

AERA SIG RMLE

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The Chronicle of Research in Middle Level Education

AERA 2002 Update

By Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.

Good news arrived in July 2001 with the announcement that the SIG had been awarded 2 paper sessions and 7 paper discussions (formerly called "roundtable") for AERA 2002. This allotment is based on membership numbers with one paper session for every 43 members. I want to thank Dr. Nancy Mizelle, SIG Treasurer, and Dr. Dick Lipka, SIG founder, for all of their hard work. Members are encouraged to continue recruiting new members for our SIG.

For AERA 2002 The Research in Middle Level Education SIG received 18 proposals. Proposals are currently being reviewed. Research selected for presentation at AERA 2002 will be announced at NMSA in November. Because of our allotment of paper sessions and paper discussions we will be able to possibly accept (pending results of reviews) 15 out of the 18 papers for presentation. I anticipate a very exciting program for AERA 2002. But virtually everyone who submitted a proposal requested a paper session. Therefore, some (based on review results) will be asked to accept a paper discussion format.

Reviewers for 2002 included: Tony Manson, Richard Lipka, Suzanne McCotter, Karen Onofrey, Maureen Musser, Kathleen Malu, Robert Felner, Micki Caskey, Jeffrey Mitchell, Stephen Brand, Mickey Fenzel, Gayle Davis, Sandra Stacki, Dave Brown, Eileen Reilich, Hersh Waxman, Lori Olafson, Stacy DeZutter, David Strahan, and Ruth Ference.

I want to thank each of the reviewers for the timely manner in which they conducted their reviews and for the expertise they brought to this process. I anticipate a very exciting program for AERA 2002.

AERA 2002 is scheduled for New Orleans. The first 30 members to arrive for our meeting in New Orleans will receive a special gift.

NMSA 2001 Update

By Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.

NMSA is scheduled for November 1-3 in Washington, DC. Research in Middle Level Education SIG members are encouraged to attend the SIG meeting on Friday, November 2. The first 30 members to arrive at the meeting will receive a very special memento. Presently, our meeting is scheduled for 5:00PM in the Grand Hyatt's Roosevelt Room.

I have been informed by NMSA that this meeting will NOT appear in the annual program. Please look for signs containing information about our meeting.

In addition to our SIG meeting there are a number of sessions sponsored by NMSA's Research Committee. Please look for these sessions in the official program. A number of our SIG members are participating in a "Chat Session" which is currently scheduled for 3:00PM on November 2.

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Tom Manderville, Southwest Texas
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Dick Lipka, Pittsburgh State University

Kathleen F. Malu, William Paterson
University

Richard Powell, University of Colorado,
Denver

Message from the President

By Barbara Whinery

The events over the past few weeks have left all of us with a wide range of feelings from shock and disbelief to incredible sadness. On behalf of the Research in Middle Level Education, Special Interest Group, I would like to extend our thoughts and prayers to everyone who has been impacted by the horrible tragedy we all experienced on September 11, 2001.

In struggling to make sense of these attacks on our nation and our way of life, there are many challenges that still lie ahead as we return to our jobs and to a "new normal" way of living. Family, friends, and taking care of ourselves seem to be at the top of the "To Do List" for now. However, in a professional sense, there is much to be done, too.

In middle level education, we have made progress in many areas, but there is a need for re-examining and reflecting on the current state of middle level education and what the future holds for this concept of educating early adolescents. The September 2001 Middle School Journal focuses on "Reinventing the Middle School" and identifies issues related to sustaining the middle school concept. The articles in this issue provide much food for thought and consideration.

Providing research and leadership for the middle school concept is critical at this time. If there is to be a

future for this approach to learning, the Research in Middle Level Education SIG has a significant role to play. In the past year, the SIG has made progress toward supporting the middle school concept. Membership in the RMLE SIG has increased to over 115 members, resulting in two program sessions and seven paper discussions (roundtables) at the 2002 AERA Annual Conference. Over the summer months, RMLE SIG members have actively participated and contributed to the Middle Level Research Organization Network (MLRON), a unified effort to promote middle level education research with the National Middle School Association Research Committee and the National Association for Professors of Middle Level Education (NaPOMLE). The RMLE website is currently being updated and a proposal for a Graduate Student Scholarship is under development. The SIG newsletter is in very good hands and is now published three times a year.

