was lots to think about; lots to explore and interpret; and no conceivable predetermination or script. It was a toy of the highest order because it was real, found, and theirs to command.

One passage in Chudacoff's book made me particularly grateful for what we can preserve here in Castine. "There is nothing surprising about the fact that, as the U.S. became more urban (and suburban), more families lived remote from the natural landscape, and fewer children had access to forests and fields where they could indulge in "roving" and "roaming" and where they could integrate waterways and wildlife into their play. And as informal neighborhood play has declined, many preadolescents now express their autonomy at the mall, where they "roam" either after a parent has driven them there or when they arrive by their own devices."

Play is actually the work of children, and it's good work if you can get it. I'm glad we can make time and place for it here. I prefer the autonomy we see out by the stump on the playground.



Eye On Research

Using the latest information to shape and validate our practice!

Remediation and Humiliation – Is There Another Way?

If We Continue To Do What We Have Always Done We Will Continue To Get What We Have Always Gotten

RTI AYP These initials sometimes cause us all to shudder even though we recognize that middle grades schools often have way too many students who are struggling with reading, writing, and math skills. Their lack of competence in these areas impacts their learning in all classes as well as negatively affecting attitude and self-confidence. Many schools have adopted a double-dipping approach to addressing student deficits in reading, writing and math—students not meeting the standards attend an additional language arts or math class. In a recent *Middle School Journal* article, Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher report on a small research project they conducted that focused on the role of humiliation in middle schools. One of the areas of interest was the attitude of students who were in these double-dipping classes.

This study was too small to base decisions on, but their findings should give us all pause. Frey and Fisher use both student and teacher voices throughout their article. In regard to double-dipping classes, here are three testimonies (p.8):

Marsha (a student): *Everyone knows who the dumb kids are. All you have to do look around at who's not on the wheel (elective class rotation). They're all in reading mastery.*

Mr. E. (teacher): *But every time we excuse students to go to another class, one that's different from everyone else, it chops away at the concept of family of students and teachers. I can see the light go right out of their eyes when they have to pass up computer class to go for extra reading or math class.*

Ms. A (computer teacher): *If I'm not teaching literacy and math, then what am I doing? They'll just get further behind.*

The main point of this article is that humiliation is alive and well in middle school with dire results that include drug and alcohol use, attendance problems, pregnancy, potential drop-outs, and suicide. Remedial classes, in this study, were a component of the creating this climate of humiliation. Again this was not a huge study but schools should think about their findings as plans are made for addressing student

learning needs. Eventually there will be longitudinal studies done on the recent efforts to address the requirements of RTI and AYP and their effectiveness. It will be interesting to see if the current iteration of remedial/double-dipping classes is more effective than previous efforts. In 1993 Robert Slavin's review of the literature on remedial classes in middle school revealed that they made absolutely no difference in academic growth (p.8).

The question remains, however, what are effective ways for middle grades schools to close the learning gap for their students? What follows are two narratives relating how two different middle schools took action. The information comes from presentations at the annual conferences of NMSA and NELMS. The schools each saw tremendous growth in their standardized scores. Both models are probably reasonably easy to replicate.

School # 1: Reading Across the Curriculum

The Blue Team was meeting with the district reading specialist prior to the opening day of school. The conversation evolved into complaints about how poorly the students read and how that situation made it very difficult to teach them—anything. The reading specialist steeled herself and looked the team members in the eye and queried, “Do you want to moan and groan about this situation all year or do you want to do something about it?” The team members, rather taken aback, looked at one another and agreed that they would like to take action.

The reading specialist laid out a framework: “We need to identify specific reading skills, plan lessons that teach them explicitly and lessons that reinforce them. Then we have to decide who is going to do what.” She worked with the team collaboratively to flesh out this framework. Together they identified the skills they felt students were lacking: how to navigate a textbook, identifying the main ideas and their supporting details, making inferences, getting unstuck when reading, note taking, etc. Then the team looked at their curriculums for the year and matched readings skills to the requirements of their various units. That process helped them map out which one of them would introduce a specific skill and when. Next they figured out how each of the other team teachers could



reinforce that particular skill in their classes.

The process would go like this... The social studies teacher introduces previewing a text—reading bold print and turning those sub-titles into questions, scanning pictures and maps to make predictions, using the questions at the end of the chapter to set a purpose for reading. The next week the science teacher uses her textbook to reinforce the skill and to give the students additional practice. Then it would be the math teacher's turn to reinforce the skill, informally assessing student progress and reteaching certain aspects of the process if necessary. By then end of the sequence, the language arts teacher is able to observe the students using the skill independently. The next skill introduction might be the responsibility of the math teacher.

