MLER Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group

The Chronicle of Middle **Level Education Research**



Penny Bishop University of Vermont

Message from the Chair Penny Bishop, University of Vermont

As your new Chair of the MLER SIG, I am pleased to write my first Chronicle column. The sig has been an essential part of my professional growth and development over the past decade. Being involved in our SIG throughout my time as a member, a councilor and program chair provided me with an international network of colleagues and with critical outlets for my scholarship. Now, as Chair, I am happy to provide leadership to an organization that has done so much for me. I hope to help our SIG continue to serve such an important role for many more middle grades researchers, novice and veteran alike.

It was good to see so many of you at AERA last month and to reconnect as colleagues. AERA's annual meeting is always a strong reminder to me that the MLER SIG is in fact the largest group of researchers focused specifically on middle grades education. As such, our work together has the potential to make a real difference. The quality of presentations was high; the dialogue was thought-provoking; and collegiality abounded. I appreciate the hard work that went into preparing papers and presentations for our sessions and thank the presenters and our sig's review board for their substantial time and effort.

It's clear that our organization has benefited tremendously over the past few years from extraordinary leadership. Immediate Past-Chair Micki Caskey and Executive Advisor Vince Anfara have provided laudable vision to sustain and expand the strength and capacity of the MLER SIG. I am grateful to be stepping into this position after Dr. Caskey's strong leadership and am confident that Dr. Anfara's continued assistance and guidance will support a smooth transition. Deep gratitude is also due to the other members of this past year's leadership team: Kathleen Roney (Past Chair) Kathy Malu (Secretary) and Steve Mertens (Vice Chair/Treasurer) for their contributions.

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News from the Executive Advisor

Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., University of Tennessee Knoxville

It was great seeing many of you in Denver for the annual meeting of AERA. I hope that the closing of your spring semester went well and that you are enjoying some time away from the office during the summer months.

Since Aera 2010, I traveled to New Orleans as a member of the 2011 AERA Program Committee and a member of the Aera sig Executive

Committee. One of the tasks of the Program Committee is to design a number of sessions that support the conference theme, "Inciting the Social Imagination: Education Research for the Public Good." Kris Gutierrez. AERA President, and Joanne Larson, Program Chair, have done a great job in developing the theme. I encourage you to read about the theme in the May issue of Educational

Researcher (see p. 359). I am pleased to report that there will be sessions that will highlight New Orleans, from the perspective of Katrina and the public policies that have emerged, as a case study to look at some of the larger educational issues that have continued to confront (and even plague) us in PK-16 education. I urge you consider the context of post-Katrina New Orleans as you submit papers

Message from the Chair

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I'd like to thank outgoing Council members Dick Lipka and Nancy Mizelle, and continuing Councilors Kezia McNeal, Donald Hackmann, Karen Bostwick Frederick, and Nicole Miller for their service. I extend a special welcome to our new Officers: Christopher Cook (Vice Chair), Shawn Faulker (Treasurer) and Cynthia Reyes (Secretary) and to new Councilors: Molly Mee, Kenneth Anderson and Tariq Akmal. I thank Kathleen Brinegar for her superb work as Editor of The Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research. And I am pleased to announce the transition of Steve Mertens from Vice Chair to Program Chair/Chair Elect. I look forward to working closely with him and the other Officers and Councilors on our sig's mission in this new leadership role.

I'd like to highlight two upcoming opportunities to be involved in our sig. First, as you may know, one of the most exciting sig-sponsored initiatives is the National Middle Grades Research Program. The Common Planning Time Project is the

first part of an ongoing coordinated research effort across the sig membership. While Phase I is complete, there is still time to become involved in Phase II. Please visit www. rmle.pdx.edu/research_project.htm for more information.

Second, as you plan your next few weeks, I urge you to submit proposals for the 2011 AERA annual meeting, to be held in New Orleans, Louisiana from Friday, April 8 through Tuesday, April 12. The submission system opened June 1st and will close July 15, 2010. As you may be aware, AERA session allocations are based on the total number of proposal submissions and sig members.

In closing, there is exciting work to accomplish during the upcoming academic year. As a sig, we will revisit our priorities and strategic plan and we will require a lot of input to help frame our next few years of action. I hope each of you will be an active member of this process.

Have a wonderful summer (or winter, for our colleagues down-under)!

MLER SIG Officers:

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SIG Association Council Members

(2010-12)Tariq Akmal Washington State University takmal@wsu.edu

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Nicole Miller (2009-11)**Graduate Student** Mississippi State University ncm39@colled.msstate.edu

Middle Level Research SIG Business Meeting Minutes

MLER SIG BUSINESS MEETING APRIL 30, 2010 6:15 - 7:45 PM

I – Welcome & Introductions

Participants introduced themselves. About 40 members attended.