I would like to thank all of the RMLE SIG Officers, Council members, Newsletter Editors and SIG members who have made major contributions to the growth and continued development of the SIG this past year.

As we attempt to return to the "new normal" way of life, the RMLE SIG challenges will be to sustain and extend our membership, continue to make contributions to the research and knowledge base of middle level education, and to collaborate with our colleagues to provide the leadership and vision for the middle school concept. I look forward to seeing you at the National Middle School Association Conference.

Abstracts from AERA 2001

Reinventing Democracy in Middle Schools: Students' Lived Experiences

By Richard Powell

Schools tailored to the needs of eleven to fourteen year olds, especially schools that have reinvented themselves as progressive cultures for learning, often give rise to what commonly has become known as student voice. When we find reinvented schools that affirm student voice we often find students that talk openly together, that are vocal and meaningful and that are negotiating their education in part with their teachers. Another name for these kind of schools is democratic. The purpose of this study was to examine the democratic nature of one middle school that had only in part implemented the middle school ideology.

For the study I employed phenomenology and the corresponding construct of lived experience. Consistent with phenomenology I used qualitative research methods, in particular student and teacher interviews, and classroom observations. In particular I interviewed individual students, and I interviewed a core team of teachers. All interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis. Teachers' interviews provided needed insight into the democratic nature of their core team and of their school culture. Student interviews provided four themes: Best case school, On family discontent, On the boundary line, and Looking inwardly.

The importance of the study revealed that middle schools that do not fully implement the middle school ideology may be less prepared to bring student voices more fully into the collective conversation of school decision making.

Classroom Learning Environment: Differences Between More-Effective and Less-Effective Urban Middle Level Schools

By Hersh C. Waxman, *University of Houston*; Lisa L. Read, *University of Houston—Downtown*

The present study addresses some of the previous problems of school effectiveness research by specifically examining whether there are significant differences in students' perceptions of their classroom learning environment between urban middle level schools that were classified by the state-wide assessment criteria as "exemplary," "recognized," or "acceptable." Differences between these three types of schools in students' background characteristics, attendance, out-of-school activities, and student aspirations also were examined in this study.

About 400 sixth- and seventh-grade students from each type of school completed an adapted version of the My Class Inventory and some background questions from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS: 88). The results indicated that for the scales of Satisfaction, Teacher Support, Cohesion, and Equity, students in the exemplary school had significantly higher ($p < .001$) perceptions than students in the recognized and acceptable schools. Students in the exemplary and recognized schools had higher scores on Self-Esteem in Reading than students in the acceptable school. On the other hand, for the scales of Friction and Difficulty, students in the recognized and acceptable schools had significantly higher perceptions than students from the exemplary school. There were no differences between the schools on the scale of Competition. In addition, there were very few significant differences between the recognized and acceptable schools. The results of the present study are encouraging in that they illustrate that urban middle schools can provide supportive and positive classroom learning environments for ethnically and culturally diverse students. The results of the present study are also discouraging in that they paint a bleak picture of

middle level school students who are from less-effective urban schools. Many of these seventh- and eighth-grade students appear to have already "given up" on school and several of these students indicated that they don't even plan to go on and finish high school. They also find their work in reading/language arts to be more difficult than students from the exemplary school, and they similarly perceive that there is more friction in the classroom, but less support and equitable treatment from their reading/language arts teacher.