The Blue Team focused on a different skill each month using the same process. The reading specialist was available for co-teaching and coaching. At the end of the year, students had been introduced and practiced nine reading skills critical to academic success in middle and high school. Their scores increased significantly. The teachers had to change their instructional practice, but they were rewarded with high student achievement and engagement because student frustration decreased and skill level increased.

School # 2: 30 Minutes a Day for Focused Intervention

The principal of a high performing middle school was called into the superintendent's office to discuss the latest state assessments results. The school's overall results were excellent as usual, however the scores of students in lowest quartile had not budged in many years. The principal was given her marching orders—those scores have to improve.

Going back to her leadership team with this directive sent them into high gear brainstorming solutions. They already had a lot things in place, but the one area they never had addressed was the use of time. They explored ways to structure their day differently so that teachers could provide focused interventions for specific students. That goal quickly morphed into interventions for all students. They designed a program they dubbed Academy. Here are its components:

- Academy time was the first 30 minutes of the day, every day.
- Students with major reading issues usually attended a class using the Wilson approach to reading instruction. They occasionally rotated through another intervention group.
- Exploratory teachers were attached to specific interdisciplinary teams. This initiative was a total school effort.
- Results from standardized tests and the state assessment were used to identify specific needs. For example, a group of students who scored poorly in the measurement section of the math assessment would receive targeted instruction in measurement for 6 weeks.

- The extended teams planned interventions in 6-week blocks. Students were grouped and regrouped every six weeks to work on a specific skill need.
- Students who were excelling in a particular skill area were placed in groups where the focus was extension or enrichment of learning.
- Each member of the extended team was responsible for developing a six-week unit to address a specific skill. Using non-traditional methods was encouraged. For example, the PE teacher used an orienteering approach to reinforce measurement skills. Usually teachers were teaching their block more than one time so they were not developing a new plan of action every six weeks.
- Time was provided for the exploratory teachers to meet and plan with the team teachers. Sometimes the principal covered the exploratory classes so these planning sessions could go on. All agreed, more combined planning time would be beneficial.
- The leadership team solicited feedback from teachers on a regular basis and attempted to address concerns as the year went along. Ongoing conversation was critical to the success of this initiative.
- Sometimes the entire grade level did the same thing. It was determined that writing short answer responses for the state assessment was an issue across the board. As a result, all of the groups focused on writing exemplary short answer responses for 6 weeks.
- Parents received a report at the end of each six weeks. It was a scale that had two components—one on effort and one on growth in the skill area.

The principal was astounded by the results. Not only had there been good growth in academic achievement of the lowest scoring students, but the achievement of the highest scoring students also increased significantly. At the end of the year, the principal polled the teachers to see if they wanted to continue with the Academy. Because they had seen such good results from their efforts the answer was YES!

Providing for the learning needs of a diverse student population is a complex issue, not easily solved with a one size fits all intervention. Schools must use their creativity as well as their experiences and expertise to develop dynamic approaches for building student competencies in reading, writing and math. Above all as Frey and Fisher conclude, "...it may be time to reconsider how we group and regroup students and provide supplemental interventions such that groups of students do not experience school as telling them they are stupid, incompetent, and not worthy (p.11)."

Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (2008) "The Under-Appreciated Role of Humiliation in the Middle School." *Middle School Journal*. (Volume 39 Number 3).

Eye on research is written by Jill Spencer



Connecting with Students, Especially Challenging Students

Mike Muir

University of Maine at Farmington

I recently did a series of teacher observations in one of the schools I'm working with. We're working hard to implement an engaging, project-based curriculum with hard-to-teach students.

These weren't evaluation observations, but observations to help us track the level of implementation of our programmatic elements (especially the teacher practice elements), to aid us in knowing how to support the teachers, and to collect information about strategies that seem to be working.

As expected, we were at a low level of implementation on most of our factors. This isn't the teachers' fault, but rather simply an indication of how little time we've had for training. We collected this simply as baseline data. We expect that everyone will be excited when we see those measures start to move and improve!

One area that we did expect to learn something was in the area of connecting with students. As with many hard-to-teach students, our students can be challenging. We know that relationship is everything when it comes to reaching these students and many won't learn unless they feel that the teacher respects, if not likes, them.

Some of the teachers find our students quite challenging and others seem to have little problem with them. What could we learn about how different ways of interacting with students impacts student behavior?

Tone of Voice

It was interesting to see (and perhaps no surprise) that the teachers who seemed to have the best rapport with students talked with them as people - they used the "people voice" (as if they were just talking with another person - I think some teacher educators call it the adult voice). There was no positional authority in their voice. The teachers who used the people voice still drew the line with behavior, set expectations, and intervened when students weren't doing what they were supposed to. In other words, even though their authority didn't come through in their voice in general, these teachers still used their authority when appropriate and necessary.