II - Chair Report (Micki Caskey)

Membership:

Membership dip at the beginning of the calendar year was probably due to renewal process. Members reminded of the value of increasing SIG membership.

Reformatted Bylaws:

- Submitted to AERA Central Office on April 5, 2009,
- Approved by Aera Council on June 27, 2009
- · Approved by sig membership on February 24, 2010
- Posted to sig website on February 28, 2010.

Elections:

2010-2012 SIG election results include Chris Cook as Vice Chair, Shawn Faulkner as Treasurer, Cynthia Reyes as Secretary, and Tariq Akmal, Kenneth Anderson, and Molly Mee as Council Members. Other leadership changes include Penny Bishop as Chair



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and Steve Mertens as Chair-Elect/Program Chair. These officers and council members begin their term at the close of the AERA Annual Meeting.

III – Executive Director Report (Vince Anfara)

AERA News:

AERA continues to consider the number and size of SIGS. Some smaller SIGS may opt to combine with other small SIGS with similar interests. AERA will continue to focus on program quality.

National Middle Grades Research Program:

The Common Planning Time research project began in 2006. Phase I, the qualitative phase, included training 60 researchers to conduct observation and interviews. Data will become part of a national middle grades database that will be available to participating researchers. Phase II, the quantitative phase, has begun. The SIG joined with the CPRD for this phase. The CPRD has expertise in survey development. To date, approximately 20 researchers have been trained to collect data using an online survey tool. An additional training will take place in Summer 2010 in Chicago.

Handbook Series:

Seven handbooks published to date. Two handbooks are planned for the Common Planning Time (CPT) research

project. Calls for manuscripts for Phase I of the CPT research project first of these handbooks have been distributed to participants of Phase I. Another volume has been planned for Phase II.

IV – Treasurer Report (Steve Mertens)

2009 Financial Report:

BEGINNING BALANCE \$3,985.02 REVENUE \$1,563.35 EXPENSES -\$1,146.61 ENDING BALANCE \$4,401.76

Revenue came from membership dues (\$1,538.35) and a donation (\$25.00). Expenses included awards graduate student award plaques and stipend (\$500.00), outgoing SIG officers plaques (\$250.00), sig management fee (\$225.00), shipping (99.61) and business cards for Chair and Executive Advisor (\$72.00).

2010 Financial Report (January - March):

BEGINNING BALANCE	\$4,401.76
REVENUE	\$730.42
EXPENSES	\$0.00
ENDING BALANCE	\$5,132.18

V - Program Chair Report (Penny Bishop)

Review Panel:

For Aera 2010 Annual Meeting program, SIG had 16 reviewers. Each panelist reviewed about 8-10 proposals. Four researchers reviewed each proposal with the fourth reviewer being a graduate student researcher. Noted

challenge was that the deadline for applying to serve on the panel occurred before the deadline for proposal submissions. Need to volunteer early to serve on review panel.

AERA Program:

Allocation resulted in an increased number of roundtables and reduced number of paper presentations. Accepted 21 of 41 proposals with 10 in two paper sessions, 11 in roundtables, and 1 invited symposium

2011 AERA Annual Meeting: Proposal submissions due July 15, 2010.

VI - Graduate Student Award

Proposal Presentation:

Tarra Ellis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, presented "Effects of the Shared Principles of Middle School Philosophy and Culturally Responsive Education on the Academic Achievement of African American Middle School Students."

VII - Awards

Graduate Student Award: Tarra Ellis. Received plaque and honorarium.

Service Awards:

Steven B. Mertens for service as Treasurer, Kathleen Malu for service as Secretary, and Christopher Cook, Nancy Mizelle, and Richard Lipka for

service as Council Members. Each outgoing officer and council member was recognized for contributions to SIG and honored with plaque. Micki Caskey was also recognized for her service to the sig as Chair (2007-2010) and webmaster (2001 to present). She was honored with a plaque and gift certificate to Jake's (a Portland restaurant).

Special Recognition Award: Dick Lipka, the founder of the sig, was recognized for his tireless service to the sig. The SIG is in the process of naming an award in honor of Dickthe Richard Lipka Award.

VIII - Announcements

2011 Graduate Student Award Applications: Due January 15, 2011

Publications:

Calls distributed for the Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research, Research in Middle Level Education Online, and Research Summaries

Position announcements

Regional conference announcements

IX – Member Networking with Reception

Members enjoyed collegial conversation and refreshments.



