



MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION RESEARCH  
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

# The Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research

## Message from the President

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

It was great seeing so many MLER members in Chicago. I want to personally thank each presenter, chair, discussant, and proposal reviewer for the fantastic job they did. Thanks again to Kim Hartman, President-elect and Program Chair, for creating a great program that had 4 paper sessions, 9 paper discussions, a symposium, and our business meeting.

I would like to challenge each of you to nominate a colleague for membership in our organization. Currently we have 215 members with a small number not being AERA members (joined at a NMSA conference). If you would please send names and addresses of potential members to me at [vanfara@utk.edu](mailto:vanfara@utk.edu), I will mail each person a personal invitation to join.

On another issue, we purchased a display board for the purpose of advertising the SIG at local, state, regional, and national meetings. I need color pictures of you in action! I will enlarge the pictures so don't worry about size. Please mail your submissions to me at The University of Tennessee, A321 Claxton Complex, Knoxville, TN 37996-3430. We plan to unveil this display unit at NMSA-Atlanta.

Included in this issue of the newsletter is "News from AERA." Please take a few moments to review the changes that are planned regarding the electronic proposal submission and management system. Also, note that the "hold-harmless" provision that has been in effect for the past three years will be stopped. SIGs that fall below the

minimum number of members will be sunset.

Many years ago (in a former life) I was a Christian Brother. This Catholic religious organization had a monthly newsletter that contained information from each school operated by the Brothers. In a funny way, it came to be standard practice that each newsletter entry ended with the sentence, "A good time was had by all." As I reflect back upon our week in Chicago I think about the fact that that sentence really applies. We have a great group of members in MLER. Thanks for your collaboration and friendship.

See you in Atlanta!

June 2003      Volume 3, Issue 2

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**R.S.V.P.**

Proposed Revision to  
Constitutions & Bylaws  
p. 11

Please vote by  
July 10, 2003

✍ Send ballot, or

✉ Send FAX, or

@ Send Email

to  
Vince Anfara

### **MLER SIG Officers**

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Joanne Arhar (2002-2004, fall)  
Gayle A. Davis (2002-2004, fall)  
Steven Mertens (2002-2004, fall)  
Micki M. Caskey (2002-2004, spring)  
Mickey Fenzel (2002-2004, spring)  
Stephen Lucas (2002-2004, spring)  
Richard Lipka (2002-2004, spring)

Fall election takes place prior to NMSA's  
Annual Conference

Spring election takes place prior to AERA's  
Annual Meeting

## **AERA 2003**

"Accountability for Educational Quality: Shared Responsibility"  
April 21 to 25, 2003  
Chicago, Illinois

**84th Annual Meeting of the  
American Educational Research Association**

## **Middle Level Education Research SIG Presentations**

Note from the Editors: Due in great part to MLER SIG President, Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., and his tireless efforts on increasing our membership, MLER SIG sponsored four paper sessions, two paper discussions, and a symposium at AERA '03. While all presenters were invited to submit their abstracts for inclusion in this issue of the Newsletter, we did not receive all of them. Since the AERA website archives presentations, we included the titles and authors of each, and we encourage you to consult that website should you wish to learn more about a particular piece of research.

### **Paper Session: Rhetoric Versus Reality in Middle Level Education**

**A Study of Studies** (Presented by David L. Hough, Southwest Missouri State University; Vicki L. Schmitt, University of Kansas; Marcela J. Ruales, Avinash J. Daga, Gautham J.Pillaipakkam, Southwest Missouri State University.)

This "*Study of Studies*" examines the types of middle level research conducted over a twelve-year period between 1991—2002. An analysis is made of the relationship of this body of research to the National Middle School Association's *21<sup>st</sup> Century Research Agenda* outline of issues, topics, and questions most frequently addressed (and by whom) and were examined in an effort to understand better what is known, believed, and yet unanswered.