Students reacted to teachers who used the people voice better than to the teachers who had positive interactions with the students, but had a bit of a "teacher voice" (you know, that voice that says I'm the teacher and you're the student).

Further, teachers who used the "disappointed voice" (the tone indicated that the teacher was disappointed, upset, or

angry with the student) had the most difficulty with students. The disappointed voice did not necessarily happen only when students were off task or misbehaving. Ironically, teachers were not aware that they were using the disappointed voice, and in at least one case, it had more to do with the teacher's natural tone of voice than it did with how the teacher was feeling.

(Ironically, in the past, I was a middle school teacher and had really good luck connecting with my students. But later I was moved to the high school and had a really horrible year before moving to the university to work with pre-service teachers. I realize now that I had used the people voice with my middle school students and the teacher voice with my high school students. I can't help but wonder now if that had something to do with the quality of my year...)

Clearly our challenging students are very sensitive to the teacher's tone of voice and teachers should avoid both the disappointed voice and the teacher voice in favor of the people voice.

Dealing with Behavior

Teachers who had better luck with the students also made extensive use of behavioral expectations. They made comments about what individuals, groups, or the class would be working on and what was expected of them during that time (in their people voice) and constantly updated students about what the teacher would be doing and what the students should be doing at that time. Further, when students were off task, the teacher didn't shift to an authoritarian or angry voice, but rather remained in people voice, but used a strategy I call "broken record," simply repeating the expected behavior until the student follows through.

When students needed to be redirected or corrected, students became confrontational or ignored shifts to the authoritarian voice and were certainly confrontational to a shift to the disappointed voice. Both approaches were non productive or counter productive.

Threats of punishment, removal from the room, or extra work only exasperated student behavior and had the opposite effect from the one desired. Using humor or broken record to get the desired behavior was much more effective, especially when it came to having students put away cell phones, mp3 players, or other objects teachers needed to have put away. (It was also observed that grabbing the object or getting into a tug-o-war are counter-productive strategies.)



Motivating Students

Certainly, many hard-to-teach students are not particularly interested in learning what we have to teach. Motivating the students to learn can be challenging.

But teachers who attempted to use grades (tests or quizzes), the future (the next grade or course, or the next school, whether it be high school, or college, etc.) or the high stakes test to motivate students, only succeeded in agitating the students or exasperating undesirable behavior.

Teachers who were more successful motivating the students used strategies such as making the material interesting, using real world examples, or leveraging their positive relationship with the students.

Teaching Hard-to-Teach Students Productively

Interestingly, feeling angry (and perhaps showing it in your voice) when students act rudely or are persistently off task or disruptive is human nature. Wanting to subtly assert your author-

ity is perfectly understandable. Grabbing an object a student won't put away seems a normal reaction. It is the teacher's job to help students be successful in the next grade, course or school, or to do well on accountability measures.

These differences in teacher behavior can even be explained as stylistic differences. For example, some teachers relate more informally with students while others are more formal, and some teachers are more straightforward about their content, while other teachers work to make it more fun.

But although various behaviors, approaches, or reactions are natural, logical, understandable, or one's personal style, they can be non productive or counter productive.

This is about teachers being strategic and intentional in using productive behaviors, approaches, and reactions.

It would appear that using the people voice, broken record, and humor are much more effective ways of dealing with challenging students, and that making learning interesting or meaningful are more effective motivators for learning.

The Kieve Leadership School, A Partner in Middle Level Education and Transforming School Cultures

During the week of February 4, Sabbatus Central School sixth graders traveled to The Leadership School at Kieve on Damariscotta Lake for five days of teambuilding, decision-making, and adventure. Students and staff spent five days learning through an experiential model of hands-on activities and open classroom discussions revolving around topics of teambuilding, conflict resolution, communication skills and making healthy decisions in the face of various school and peer pressures.

Designed to help students make healthy decisions about adolescent issues such as substance abuse, and peer relationships, The Leadership School staff also works to build the student's self esteem and self awareness. The curriculum is designed to provide students with accurate information and the tools necessary to stay on track despite contrary peer influences.

John Marchelleta, a teacher with The Leadership School said, "this was a really fun week working with a group of kids that were so excited to be here – it just makes the week great." According to Sabbatus teacher, Allyson Ferguson, "bullying, teamwork, and self esteem were large program goals that we had for our students. Each of these goals the kids learned, experienced and practiced throughout the entire week. Both students and teachers have learned a great deal and had fun doing it."

Teachers were not the only participants who felt the week was well worth it. Students, such as Athena Ritcheson, said, "something she was going to take from the experience was the realization that she is cared about by a lot of people." Both teachers and students from Sabbatus stated that there were

many lessons and experiences they plan to bring back to their own school and community.