Middle School Teacher Education Programs: Recent Graduates' Perceptions of How Well Prepared They Are

By Suzanne S. McCotter, *Millersville State University*; K. Denise Muth, Laurie E. Hart, and Jae Hoon Lim, *The University of Georgia*

An important component of the middle school reform movement is the improved quality of the preparation that middle school teachers receive. In this study, data came from a national survey of graduates of NMSA/NCATE-approved middle school teacher education programs and focused on graduates' evaluations of their programs in 13 areas (e.g., meeting the developmental needs of young adolescents, planning middle grades curriculum, managing the classroom environment, assessing student performance). In addition, graduates' evaluations of their content area preparation, other education courses (e.g., educational psychology), field experiences, and field experience supervision were examined. The results indicate that the majority of respondents felt well prepared to teach middle school students in each content area. The respondents felt best prepared to teach reading and least prepared to teach science. Student teaching was considered to be the most effective preparation for teaching and the majority of the respondents also felt well prepared by their pre-student teaching field experiences. College supervisors, both during student

teaching and during pre-student teaching field experiences, were perceived by the respondents to be very helpful. Arts and sciences courses and general education courses were not rated as highly as general middle school courses in terms of how well they prepared the respondents. In addition, respondents had clear ideas about the effectiveness of particular components of their preparation programs. There is value in the general themes depicted in their responses as we continue to conceptualize the broad field of middle school education. There is also value to particular institutions in examining what their students have to say about their preparation.

The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education

By Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.

The first volume of *The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education* is scheduled for release in mid-October. The series is being co-published by Information Age Publishing and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The second volume of this book series is in the planning stages. Manuscripts focused on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the middle level are due no later than February 9, 2002.

The SIG officially endorses this book series and members are encouraged to submit manuscripts and to serve as advisory board members. Please contact Vincent Anfara if you have any questions, 215.204.6174 or vanfara@astro.temple.edu

Middle Level Research Organization Network (MLRON) Update

By Gayle Davis, The University of Georgia

The Middle Level Research Organization Network (MLRON) has been active over the last several months through the work of several committees. The mission of the Network, according to its draft mission statement, is to "encourage, sponsor, and disseminate research that improves the quality of schooling for young adolescents." MLRON includes all the members of the American Educational Research Association's Special Interest Group on Research in Middle Level Education (RMLE SIG), the National Association for Professors of Middle Level Education (NaPOMLE), and the National Middle School Association's Research Committee. MLRON will hold its next meeting on Friday, November 2, at 8:00 a.m. in Washington, DC, during the National Middle School Association's annual conference.

In early summer, MLRON established six committees:

1. Mission and Organization Committee (chair: Gayle Davis, The University of Georgia, gdavis@coe.uga.edu)
2. Communication Committee (co-chairs: Micki M. Caskey, Portland State University, caskeym@pdx.edu; Kim K. Ruebel, Georgia Southern University, kruebel@gasou.edu)
3. Research on Student Achievement Committee (chair: Joanne Arhar, Kent State University, jarhar@kent.edu)
4. Identifying Research Interests and Projects Committee (chair: Vincent Anfara, Temple University, vanfara@astro.temple.edu)

5. Recognizing Distinguished Research Committee (chair: George White, Lehigh University, gpwl@lehigh.edu)
6. Planning Committee (co-chairs: Barbara Whinery, University of Northern Colorado, Barbara.whinery@unco.edu; Deborah Thomas, Georgia Southern University, debthom@gasou.edu; Gayle Davis, The University of Georgia, gdavis@coe.uga.edu)

The MLRON committees began meeting via conference call over the summer, and three of the six committees have developed reports on their progress up to September 1. Those committee reports are included in this RMLE SIG newsletter.

MLRON will hold its next meeting on Friday, November 2, 8:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m., in Washington, DC. We encourage RMLE SIG members to attend, and to take a few minutes to review the following MLRON committee reports beforehand. We will be making decisions affecting both the short and long-term goals and activities of this new Network. The draft agenda appears below:

MLRON Meeting
Friday, November 2, 2001
8:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.
Location: Renaissance
Room: Congressional Ballroom B
Washington, DC