The study also examines who has been studying what, where the most research is being disseminated, and in which years the majority of this work has been completed. Which colleges, universities, or other institutions have been turning out the most research and the level of sophistication of that research are examined as well. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed designs are examined; as well as the most commonly used techniques of data collection: surveys, case studies, interviews, focus groups, observations, or a variety of unobtrusive approaches.

This *Study of Studies* also finds that much research has been done in the way of counting numbers of schools and types of organizational structures, but an accurate measure of what a bona fide middle school really is, has not been developed, at least not very well. In addition, few have attempted to tackle designs that identify middle level programs, policies, and practices related to student outcomes that can be generalized. While much rhetoric found in the popular literature is used in support of the middle school philosophy, precious little basic research has been done and precious few studies use experimental designs to examine impacts and outcomes.

## Effects of an Emergent Specialized Middle Level Teacher Preparation Program

(Presented by Micki M. Caskey, Portland State University)

Overwhelming evidence supports the specialized preparation of middle level teachers and numerous teacher education institutions have developed specific middle level programs. Positioned within an existing graduate program, an emergent middle level model offers a specific pathway for preparing teachers of young adolescents. This study examines the perceptions of twenty-four preservice teachers who were admitted to the program's first middle level cohort. Model components include extensive field experience, integrative coursework, cohort structure, and collaborative partnerships. Data sources consist of attitude surveys, performance based assessments, and interviews.

Findings reveal preservice teachers' positive attitudes toward the middle level program and its components.

## Middle Start CSR: Show Me The Evidence of Effectiveness!

(Presented by Steven B. Mertens, Nancy Flowers, CPRD, University of Illinois)

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## Paper Session: Maintaining Successful Middle Schools

### Middle School Voices On Advisory

(Presented by Jennifer Goodwin, Teachers' College, Columbia University)

The findings of this qualitative study show that students at New York Middle School experience advisory through two interconnected components, the advisory group and the advisor-advisee dyad. In both of these components, students' experiences are shaped by an interplay of activities, roles, and relations, which are the basic components of a microsystem, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. Through the synergy of these two components students experience advisory as helping them to make sense of their school experience; provide them with a sense of belonging; and support for negotiating their relationships with students and teachers. Having advisory also means they have an adult they can talk to who is attentive to their needs and provides academic support. The dyadic relationship provides flexibility so that advisory can meet the varying social, emotional, and academic needs of the students.

## Keeping the Faith When the Going is Tough: How One Team Accomplished Success in a Struggling Middle School

(Presented by David B. Straham, Krystal Layell, UNC Greensboro)

Recent investigations have identified characteristics of teachers who have been successful in high poverty, urban middle schools. This case study chronicled ways that one team accomplished success in a school where academic growth was generally low. During the 2001-2002 school year, a university supervisor and a student teacher functioned as participant observers with a two-teacher team whose students have done well on state-mandated achievement tests. Researchers observed lessons, gathered samples of student work, and interviewed teachers. Results documented three principle ways that this team promoted academic achievement. Teachers (a) created a

climate of shared responsibility through team building and positive discipline, (b) taught explicit strategies for performing academic tasks, and (c) developed instructional activities that linked inquiry, collaboration, and real-world experiences. Among the challenges this team faced in sustaining success were assisting new colleagues with discipline, implementing mandated programs, and devoting increased time to testing. Results extend our understanding of the dynamic of caring in action that fuel success in challenging settings. Case descriptions suggest that this school and others who wish to increase student performance in similar settings will need to offer teachers higher levels of personal support.

## Evaluating Middle Grades Students' Quantitative Literacy

(Presented by David K. Pugalee, Kim Hartman, University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

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## Paper Discussions: Middle Level Teacher Development

## Sharing the Responsibility: A University-School District Investigation of Middle School Transition

(Presented by Sandra A. Deemer, Suzanne McCotter, Nancy Smith, Millersville University)

Given the developmental, academic, and social difficulties that often accompany the transition from elementary school to middle school, administrators from a local school district approached university faculty for advice and assistance in gathering and analyzing data on the issue of