The Leadership School at Kieve works closely with more than 1/3 of Maine's middle level students and staff each school year. It is a program of Kieve-Wavus Education, Inc. and has been a valued educational partner in Maine for the past 27 years. From its beginning as a private boys camp in 1926, Kieve has grown to support many other programs, under the guidance of former Executive Director, Richard Kennedy and now current Executive Director, Henry Kennedy. Other programs offered by Kieve-Wavus Education, Inc. include Kieve Camp for Boys and Wavus Camp for Girls, that serve kids from Maine and around the world, Kieve-West, a co-ed wilderness program in Colorado, an Alumni & Family Camp, and a 9/11 Family Camp for families from New York and Washington, D.C. who were affected by the 9/11 tragedy. In addition, The Kennedy Learning Center serves as a private retreat and conference center for adult teambuilding programs. Half of the funding for The Leadership School at Kieve's program typically comes from fundraising at the schools or from the parents and the other half (approx. \$750,000 annually) is subsidized by Kieve-Wavus. For those schools who are unable to attend The Leadership School on the Nobleboro campus, there is an outreach program that travels throughout New England, bringing The Leadership School curriculum to those communities.

For more information about The Leadership School call (207) 563-6212, email leadershipschool@kieve.org, or the website at www.kieve.org



MAMLE Leadership Team Profession Development Series Off to a Great Start!

Chris Toy & Jill Spencer

Ten leadership teams from across Maine have committed to building their collaborative leadership skills. They meet once a month in Brunswick or Bangor to explore the characteristics of effective leadership for the 21st century and practice tools that will enable them to help their respective schools move forward in their quests to meet the ever-more diverse learning needs of their students. These teams make up the inaugural cohorts of the MAMLE Leadership Team Professional Development Series facilitated by the team of Chris Toy and Jill Spencer. Here's how John Paige, Principal of Brunswick Junior High describes the MAMLE Leadership Team Experience for his leadership team:

Chris and Jill work very well together and each of them brings a unique perspective to the table. As a middle school principal, I particularly appreciate the fact that Chris has "been there, done that." As a former middle school teacher, I also appreciate the wealth of practical knowledge that Jill has at her fingertips. When it comes to being able to talk candidly about the dynamics of intra-school politics and the forces that block progress, Chris and Jill know what they are talking about and are able to recommend all kinds of practical strategies to help break the proverbial log jam.

Each team consists of at least one administrator and four other staff members. In several instances, the school's entire leadership team is in attendance. The work includes studying the findings of recent research on collaborative leadership and collegiality and strategizing the application of these ideas to their schools' individual situations. Chris and Jill model tools and strategies that the teams can use back at school to give everyone voice, build consensus and take action. Another major component of each session is reflection. Taking the time to

reflect about the implications of courageous and collaborative leadership allows teams to think deeply about their issues.

The third component of each session is extended time for teams to meet and work on their own action plans. Some of the topics that the schools are addressing include: (1) What process should we use to name the "elephant" in the room everyone tiptoes around and never speaks of? (2) How do we build school-wide ownership for initiatives? (3) How can we find our school's way back to a program based on effective teaching and learning for young adolescents?

Here's what Sandy Nevens, Principal of Warsaw Middle School has to say about his leadership team's experience:

Jill and Chris 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

Next year, the Series will be expanded to a full year program. There will continue to be north and south cohorts meeting approximately once a month. Registration information will be available in the Spring. So be sure to build participation in the Leadership Team Professional Development Series into your school's PD budget and calendar for 2008-2009. MAMLE looks forward to working with your leadership team in the near future!

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 great information and resources, including 2008 Conference information.



The First Couple... (Continued from Page 1)

As middle level educators, we understand these needs better than anyone, so we need to become advocates for middle level education at our local, state, and national levels. It's a real priority right now. Policymakers at all three levels often say they don't hear from middle level educators directly – and that contact is important so policymakers will stay the course of middle level support in their areas.

History was made this last fall (2007) when a middle level bill was introduced in both the United States Senate and House for the first time ever. Sponsorship for the "Success in the Middle" act is growing daily; recently a Pryor-Kennedy middle level and high school budget resolution was passed unanimously, providing a financial placeholder for middle level needs in the education budget. States such as Rhode Island and Maryland are developing new state level policies and programs geared specifically to middle level education. All of these actions point to an increased interest and potential commitment to implementing quality middle level education. The active voice of middle level educators in support of this commitment may well be the crucial link in achieving success in the middle or not.

ML: John, Maine is considering some type of middle level certification. What are the benefits to students, teachers, administrators, and parents if Maine adopted a middle level licensure, as a number of states have done?