Draft Agenda

1. Introductions and Update
2. Mission of MLRON
 - a. Review draft and discuss
 - b. Adoption of mission
3. Committee Reports and Plans
 - c. Mission and Organization Committee – Gayle Davis
 - d. Communication Committee – Micki Caskey and Kim Ruebel
 - e. Research on Student Achievement Committee – Joanne Arhar
 - f. Research Interests and Projects Committee – Vince Anfara

- g. Recognizing Distinguished Research Committee – George White

4. Prioritizing Next Steps – Barbara Whinery and MLRON members

5. Wrap-Up and Recommendations – Barbara Whinery, Deborah Thomas, and Gayle Davis

We hope to see you in Washington at the MLRON meeting. If you have any questions, please contact Gayle Davis (gdavis@coe.uga.edu), Barbara Whinery (barbara.whinery@unco.edu), or Deborah Thomas (debthom@gasou.edu).

MLRON Communications Committee Progress Report

By Micki M. Caskey, *Portland State University*, caskeym@pdx.edu; Kim K. Ruebel, *Georgia Southern University*, kruebel@gasou.edu; Thomas F. Mandeville, *Southwest Texas State University*, tm08@swt.edu; Deborah Thomas, *Georgia Southern University*, debthom@gasou.edu

During the past two months, the Communications Committee has discussed possible communication formats for the Middle Level Research Organization Network (MLRON), which includes members of NMSA's Research Committee, the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Special Interest Group on Research in Middle Level Education (RMLE-SIG), and the National Association for Professors of Middle Level Education (NaPOMLE).

The overall goals for the Communications Committee were to:

- Develop options for communication among the three groups in the MLRON
- Describe the implications for each option
- Draft and submit a progress report outlining the communication options with implications of each, and the committee's recommendations and next steps.

Options

In general, communication options for the network include: a MLRON website, a MLRON listserv, an electronic bulletin board for MLRON, and a MLRON column to be published in each group's current newsletter.

Options with Implications

MLRON Website

A MLRON website would provide members of the network with information regarding current research efforts. This web-based environment offers an easy-to-use graphic interface and affords members with "anytime, anyplace" access. The MLRON site could be linked prominently to each group's current websites.

Initially, a web designer would be needed to design and upload the MLRON website. This web designer would collaborate with the communications committee on design features (e.g. links to research articles, experts in the field). Later, a webmaster would be needed for quarterly maintenance (e.g. currency of links) and to update the website (e.g. post research findings). Additionally, the webmaster would track the use of the

website and troubleshoot technological problems. The NMSA may have web designers and/or webmasters on staff who would be able to assume responsibility for the design and maintenance of the site.

MLRON Listserv

A MLRON listserv would provide members of the network with another forum for communication. Members would post information, make inquiries and participate in electronic conversations using the listserv. Though similar to email, listservs are limited to those that subscribe to the listserv and network members may be familiar with this communication format. In addition, contributions sent to listservs are automatically archived.

Initially, an individual will need to set up the MLRON listserv. Also, a listserv moderator would be needed to monitor the listserv. One of the three groups may be willing to assume responsibility for setting up and monitoring the listserv.

Electronic Bulletin Board

Electronic bulletin boards are features of web-based educational environments that provide interactive, online discussions that may be useful for fostering collegial conversations. Two such web-based educational environments are Blackboard and WebCT, which are used at many college/university campuses for an array of purposes. These electronic environments offer an easy-to-use graphic interface and are password-protected.

Initially, a designer is needed to setup the web-based environment. Some members of the network are familiar with the format, and have designed programs and courses using the bulletin board feature. Later, the designer would manage the web-based environment. Currently universities and colleges are promoting these platforms; however, at this point, the costs related to use of these systems is unknown.

MLRON column in groups' newsletter

A MLRON column could be established, published, and distributed in each group's existing newsletters.

The column would be presented in each group's newsletter; the author would need to submit the column electronically to the editor of each newsletter. Authorship for the column could be rotated among the three groups. Questions that need to be explored are 1) does each group sponsor a newsletter, and 2) how frequently is the newsletter published? This hard copy form of communication may support those members with limited electronic access

Recommendations/Next Steps

1. The Communications Committee recommends the use of multiple formats of communication to facilitate the connection among members of the network. Multiple formats strengthen our network and minimize issues related to access of information. Suggested

formats are: website, listserv, and column in newsletter *OR* website, bulletin board, and column in newsletter.