## June 2003

middle school transition. The purposes of this collaborative study were to 1) investigate students' perceptions regarding their learning environments and 2) suggest interventions that would aid the district in creating developmentally appropriate practices at the secondary level. Working in collaboration with district personnel and university professors, graduate students in a research methods course aided in the design and analysis of both survey and interview protocols. Descriptive analyses of survey data demonstrated that, although the needs of many students were being met, there was a substantial number of students who felt as though they were neither succeeding in school, nor had the support systems necessary to succeed. Interviews with struggling students revealed themes of disconnectedness, more academic rigor, social victimization, and lack of parent involvement. Students who had trouble with the transition to high school were also likely to have struggled at the elementary level, necessitating a focus on these students at both elementary and secondary levels, as well as at the transition point.

### The Development and Impact of Principal Leadership Self-Efficacy in Middle Level Schools (Presented by Stephen E. Lucas, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

This study investigates the development of leadership self-efficacy in the principals of the Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools network. Set within Bandura's work on the development of self-efficacy and *Turning Points 2000*, the paper will report the following preliminary results from the first two phases of the study:

- The educational, career, and professional development backgrounds of middle level principals;
- The middle level leadership efficacy of the principals in the

seven domains of effective middle level practice;

- The differences in levels of self-reported middle level leadership efficacy among principals with primarily middle school and non-middle school backgrounds;
- The implementation of key middle school design components in the schools;
- The relationships between the self-reported middle level leadership efficacy of the principals and teacher-perceived implementation of key middle school design components in the schools.

The third phase of this study—the interview of a stratified sample of participating principals—will be conducted during May and June, 2003, and will seek to develop understanding of middle school principal self-efficacy in relation to these preliminary findings.

### Transition from Elementary to Middle School and Changes in Motivation: An Examination of Chinese Students

(Presented by Ping Liu, Cal State U. Long Beach)

### Using Characteristics of Effective Teachers to Encourage Meaningful Teacher Talk and Provide Direction for Professional Development (Presented by Sara D. Powell, College of Charleston)

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## Paper Session: Comprehensive Transformation of Middle Schools

### Students' Perceptions of the Impact of a Curriculum Integration Experience on Their Learning (Presented by Dave F. Brown, West Chester university)

Thirteen former 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who spent a year designing their own curriculum in a curriculum integration project were interviewed to determine their perspectives on the academic value of this experience. The students interviewed were from three separate years of participating in the curriculum integration experience. Respondents believe that their year in their experience improved their skills in reading, writing, social studies, and science MORE than a traditional curricular classroom experience would have. Interviewees also believe that through designing the curriculum themselves they improved their performance in their critical and creative thinking skills, problem solving abilities, research skills, and skills in working with others MORE than they would have in a traditional curriculum format. The majority of students noted that the curriculum integration project had no impact on their standardized test scores. Those students who entered high school believe that this experience prepared them well for high school academic requirements.

### Middle Level Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Preparation Programs, School Organization and Middle Level Teacher Licensure in Oregon (Presented by Maureen Masser, Willamette University; Michael Dalton, Oregon University System; William Greene, Southern Oregon University; Marilyn Olson, University of Oregon; Linda Samek, Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission)

In 2000—2002, at the urging of the Oregon Middle Level Consortium, a project was conducted that resulted in the “Oregon Research Report: Middle Level Licensure Study,” a report of survey results about principals’ perceptions of new teachers, instructional organization, and licensure issues for the middle level. While analyzing the results of this study, a group of teacher educators with particular interest in middle level issues surfaced four tensions apparent in the data: teaming without common planning time, instructional change without adequate transition, social/emotional activity needs competing with academic/intellectual engagement needs, and integrated curriculum with subject-specific assessments. Each of these tensions has implications for teacher preparation programs.

This paper describes school demographics, redesigned middle level licensure policies in Oregon, the original study results, findings related to identified tensions, and implications for preparation of middle level teachers. Preparing middle level teachers for both best practices and the reality of what exists in schools is a daunting task, and a number of questions are proposed for ongoing research at the middle level.