John Swaim: I have been involved in the development of middle school licensure for Colorado and Ohio. I have also had the privilege of serving on the NMSA Professional Preparation Committee that developed the NMSA Teacher Education Standards. There are 46 states that now have a middle school license or endorsement, the majority optional, but some required. I have always believed that the future of middle school depends on having well-prepared teachers. I hope to have the opportunity to share my background and experience in middle school teacher preparation while helping Maine develop a strong approach to the preparation and professional development of middle level teachers.

ML: As the recently retired executive director of NMSA, Sue, what NMSA resources would you recommend to Maine's middle level teachers and principals?

Sue Swaim: Wow, what a question! Lots of things come to mind and it's hard to limit my choices. First of all, I hope everyone is familiar with *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* and all the supporting materials that have been developed around it such as *This We Believe in Action*. I'm proud that the DVD that accompanies this book features two Maine middle schools. I know there's a wide variety of NMSA publications developed specifically for the needs of

teachers and principals in a variety of content areas as well as topics such as teaming, leadership, and beginning teaching. NMSA's Web site (www.nmsa.org) has a wealth of resources available (including an online bookstore) and helps keep people up to date on a variety of things, including advocacy needs. NMSA's School Improvement Toolkit is a great new resource to consider as a tool to build the knowledge and commitment to the implementation of the middle school concepts, no matter what the grade configuration of your school might be. It can be tailor-made to fit your school's specific needs and is a strong tool to build a personalized school improvement plan and community support.

ML: Maine's Sports Done Right Initiative has been successful in helping middle and high schools in Maine re-consider their sports programs. What should the role of sports be in middle level schools?

John Swaim: As Ken McEwin and I developed our book on middle school sports, it became evident that Maine was far ahead of most states in addressing middle school sports. The document *Sports Done Right* is one of the only publications that specifically address middle school sports at the state level. Because of my interest in middle school sports, I am very interested in becoming involved in promoting middle school sports in Maine.

ML: How has your first year in Maine gone so far? You've had quite a winter at your remote location on Long Pond.

Swaims: We have always enjoyed our summers in Maine, but this year as we extended our stay into the fall and winter, we found Maine to be even more inviting. The fall colors were more than we expected as were the winter snowstorms. However, we were able to take advantage of the snow by getting out on the ice on our pond and snowshoeing daily.

Mainers are very friendly and accommodating and it's been great to share Maine with our friends from away. Sue has found a new hobby in knitting and has enjoyed having some time during the winter months to make all sorts of things. She's currently knitting a sweater for John. John has joined a masters' swimming team in Ellsworth to continue his involvement in competitive swimming, but looks forward to warmer weather when he can swim Long Pond with his two labs, Cody and Chelsea, and Sue can float up and down the pond on her inner tube.

**See Sue & John at the Annual
MAMLE Conference in October.
Registration materials are
available at mamleonline.org.**

Must-Read Books:

Engaging Readers & Writers With Inquiry: Promoting Deep Understanding in Language Arts and the Content Areas With Guiding Questions

Reviewed by Jill Spencer

How many students were bored to tears in my classes over the years? I shudder when I think about that question. Had I read Jeff Wilhelm's recent book *Engaging Readers and Writers With Inquiry* 30 years ago the answer to that question would have been mightily reduced! This book gives teachers the tools to transform their units from ordinary to extraordinarily engaging and thought-provoking learning experiences for students.

Tool #1 - The research and connections to current national initiatives that validate a teacher or team or content area's decision to restructure a topical unit into a unit of inquiry are provided. For example, Jeff demonstrates how the components of Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design model compliment his inquiry model. In addition, Jeff clearly explains what inquiry is not. Students centered project are not automatically inquiry-based unless students are applying the concepts of a discipline in such a way they are acquiring a deeper understanding of the nature of the discipline. The early chapters give teachers the research and the language to be persuasive with decision makers who may control curriculum and instruction planning.

Tool #2 - A process for crafting guiding questions is outlined. Chapter three is entitled "Asking the Guiding Questions: Reframing the Existing Curriculum Into Inquiry Units." This process includes suggestions for turning state standards into guiding questions. Examples from across the curriculum are provided including this one from earth science: *Students will identify different climate zones and their features becomes, What are the effects of climate on ecosystems? The development of culture? Diet? How has our climate shaped how we live and work?* (p.46) A helpful chart that lines up traditional subject topics and possible related inquiry questions supports the process. This information is useful for both the novice and master teacher.