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for possible presentation. The proposal submission system is open and will remain open until July 15, 2010 at 11:59PM (Pacific Time).

As a member of the AERA SIG Executive Committee, we met to deal with issues related to SIGS who do not meet the minimum membership number of 45 (there are about 12 SIGS in this status out of the total of 165), to review the data that have been collected from SIG members about their experiences of and

expectations for sigs, and to decide upon a course of action relative to those SIGS who have not submitted revised bylaws (about 8 sigs). Our committee work continues with meetings scheduled for September and October in DC. Eventually, all SIGS will receive a formal report from the data we have collected. I anticipate that the MLER SIG will use these data as part of the strategic planning process in which it will engage in the future months.

I participated in a very fruitful conference call with our current Chair, Penny Bishop, and Program Chair, Steve Mertens. Plans are being made for the direction we will take as a SIG over the next two years under Penny's leadership, and even extending into the next four years when Steve becomes Chair. I also want to welcome and thank those who have agreed to serve the MLER SIG in leadership roles as either officers or council members. A current listing of our leaders is contained in this

newsletter for your review. These are exciting times for our SIG as we continue to grow as a viable and vibrant organization of middle grades researchers.

I welcome your comments and thoughts about the continual improvement of the MLER SIG and ways to better meet the needs of our members.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at vanfara@utk.edu or 865.974.4985.

BOOK REVIEW

Schultz, B. D. (2008). *Spectacular things happen along the way: Lessons from an urban classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press. xiii +173 ISBN 978-0-8077-4857-2. \$19.95 paperback.

Submitted by Vincent Emeka Izuegbu, Wells Preparatory Academy Chicago, Illinois

Introduction

Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way delivers one teacher's reflective narrative about his classroom practice and implementation of Project Citizen, an educational program that promotes citizenship in schools, as a pedestal to engage his students in practical democratic and citizenship inquiry. The following review includes

- An evaluation of whether Project
 Citizen at Carr Elementary met the
 criteria of middle school curriculum
 advocated by the National Middle
 School Association
- 2. A discussion on the book's organization as a discourse on the author's introspective dilemma and dialogue.

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CRITERIA

The words "relevant", "challenging", "integrative", and "exploratory" are used by the National Middle School Association to describe middle school curriculum (NMSA 2003, p. 19). Beane maintains that the driving force of most middle school curriculum theory is the characteristics of early adolescence. The dominant characteristics amongst others range from self-exploration and creation of social meanings to diversity, emerging interests, curiosity, and wonder (Beane, 2003). According to Schultz' account, Project Citizen at Carr Elementary School was relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory. It was a problem-posing and problemsolving curriculum that emerged from

a real life situation. Rather than day-to-day lessons, the teacher, Brian Schultz, described how he made students' interests the centerpiece of an entire year curriculum, using complex tasks and essential questions to engage and challenge his students.

A relevant curriculum is one that allows students to pursue answers to questions about themselves and the world, actively engages young adolescents, and sustains their efforts and interests. It addresses issues and skills that empower them to assume ownership and control of their learning as they tackle difficult but achievable tasks. (NMSA, 2003). In *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way* one of the issues

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that the students meddled with was that of race. Schultz described how the students wondered whether high-ranking officials would listen to little Black kids from Cabrini Green. There is no question it was a difficult and challenging task for African-American fifth-graders from Cabrini Green to get high ranking local, state, and federal officials to build them a new school.

NMSA also (2003) described an integrative curriculum as one that "helps students make sense of their lives and the world around them" – giving them opportunity to make "significant, meaningful decisions about their learning" while focusing on transdisciplinary tasks and ideas (p. 22). Commenting on the integrative nature of Project Citizen at Carr Schultz writes in the book:

The students' action plan became the epicenter of the entire curriculum for the remainder of the school year. Every subject lost its compartmentalization, becoming integrated and integral in solving the problem. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and social studies were all blended together. Rather than using basal textbooks, the students researched pertinent information about how to solve their problem. Their search took them to texts beyond their reading level and aptitude, but they were willing to put forth the effort because it had value to their situation (Schultz, 2008, p.7).

The above quotation is pretty clear about the integrative and

transdisciplinary nature of Project
Citizen at Carr Elementary. Building a
new school for Cabrini Green kids was of
interest to the fifth graders, as one of the
students remarked, "This stuff is really
important, and I need to get the word out
if I want something done" (Schultz 2008,
pp. 6 & 7). In trying to get the word out
the fifth graders were actively engaged
as they tackled and explored the bureaucracy of local, state, and federal governments in school and outside school.