**Cohorts in Middle Level Teacher Education: A Comparison of Student and Teacher Perceptions** (Presented by Joanne M. Arhar, Kent State University)

**Middle School Learners: Perspectives of the Volunteer Tutors** (Presented by Elizabeth G. Sturtevant, C. Stephen White, Julie Kidd, Kristy Dunlap, Carla Deniz, George Mason University)

**Helping Middle Level Teachers to Become Leaders for Change** (Presented by Paul D. Deering, Anne A. Ashford, University of Hawaii)

**Infusing the Middle School Curriculum with Career Exploration: What Are Middle Schools Doing to Prepare At-risk Students for High School and Beyond, and What More Could They Be Doing?** (Presented by Marisa E. Castellano, Johns Hopkins University)

**Involving Middle School Students as Co-Researchers of Their Media Environment** (Presented by Sandra V. Turner, Phyllis Bernt, Joseph Bernt, Ohio University)

**The Impact of Home Life, School Environment, and Peers on the Classroom Achievement of Middle Grades Students** (Presented by Dawson R. Hancock, Jeanneine P. Jones, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte; William Dee Nichols,

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**Paper Session:  
Middle Level  
Teacher  
Development**

**Middle Level Teacher Preparation: The Impact of the Portfolio Experience on Teachers’ Professional Development** (Presented by Anne N. Ashford, Hawaii Department of Education; Paul D. Deering, University of Hawaii)

This study examined how participants in the Masters in Secondary Education with a Middle Level Emphasis Program (MLMED) at the University of Hawaii perceived their personal experiences with the portfolio process in shaping their middle level teacher preparation and professional practices. The process involved understanding a standards-based teacher portfolio, generating evidence or artifacts, discussing artifacts, sharing portfolio progress, generating reflective writing, defending the portfolio, and using the portfolio following program completion. This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of the participants regarding the effects of the Portfolio process on their professional practices?
2. Which features of the MLMED Portfolio most contribute to or inhibit professional growth?

This study used qualitative case methods that focused on the portfolio process, as framed by three criteria; a social unit (MLMED Cohort One and Cohort Two participants); the period of portfolio construction and use (starting in June of 1996 for Cohort One, to

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**Paper Discussion:  
Middle Level SIG**

**Building an Effective Volunteer Tutoring Program to Meet the Needs of Diverse**

August, 2001 for both Cohorts); the experience of these two Cohorts with this process (constructing and using an exit portfolio). The sample included all of the 62 participants of MLMED Cohort One and Cohort Two; fifth-eight percent consented to participate in this study. Research instruments included electron open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews. This study reveals three major findings:

1. As part of a structured program that included sustained collegial support, the MLMED portfolio leads to perceptions of improved professional practice: i.e., improved pedagogy, more adolescent-centered curricula, and leadership beyond the classroom.
2. The MLMED portfolio process promotes: a deep understanding of the professional standards of middle level educators; and motivation for teachers to see themselves as effective agents in the larger picture of the school systems in which they work.
3. The MLMED portfolio process is an effective professional development model, and aligns with criteria for effective professional development.

Subsequent to the portfolio experience, the participants' estimation of their professional capabilities grew and took form in their willingness to seek and assume more leadership roles.

### Transition and Neophyte Strategies for Success in Middle School (Presented by Patrick Akos, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

In response to the 2000 Virginia state writing prompt, eighth grade students wrote a letter of advice to a sixth grader coming to middle school for the first time. A purposeful sample of over 5,000 writing responses was collected. Content analysis of a random sample of 350 responses revealed themes in advice for students negotiating the transition to middle school. Content analysis

revealed that organizational themes were mentioned more frequently than personal/social or academic themes. The most frequently mentioned themes in each category were choosing and changing classes or electives, improving study habits, and making and managing friends. Data also revealed wide diversity in advice and a robust sense of student agency, including recommendations of student attitudes and attributes that were deemed important for new middle school students. Implications for school personnel are discussed and future research directions are presented.