Tool #3 - Examples of units are provided that help the teacher see how the different components of a unit of inquiry come together. The guiding question of a reframed unit on *Romeo and Juliet* is What Makes a Good Relationship? Jeff connects his guiding question to curriculum requirements such as tracing character development and its meaning, writing persuasively, and understanding setting, themes, and irony. He goes on to describe with specific examples how he frontloads the unit and engages students in reading and writing. One frontloading activity that is intriguing is the opinionaire which is a series of questions that asks students to think about

contemporary "cultural attitudes" that relate to the guiding question. Here's a partial sample from the *Romeo and Juliet* unit:

Qualities of Good Love Relationships (p. 71)

Identify whether you (A) agree or (D) disagree with each statement. Then choose one statement that you feel particularly strongly about and write a brief comment about what in your experience of the world leads you to feel this way.

- Love at first sight is possible.
- Love means you never have to say you're sorry.
- Love takes a lot of hard work.
- Teenagers are capable of true love.
- If you are really in love with someone, then you won't be attracted to someone else.

This opinionaire not only acts as a hook but also provides leads to stimulate discussion as they proceed through the unit (p.71)

Jeff: What would Shakespeare say about the statement *Love means never saying you're sorry?*

Student: He wouldn't agree!

Jeff: How do you know?

Students: Everyone dies!

Tool #4 - Literacy strategies that help students think deeply about content are described. This book includes an intense mini-course on before-during and after reading strategies that emphasize collaboration. These strategies include controversial statements-questions, silent discussion threads, walkarounds, entrance and exit tickets, and critical review responses. The silent discussion thread is a good way to provide students a chance to formulate and rehearse the presentation of their ideas before a class discussion. Students who process more slowly are well served by such a strategy. Here are the steps of a silent thread discussion (92):

- Class is divided into groups
- Each member of the group receives a sheet of paper with a question on it.
- Students are given a short amount of time to respond to the questions – 2 minutes or so.

- When time is called, students pass the sheet to the person on their left.
- Students respond to both the question and the response on their new sheets.
- Process continues until the sheets make a complete circuit of the group.
- Students read their original sheet and prepare for oral discussion

Tool #5 - Processes that help students become good questioners are described. Questioning is an essential skill needed by inquirers. It is also a skill that does not come easily to many middle and high school students. A variety of techniques are shared and examples provided.

The organization of this book makes the information easily accessible to the reader. The headings and bold print help the reader make sense of the content and locating information after reading extremely easy. Often an outline format is used which delineates steps, actions, and ideas to consider. Charts are also used to summarize ideas and

provide concrete examples for the concepts being discussed. In addition there are examples of student work that help the reader envision possible outcomes and provide models to use with their own students. Finally, Jeff is a master at making his thinking transparent. It often feels like he is right in the room with the reader talking about the process of inquiry.

Engaging Readers & Writers With Inquiry is a great book for a content area or team to tackle in a professional learning community setting if they are exploring ways to engage students in substantive units that push their thinking and develop their critical thinking skills. Jeff Wilhelm, a prolific writer who has influenced many Maine teachers as well as those across the country, has added another significant title to his collected works that help teachers improve at their craft.

Wilhelm, J. (2007) *Engaging Readers & Writers With Inquiry: Promoting Deep Understanding in Language Arts and the Content Areas With Guiding Questions*. New York: Scholastic.

Maine Boys Network

Presents

A Statewide Focus Group Initiative To Support Boys' Academic Achievement

Are you concerned about the healthy development and academic achievement of boys in your community? By hosting a Maine Boys Network (MBN) focus group in your school, you'll help us gain valuable insight into the factors that help boys thrive. Over 200 boys from over 20 K-12 schools and colleges across the state have already contributed to this critical project, and at this juncture we are particularly interested in facilitating meetings with elementary and middle school students. Recent studies have demonstrated that boys' difficulties in academic performance often take root at a young age, and it is therefore imperative that we understand the school experiences of boys prior to their entrance into high school.

Last spring, alarmed by both statewide and national reports of boys' academic underachievement, the Maine Boys Network decided to ask boys themselves for more information about what particular factors enable them to excel in school and connect to their community. By conducting focus groups at elementary, middle, and high schools as well as colleges throughout the state, MBN provides boys and young men with a chance to identify the experiences, relationships and resources that support their academic success. Focus group discussion topics include personal curriculum preferences, memorable mentors and teachers, and individual perspectives on the ways in which educational experiences differ for boys and girls. All focus group discussions will remain confidential and anonymous.

Facilitators will provide to each school a summary of themes that emerge from each focus group.

Created by Boys to Men in 2005, the Maine Boys Network is a group of activists, educators, and academics committed to promoting the health, successful development and academic aspirations of all boys from pre-adolescence through young adulthood. The network's statewide focus group project is enhanced by the expertise and rich experience of its members who hail from Bates College, Boys to Men, Bowdoin College, Bridgton Academy, Colby College, the Mitchell Institute, Portland Public Schools, The Great Schools Partnership and the University of Maine at Farmington. Upon completing the project next year, MBN will use the focus group data to inform a statewide conference at Bates College in the fall of 2008. All staff members identified by boys as being effective mentors and motivators will be invited to attend this conference and possibly participate in a panel on how to best connect with boys. Additionally, Boys to Men intends to spearhead a statewide press and media campaign highlighting the project's findings. To learn more about the Maine Boys Network Focus Group Project, or to schedule a focus group meeting at your school, please contact Meghann McCluskey at meghannb2m@maine.rr.com or (207) 774 9994. A complete list of schools that have already participated in the project is also available.