2. Contact the National Middle School Association about hosting and maintaining the proposed MLRON website and/or listserv.
3. Contact our respective universities and colleges about access and costs related to an electronic bulletin board. Use this information to determine whether a listserv or a bulletin board is a better option.
4. Present options at a MLRON session at the upcoming National Middle School Association meeting in Washington, DC.

MLRON Middle Level Student Achievement Committee Report

By Joanne Arhar, Committee Chair, Sue Thompson, Steve Mertens, Larry Holt, Nancy Mizelle, Kim Hartman, Dick Lipka

Purpose of Research

To explore the various ways student achievement/learning has been constructed and assessed within the measurement and constructivist paradigms – both nationally and internationally.

- To what extent are current conceptions/practices of achievement/learning and assessment developmentally responsive and socially equitable?
- To what extent are high stakes tests a valid measure of student

achievement/learning? To what extent are high stakes tests developmentally responsive and socially equitable?

- What are alternative types of assessment of student achievement/learning? Are they developmentally responsive and socially equitable?
- What is the relationship between alternative forms of assessment and current ways of assessing, e.g., high stakes, standardized tests?

Goals

1. Seek funding to address the above questions.
2. Develop policy statements about middle level achievement/learning and assessment that reflect the Vision Statement of the Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform that education for early adolescents should be academically challenging, developmentally responsive and socially equitable.
3. Disseminate these policy statements to educational organizations, policy makers, learned societies, parents, teachers, and administrators of middle level students

Research Design Principles

1. Longitudinal research
2. Nationally representative samples
3. Mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative research design to include: student achievement data, survey data, interviews, case studies, classroom observations, focus groups.

MLRON Committee on Identifying Research Interests and Projects Report

By Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.

Committee members: Vincent Anfara, Chair, Temple University; Joan Lindgren, Florida Atlantic; William McBeth, University of Wisconsin; Deborah Thomas, Georgia Southern.

TASK 1: Identify strategies for identifying research interests and projects among MLRON members:

- (1) Creation of a website that would be linked to NMSA, RMLE-SIG, and NaPOLME's websites. This website would allow middle level researchers to create profiles that would include contact information, a selected list of recent and/or important publications, and current projects. Please note that this type of profile is much like the one that can be created on the "Community of Science" website. See <http://www.cos.com> and attachment for a better understanding of what is meant here. Researchers would be able to update their information whenever they choose. The website would be advertised in the Middle School Journal, Schools in the Middle, NASSP Bulletin and on NMSA, SIG, and NaPOLME's websites, newsletters, etc.

- (2) A "Call for Information" could be placed in the Middle School Journal, on NMSA's website, in NASSP's Bulletin and

Schools in the Middle, and in RMLE-SIG and NaPOLME newsletters. Information sheets could be made available at AERA and NMSA conferences.

- (3) David Hough recently mailed out a survey pertaining to NMSA's Research Agenda for the 21st Century. Information from this survey could be compiled and a report written on what response this research agenda has received. [i.e., I know that many of my doctoral students at Temple have used this agenda to find dissertation topics.]
- (4) A subcommittee could be created to review NMSA and AERA program books from the past 4 years and analyze what has been researched and presented. Additionally, electronic searches could be conducted in such databases as Dissertation Abstracts International, ERIC, etc.

TASK 2: Describe the implications for each option regarding budget, timing, staff needed both initially and for maintenance of these processes. The options mentioned above would cost very little in relation to money, time, or staff.

Option #1 would probably be the most costly. Website creation would hopefully be done by someone at NMSA's headquarters. This would require NMSA releasing someone who has expertise in website creation to complete this task (probably 1-2 days work). We suggest that the MLRON subcommittee have input into the design of this website and that ultimate approval for its release be granted by the MLRON governing

board. Someone at NMSA would have to be responsible for the maintenance of this website.