Schultz demonstrates how middle school curriculum is a continuous negotiation with students - a conversation that is driven by a relentless search for a solution to a problem of interest and importance. As a middle school teacher myself I have discovered that my students perform better when I seek and value their opinions. Early adolescence is a stage when students just don't do whatever they are asked to do but rather they question and ask for reasons, justifications, and values. Many teachers see this early adolescent characteristic as resistance rather than as basis for curriculum. Not Schultz. One student in Schultz' book spoke about feeling like a powerful person, a manger of a company, and a grown-up (Schultz 2008, pp. 39 & 40).

Organization, Dilemma, and Dialogue

Because *Spectacular Things Happen*Along the Way is a reflective narrative,
it is organized in a way that reflects the
author's own progressive reflection and
interpretation of the project, the student
themselves, and himself as an educator.
The curriculum developed as Project
Citizen came to life, and at the same time,

the students progressed in their maturity and learning, while the teacher grew as a reflective practitioner. This reflective and interpretive organization made it easy for the reader to follow. It was interesting to see how Schultz interweaved his internal struggles and dilemma within the narrative without loosing the reader. He made it easy for the reader to share and participate in his internal struggles, concerns, discourse, and dilemma. Deserving a mention are his struggle and reflections regarding democratic classroom and standard-based learning. In a democratic classroom (like Schultz'), the progressive curriculum proceeds from students' interests (like the push for a new school building) and not state standards. For Brian, there was no guarantee that his progressive curriculum would ensure commendable performance on the state standardized test. Although his progressive curriculum was developing his students in very meaningful ways, Brian struggled with the fact that his curricular decision would in the long run possibly be a perpetuation of the dominant culture. Is an interest-driven curriculum in the interest of the students? In his own words, Schultz stated:

My concern was that the goal of (inequitable) education might hinder students' progress and even perpetuate more inequity in their future. Was it better for my students to be aware of their potential through more democratic curricula, or was this questioning going to create more of a struggle for them in their future? Was I acting as an instrument of the

dominant culture, or was I able to cut through this power dynamic to reach my students? (Schultz, 2005, pp. 14 & 15).

The integrative, transdisciplinary, and interdisciplinary nature of Project Citizen was ultimately viewed as contributing to Schultz's students' good performance on the state's standardized test. Having said that, a question still remains. If progressive education caters to the needs and interests of students, is good performance in this standard-driven age and society not a need of students, especially inner city students?

Schultz did a good job of problematizing this dilemma. He discussed it, but as a student of curriculum and a teacher, I hoped I had more to read. I think this is an important issue because some educational and curriculum theories do not see the classrooms because of the fear of their opposition to standard-based learning and testing. The reality of the issue is that the society is not moving away from standards anytime soon. I therefore recommend Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way to policy-makers, teachers, administrators, educators, educational researchers curriculum students, and all who are burdened with

the dilemma of democratic curriculum versus standard-based learning and testing. The earlier adolescents discover their true identities (in relation to their social environments and the society at large) the better chances they have at succeeding in life. Experiences such as the one experienced by fifth-graders at Carr Elementary lead to self-discovery and better chances at success in life.

References

Beane, J. A. (1993). *A middle school curriculum* (2nd ed.). Westerville, Ohio: NMSA

National Middle School Association (2003). This we believe. Westerville, Ohio: NMSA

Schultz, B. D. (2008). Spectacular things happen along the way. New York: Teachers College Press.



Call for Submissions

The Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research

The Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research, the online publication of the Middle Level Education Research SIG, is seeking submissions. The MLER SIG publishes the Chronicle three times a year in January, June, and October. We invite you to submit book reviews, descriptions of research or publications, or other events/information of interest to MLER SIG members.

In addition to the above, we are also seeking submissions for our peer-reviewed section. We encourage MLER SIG members to submit brief articles of scholarly work, including original research and reviews of literature. We welcome manuscripts on an ongoing basis.

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be approximately 2,500 words in length
- Double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font
- Follow the 5th or 6th Edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001) style guide
- Include a separate title page with author name, affiliation, and contact information. Aside from the title page, manuscripts should have no reference to the author(s) to ensure a blind review.

Note: Manuscripts need to be prepared and submitted electronically as Word documents

Correspondence

Please direct questions and submit completed manuscript and title page to: Kathleen Brinegar, Editor, Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research kathleenbrinegar@gmail.com



Call For Manuscripts

Research in Middle Level Education Online

Research in Middle Level Education Online is an international peer-reviewed research journal published by National Middle School Association. It publishes quantitative and qualitative studies, case studies, action research studies, research syntheses, integrative reviews, and interpretations of research literature. NMSA's Research Advisory Board provides guidance for the publication. Issues of RMLE Online, members of the NMSA Research Advisory Board and a listing of the editorial review board are available at www.nmsa.org

Guidelines for Contributors

Manuscript Preparation:

Manuscripts, including references, range from 25 to 40 double-spaced pages. Tables and figures should be placed at the end of text.