Professional Development Strategy: Web 2.0

Web 2.0: a term introduced in 2004 to characterize design patterns in a constellation of new generation Web applications which may provide an infrastructure for more dynamic user participation, social interaction and collaboration.
www.csa.com/discoveryguides/scholarship/gloss.php

Participation, social interaction, and collaboration—aren't those all characteristics of good professional development? There is rarely enough time in schools for deep professional discussions or developing shared understanding of the issues that confront educators today. Perhaps Web 2.0 tools can help school staffs develop the collegiality that propels the advancement of school goals.

Furthermore, when leadership teams model the use of 21st century instructional tools in their work with staff and provide a method for reflection on the effectiveness of this tool, transference of these new tools to classroom practice is more likely to occur. As many have said previously, "You can't lead where you aren't willing to go."

Noteshare

A fantastic tool already possessed by every school with 7th and 8th graders is *Noteshare*. The disadvantage, of course, is that other grades don't have access to *Noteshare* because they don't have MLTI laptops. But... there is a way to address that issue and it will be discussed a little later. First, some ideas for using *Noteshare* as a professional development tool that promotes collaboration:

- *Noteshare* notebooks can make curriculum guides living documents instead of dusty three-ring binders lost in the clutter of everyday school life. Units can be added, deleted and updated easily and shared across the school network. Resources can be added easily and made accessible to everyone. Teachers from one grade level can readily check what was taught the year before and adjust their instructional plans to reinforce those skills. Student work can be shared and commented on. Staff can identify the criteria of exemplary work across the school and have readily available models to share with their students (with appropriate permission gathered to share work).
- *Noteshare* notebooks provide a reliable and accessible procedure for taking and distributing notes from various school committees. Everyone can see the connections among the different school initiatives, and it becomes much easier for the right hand to know what the left hand is doing.
- A notebook can be created to support a school initiative—literacy, bullying, advocacy, etc. Resources can

be gathered and shared easily, common approaches can be outlined, modeled, and examples shared.

- Information (articles, videos, *PowerPoints*, etc.) on a topic can be shared ahead of time so staff is able to think about them and generate questions in a reasonable fashion. This strategy is apt to mitigate the feeling of staff that something is being "sprung on them" and thus avoid everyone descending into defensive mode. This strategy also models the use of accessing/building prior knowledge and setting a purpose for and making relevant a training or class. Both of these practices are critical for learning to take place at any age.

But what if a school is 5-8? K-8? Even if the school has bought the old laptops for staff, they don't have *Noteshare*. What to do? There are solutions and though they are not free, they are not exorbitant and might well be an excellent investment that helps develop collegiality and a high degree of inquiry in a school community.

- Solution #1: If the other grade level teachers have access to Macs, buy additional licenses for *Noteshare*.
- Solution #2: Purchase *Noteshare* server software and find server space or purchase a Mac Mini. The *Noteshare* server software provides an option called Express—it allows anyone on any computer to view a notebook. They can't write in it, but they can have access to the same information.

It's worth a visit to the ACTEM website to learn more about these solutions: <http://www.actem.org/Pages/index>.

Wikis

Wikis are all the rage. Some are interesting, some are worthwhile, and some just allow folks an opportunity see themselves in print. If teachers are going to use wikis as instructional tools with kids, they need time to experiment with them and reflect on what makes them effective as learning tools. Also, folks reluctant to try some of the Web 2.0 technology will receive training that is both relevant to their work and non-threatening. Using a wiki for all-school professional development provides an authentic experience with a tool while giving everyone a voice in a collaborative effort to understand an issue or practice



a new strategy or approach.

There are at least four ways to use a wiki effectively with a school community. A wiki does not need to be open to the entire world, but sometimes it might be appropriate to invite students, parents, school members, and other community members to join your wiki.