### A National Evaluation of the Success of an Alternative Middle School Model for Urban Minority Children (Presented by L. Michey Fenzel, Loyola college in MD; Debby Deal, Loyola College)

The present study is a pilot investigation of six alternative urban middle schools for students of color that follow the Nativity model that emphasizes small class and school site, extended instruction, and strong relationships with family. The six schools included in the present study are found in five different urban locations in the U.S. In five of the six schools students showed improvements in standardized test scores in reading and math that exceeded one grade level per year and high grade 6-to-8 persistence rates. Across all schools, student academic performance was found to be related to principals' perceptions of parents' commitment to their child's education, students' social mature ratings, ratings of students' leadership, and, to a lesser extent, student academic effort. School data show that student academic performance was related negatively to school size, average class size, and student-teacher ratio and positively to the expenditure for teacher salaries per student. This preliminary research will serve to inform a more extensive

investigation of the model to include factors such as the quality of administrative leadership and teaching.

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## Symposium: Perspectives on Middle Level Student Achievement

(Facilitated by Joanne M. Arhar, Kent State University)

### *What Counts as 'Achievement?' Looking at a "New Literacy" Middle School Classroom* (Presented by William Kist, Kent State University)

Based on a long-term research study, this presentation will describe how "new literacies" teachers conceptualize achievement in their classrooms. "New literacies" teachers seek to broaden the conception of "literacy" in their classrooms to embrace multiple forms of representation. "Student achievement" in these classrooms is demonstrated via alternative assignments and assessments that will be described.

### Learning Organizations, Leadership, and Student Learning

(Presented by Sue C. Thompson, University of Missouri, Kansas City; Larry Gregg, University of Missouri, Kansas City; John M. Niska, Rhode Island College)

Through a study of six middle school principals, this presentation will answer the following questions:

- What a learning organization looks like in a middle school;

- What kind of principal creates a learning organization in his/her school;
- What are the beliefs and dispositions of such a leader;
- Whether teachers perceive their school to be a learning organization; and
- Is there a relationship between a learning organization, leadership, and student learning?

**Competing Paradigms, Student Achievement, and the Role of Teachers as Decision Makers** (Presented by Joanne Arhar, Kent State University)

**Research on the Middle-School Concept and Student Achievement: Inconclusive and Complex** (Presented by Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

**The Impact of Team and Classroom Practices on Student Achievement** (Presented by Steven Mertens, Center for Prevention Research and Development)

**Student Learning, Teacher's Perceptions, District Standards: The Jury is Still Out** (Presented by Larry Holt, University of Central Florida)

# Minutes of the MLER SIG Business Meeting

**AERA**  
Chicago, IL  
24 April 2003  
6:15-7:15p.m.

By Kathleen Roney, Rosemont College

1. Introductions: President Vincent Anfara opened the meeting by welcoming new and present members, and by introducing SIG Officers.  
Vince awarded Kathleen Brown a plaque from the MLER SIG in gratitude for her years of service as Newsletter editor. Kathy Malu, the co-editor, was also thanked. Kathy Malu was not in attendance, so her plaque was mailed to her.
2. MLER Graduate Student Award Recipient. Barb Whinery introduced Nancy Barnes Mansberger, Ed.D. of Western Michigan University. Dr. Mansberger gave a brief description of her work entitled: *AFTER TURNING POINTS: EVIDENCE OF THE ADOPTION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORMS IN THE UNITED STATES 1987-2000*. (Abstract of the paper is found on page 9 of this month's newsletter.)
3. Election and Voting Results. Joan Lindgren was not in attendance so Vincent Anfara reported on results of recent elections.
  - a. Kathleen Roney was elected Vice President of MLER SIG.
  - b. Revisions to Constitution and By-Laws, Article VI were approved.
4. Membership Database Update. Vincent Anfara distributed the most recent membership list from AERA. Members were asked to check the accuracy of their mailing information. Corrections were to be placed on the accompanying tablet. An updated database will be created.