Option #2 would cost virtually nothing to implement. NMSA should be pleased to place these "Calls for Information" in its journals. Possibly the ad in NASSP would cost a minimal amount of money. The SIG and NaPOLME could include these "calls" in their newsletters with no substantial cost to anyone.

Option #3 and Option #4 would involve a group coming together to spend 1-2 days to review these documents and complete the final report. We suggest that NMSA bring 4 people together to do this task (possibly connected to NMSA's conference in DC). Money for partial payment of travel, expenses, etc.

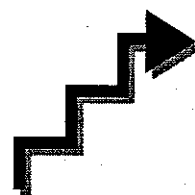
Whatever option is selected there should be an annual update that is consistent—possibly updated at the time of NMSA's annual conference.

Committee Recommendation:

Course of Action: Option #1

Next Steps:

- (1) Contact NMSA and secure its support on website creation and maintenance.
- (2) Start advertising this website in Middle School Journal, NASSP's Schools in the Middle and Bulletin, and SIG and NaPOLME newsletters.



Become A Member Today!

Why join the Research in Middle Level Education SIG?

Membership in this organization will enable you to remain current and up-to-date on the most recent, cutting edge research available regarding middle level education. You will be able to network and converse with leading researchers and other professionals in the field of middle level education.

By joining you will ensure that the voices of middle level researchers and practitioners are heard within the American Educational Research Association community. As our membership increases we will receive additional convention timeslots and opportunities for presentations.

How Do I Join?

To join the SIG, simply contact Nancy Mizelle, SIG Treasurer, or the American Educational Research Association:

Write to:

Nancy Mizelle
School of Education
Georgia College and State University
Milledgeville, GA 31061
Nmizelle@MAIL.GCSU.EDU

Or:

AERA Subscription Department 1230
17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3078

Fax: (202) 775-1824. Be sure to note that you wish to join the SIG Research in Middle Level Education. Annual SIG dues are \$5. **Further information is also available at:**

<http://aera.net>

RMLE-SIG Website needs YOU!

PLEASE check out the NEWLY remodeled RMLE-SIG website. NOW, our website needs your input, support, and feedback. **PLEASE** help to expand and improve our site as follows:

Pause for a moment from your pressing academic and scholarly demands.

Look closely at the RMLE-SIG website at <http://www.rmle.pdx.edu>

Elaborate ways to enhance the site, and send these to caskeym@pdx.edu

Ask your students, colleagues, and others to visit the site. Invite them to send their suggestions to caskeym@pdx.edu

Send publication information to be included in the website to caskeym@pdx.edu
NOTE: The "Publications" page will be based upon your input.

Email your name, affiliation, and research interests to caskeym@pdx.edu
NOTE: A list will be compiled for our "Research Interests" page.

Naturally, your suggestions and feedback may also be mailed or faxed. **PLEASE!**

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SEND US YOUR NEWS!

Please send news items to co-editors Kathleen M. Brown at brownk@email.unc.edu OR

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Mark Your Calendar!

November 1-3, 2001
Washington, DC
National Middle School Association Annual Conference

For more information call 1-800-528-NMSA

NMSA CONFERENCE
FRIDAY NOVEMBER 2, 2001:

-8:00, a.m., Renaissance,
Congressional Ballroom
MLRON Meeting
All RMLE SIG members invited!

-3:00, p.m.
Chat Session for RMLE SIG Members
All AERA RMLE SIG members are invited! Check program for location.

-5:00, p.m.
Grand Hyatt, Roosevelt Room
RMLE SIG Meeting
All AERA RMLE SIG members are invited to attend! First 30 members to arrive will receive a very special memento! For more information contact vanfara@astro.temple.edu

April 1-5, 2001
New Orleans
American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting.
For further information contact <http://aera.net>

How about joining the RMLE SIG Listserv?
Simply send an email message expressing your desire to join the listserv to Vince Anfara and he will place you on the listserv. Vanafara@astro.temple.edu