- **Sharing of strategies:** Perhaps a school is involved with a literacy or numeracy initiative. Folks can post their favorite strategies on the wiki. This action makes instructional practices more public, allows newer teachers to tap into the wisdom of their senior colleagues, and introduces senior members to more recent information and ideas, especially technology-based. An example of such a wiki can be found at <http://greatstrategies.pbwiki.com>. Invite key: strategies.
- **Brainstorming:** Imagine a content area that wants to update a unit that they all teach but haven't revised in several years. At their leisure teachers could go in and brainstorm ideas so that when that precious content area meeting time rolls around, they can get right to work on the revision with a bank of ideas to draw upon. They could even invite an expert in their field to brainstorm along with them!
- **Dialogue:** There are many contentious issues that school staffs need to address. A leadership team could craft an essential question to weigh in on in advance of a staff meeting. Everyone would have time to process the issue and share their best thinking. If a protocol is in place that clearly states the parameters of the dialogue and maintains a psychologically safe atmosphere, then a wiki could provide a forum for honest discussion. A protocol might include:
 - Sign your name
 - Be respectful
 - Comment on the issue, not the person
 - Inquire, ask for clarification of someone's

thinking.

- Be not judgmental – we will look at pros and cons to an idea later
 - Put your persuasion hat aside, this is not the time to try to persuade. Rather it is a time to express ideas.
- **Reflection:** Time is in such short supply that reflection rarely occurs during staff meetings or professional development days. A wiki allows for people to think about what they have just heard and express lingering questions. A simple prompt like the one below allows the individual to think about the ideas presented while giving the leadership team valuable feedback that will help them with their next steps. Teachers could also reflect on a lesson using this same 3-2-1 model with different wording and share that information with others. When everyone is working to integrate literacy or differentiation or critical thinking skills into their practice, shared reflections are a powerful tool for building capacity with these new strategies.
 - 3 things that really make sense to me are...
 - 2 questions I still have are...
 - 1 idea I am going to implement in the next two weeks is...
 - 3 things that went well in the lesson were...
 - 2 things I might have to tweak are...
 - 1 way I knew the students were understanding the new concept was...

Web 2.0 tools have changed the face of political campaigns, allow anyone to venture into populist journalism, and give ordinary folks a voice in arenas they've never had access to before. Why shouldn't we use Web 2.0 tools, then, to help us work more critically and creatively in schools? Look for future columns on Web 2.0 and professional development: *iChatting*, *Skyping*, *Survey Monkey*, *digg.com*, and Web 3.0!

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 wallace.alexander@umit.maine.edu.



Register now for the...

24th Annual Middle Level Education Institute

June 22 - June 26, 2008

The University of Maine

www.mainemlei.com

WHAT'S NEW AT THE 2008 MLEI?

Just about everything!

Two years ago MLEI changed its format dramatically, placing greater emphasis on team planning time and less on attending sessions. You might say we differentiated instruction for all attending teams. This year's focus is solidly on KIDS AND CURRICULUM. We are again partnering with the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) to bring in consultants from around the country and the world to assist teams in integrating technology in their middle level schools.

A NEW Focus on collaborative teamwork and leadership

We often talk about teamwork, teacher leadership, and certainly, the critical role of the principal. This year we will again live that model at the MLEI where our focus will be on the needs of your students, in your school. You will set the agenda and goals and we will provide the time and consultant expertise to help you achieve them. Individual teams will also be partnered with several other teams for significant amounts of time.

A NEW Format

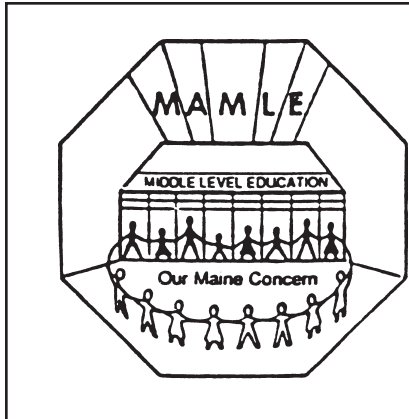
To allow you to make the most of your most precious professional commodity—TIME—we will focus on the work that you need to do. Each day will begin with a thought-provoking and provocative general session, followed by a substantial TEAM BLOCK when teams work on their previously developed projects; consultants will work closely with you during each morning TEAM BLOCK. Sessions and workshops will be conducted in the afternoon, based on the suggestions of each team.

Extensive Use of Technology

Central to every team's work before, during, and after the 2008 MLEI is the MLEI Web site www.mainemlei.com. The Web site will contain electronic copies of all handouts, schedules, presentations, useful resources, links, and copies of team projects. Participants can access and download any desired materials. Every residence and meeting room will offer wireless, online access. In Maine, this is the way we work!

TO REGISTER...download the registration form from the MLEI Web site, complete, and fax or mail back. If you would like more information about this year's Institute and how it can assist the work your school is doing, please e-mail one of the Institute Directors (see addresses below). Registration close May 10, 2008, and we expect all slots to fill quickly.

Gert Nesin at gert.nesin@umit.maine.edu
Ed Brazee at ed.brazee@umit.maine.edu
or Telephone (207) 581-2412



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: _____

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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.