Format and Style

The text and references should be doublespaced with 1" wide margins in 12-point font. Authors need to

- Follow the 6th edition of Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.
- Include a 150-200 word abstract.

Manuscripts should have no reference to the author(s) to ensure a blind review.

Submission Process

To submit a manuscript, go to http://www.editorialmanager.com/rmle

Please register as an author and fill out the required information. You will upload directly to the site the following separate documents:

- Your cover letter addressed to Editor Dr. Micki M. Caskey
- A title page with author name(s), affiliation(s), and contact information for the corresponding author
- Your manuscript with any tables and/or figures

Please do not include any identifying information in your manuscript document or in the document file names. You will receive an automated e-mail acknowledgement of successful submission. Manuscripts that do not meet submission requirements will be returned to the author.

Correspondence

Please direct your questions to: Micki Caskey, Editor, RMLE caskeym@pdx.edu 503.725.4749

Endorsement

The Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association endorses RMLE Online.



Call for Proposals Middle Grades Education Researchers

NMSA Research Advisory Board Poster Session

The NMSA Research Advisory Board will sponsor the NMSA Research Poster Session at the 37th Annual NMSA Conference in Baltimore, MD, November 4-6, 2010. This poster session highlights research that addresses issues in middle grades education conducted by beginning and emergent researchers and scholars.

We invite assistant professors and doctoral, specialist, and master's level researchers to submit proposals about their research in middle level education. The Research Advisory Board selects the top ten proposals for presentation at the conference.

Submission Guidelines

To submit a proposal, send the following by July 30, 2010:

Cover Page that includes:

- Name
- Institution
- Title of research paper
- Research topic and/or questions addressed by the study
- Contact information (Address, phone number, and email address)
- Abstract (maximum of 250 words)

Note: Research papers of accepted proposals are due October 10, 2010. Papers need to follow APA 6th edition style guidelines and range from 15 to 25 pages.

Correspondence

Please direct questions and submit completed proposal to: Penny A. Bishop University of Vermont penny.bishop@uvm.edu

Notification of proposal acceptance:

August 30, 2010



Call for Research Summaries

Micki M. Caskey, Chair

NMSA Research Advisory Board

The Research Advisory Board of the National Middle School Association is seeking submissions of Research Summaries in Support of This We Believe. NMSA research summaries are abbreviated reviews of the literature—not exhaustive reviews of the research literature. The purpose of these summaries is to inform middle school practice, research, and policy as well as to provide basic information about the education of young adolescents. The research summaries are peer-reviewed and posted on the NMSA website for far-reaching dissemination.

If you are interested in authoring a Research Summary for the National Middle School Association, please review the current research summaries at www.nmsa.org and contact

Micki Caskey caskeym@pdx.edu

Chair of the NMSA Research Advisory Board to discuss prospective topics and guidelines for manuscripts.



IAP Acquires MGRJ

Middle Grades Research Journal (MGRJ)

(A Research Journal Published Quarterly Information Age Publishing)

Edited by Vicki L. Schmitt, University of Alabama

Beginning January 1, 2010, MGRJ Publication Offices moved to Charlotte, NC The Editorial Office moved to the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL

Call for Manuscripts -- Middle Grades Issues

Middle Grades Research Journal (MGRJ) is a refereed, peer reviewed journal that publishes original studies providing both empirical and theoretical frameworks that focus on middle grades education. A variety of articles are published quarterly in March, June, September, and December of each volume year.

Publication Date:

Published Quarterly

ISSN:

1937-0814

Subscription Rates Per

Year:

Institutional Print:

\$149.00

Individual Print: \$80.00

Trim Size: 7X10

Subject:

Education, Middle Grades

Guidelines for Contributors

All manuscripts must adhere to APA fifth or sixth edition format, include an abstract of 200-300 words, and range between 20 - 30 pages in length (including camera ready tables, charts, figures, and references). If hard copies of manuscripts are submitted for review, the lead contributing author must send four "blind" copies including title and abstract along with a letter of transmittal to:

Dr. Vicki L. Schmitt, Editor-In-Chief

Electronic submissions as Word documents are strongly encouraged and should be e-mailed to: vschmitt@bamaed.ua.edu



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