5. Research Interest Update. Micki Caskey provided members with a survey on which a list of research descriptors were specified. Members were to identify their top four research interests. Information regarding the research interests of members will be posted to the MLER SIG website.
6. Middle School Database Project: Field Research Associates Needed. David Hough distributed a "Call" for Assistance. The NMSA National Data Base Planning Team (NDBPT) is accepting applications from interested scholars and researchers for consideration of participation as field researchers. [See article on page 12 of this newsletter for details.]
7. Program Report. Kim Hartman offered congratulations to presenters, chairs, discussants, reviewers for the helping to create the full schedule of paper sessions, table discussions, and the symposium at this year's AERA. Kim encouraged members to submit proposals, volunteer to chair and/or serve as discussant at subsequent conferences.  
Vince Anfara announced that MLER is the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> largest SIG at AERA. Vince encouraged members to recommend their colleagues for membership in the SIG. Vince offered to write personal letters of invitation on the new stationery to those recommended by current members.
8. Treasurer's Report. Nancy Mizelle was not in attendance but advised Vincent Anfara to report that there is \$1326.87 in the account. Recent expenditures were made to purchase a table skirt and a display board with the MLER logo—both of which are available to members for display at their local state association and other conferences.
9. Newsletter. Kathleen Roney announced that the MLER Newsletter is moving to the electronic format. The next two issues will be distributed in hard copy, after that, the newsletter will be sent in soft copy. Copies will be archived on the website.

Kathy invited members to submit short articles—one that might outline a current research project, review a piece of literature, etc. Sue Thompson will take the lead and submit a Book Review for the next issue. [See p.xx this issue]

- 10. Website. Micki Caskey encouraged members to use the website as a resource. Micki clarified that the website can be accessed directly <[www.middlelevel.pdx.edu](http://www.middlelevel.pdx.edu)> or through the AERA website.
- 11. Updates: (a) New Logo; (b) Display Unit/Table Skirt.
  - a. Vincent Anfara announced that MLER SIG has a new logo [as shown on this newsletter].
  - b. The SIG now has a table skirt and display board. They are easy to carry and can be shipped to members upon request. Members are asked to contact Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., at [vanafra@utk.edu](mailto:vanafra@utk.edu).
- 12. Report from the Executive Committee Meeting. Dick Lipka reported.
  - a. Creation of SIG Historian. Ron Williams has agreed to serve as SIG Historian. This will require a change to the SIG Constitution. A ballot will be sent to members. Subsequent issues of the newsletter will feature the "Historian's Corner." Ron has agreed to produce a full rendering of the SIG's history, which will be submitted to Information Age Publishing for publication.
  - b. SIG/NAPoMLE. A round table conversation will be held in Atlanta during the NMSA fall '03 conference to discuss the collaboration.
  - c. It was suggested that MLER SIG consult with the Adolescence SIG. There may be an opportunity to increase membership in MLER if Adolescence would like to join us.
- 13. New Business
  - a. Dick announced his interest in gathering a group of educational researchers for social responsibility.

- b. Vincent Anfara announced that Handbook series Volume 4, edited by Sue Thompson, is scheduled for release at AERA in San Diego (2004). Micki Caskey is editor of Volume 5, on the topic of Action Research. Proposals are being accepted.

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## News From AERA

By Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., Ph.D.

On Thursday, April 24, 2003, the SIG Executive Committee of AERA met with SIG Chairs and other interested SIG leaders. Notes from the meeting follow:

### 1. MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

As discussed in previous e-mails from me last summer, after the AERA Council met, and in October, after the "Coordinated Committees" meeting in Chicago, AERA put out for bid a contract for software to keep and analyze membership records. Phoebe Stevenson updated us on this process, and answered questions. The new contracted system is called NOAH. Upon implementation over the next 2 or 3 months, we will see major changes in how AERA members can access and update their own membership information. For example, members can join AERA or SIGs on-line using credit cards. They can look at all their data in the database, to make sure it is correct. They will see EXACTLY the same record that AERA staff will see. Each member will have this access based on a personal password. They will be able to change selected fields themselves (e.g., update an e-mail address or other mailing address).

SIG leaders will have broader capabilities to access the system on a password-protected basis. For example, a SIG Chair can himself/herself create and immediately download a membership roster or a list of member e-mails that are accurate at any given

moment of time, without any involvement of AERA staff. That's the GOOD news. That's also the BAD news. This means in the near future program space will be allocated based on number of AERA members who are active in a given SIG (i.e., no more "hold harmless" in allocating program space). And, any SIG that in two contiguous years, once records are accurate, has fewer than 30 members, WILL BE SUNSET. [However, SIGs can, upon the joint request of the involved SIGs, ask the SIG Executive Committee to approve mergers. Or SIGs can request name changes to facilitate a broader appeal.]

### 2. 2004 AERA PROGRAM SOFTWARE

On Monday, AERA Council voted to terminate the TIGER proposal processing system. Proposals for the 2004 meeting will be submitted using software developed by All Academic, a company that has created such software for other professional associations. There will be on-line training for SIG Program Chairs by mid-summer. This will be widely available. I encourage several leaders in a given SIG to access this training. The company will also provide some phone-in support in using the system this year. The software will create e-mails warning of approaching deadlines. Also, SIG leaders can "back stop" SIG Program Chairs to insure that deadlines are being met, via accessing web-based summaries of progress in doing program tasks. Last year some SIG Program Chairs did not perform tasks, unbeknownst to other SIG leaders. Because this year SIGs will lose their program space if deadlines are not met, it is important to have back-up mechanisms so that the system is not "single point of failure."

### 3. 2004 SIG SCHEDULES

We asked, and Phoebe Stevenson agreed, that (1) NO SIG BUSINESS MEETINGS would be scheduled anywhere except evening "off hours", and (2) nothing else would be scheduled in these hours, UNLESS the SIG Program Chair overrides these requests by filing in "Special Request" boxes for



the involved sessions. You can also use the "Special Request" boxes to ask that your Business meeting not be scheduled against that of a particular SIG, or, conversely, you can make a "Special Request" that named SIGs do have their business meetings all at the same time.

We also asked, and Phoebe agreed, that NO TWO sessions of a given SIG would EVER be scheduled against each other, unless there is a "Special Request" to do so.

4. 2004 THEME

The 2004 Program theme will be something like "Enhancing the Visibility and Credibility of Educational Research," with sub themes focusing on (a) Brown vs Board at age 50, (b) justifying evidence-based claims, and (c) research on understanding the processes on teacher change and support mechanisms.

Each year the AERA President and the general Program Chair create about 30 theme-related sessions. This year divisions and SIGs can propose some of these sessions directly to the Program Chair, Ralph Putnam (ralphp@msu.edu). If accepted, the sessions would then be co-sponsored by both AERA and the division or SIG. This is an exciting way to increase your program space and visibility, if you can come up with dynamite ideas related to areas of the program theme.

## School Reforms in the United States 1987-2000

The purpose of this study was to explore the adoption by U.S. middle schools of key practices recommended by the 1989 *Turning Points* report. Three questions were examined: (1) To what extent have the organizational practices identified by research to impact the development of "small learning communities" been adopted by U.S. middle schools? (2) To what extent do the instructional practices of U.S. middle school teachers reflect developmentally responsive or traditional/bureaucratic methods?, and (3) Do the instructional practices of U.S. middle school teachers differ between those who teach in schools with developmentally responsive organizational practices and those who teach in schools with more traditional/bureaucratic organizational practices?

National data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics through the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey was extracted for this study. A sample of 423 fulltime sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers of core academic subjects was derived from the 1994-95 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) component. Frequency distributions were run on five dimensions of organizational practices identified with the development of "small learning communities", in order to determine the extent of use of each practice in U.S. middle schools. Mean levels of the use of fourteen instructional practices identified as "active"/developmentally responsive and eleven as "passive"/traditional practices were computed and categorized in rank order to examine the predominant instructional practices of U.S. middle school teachers. One-way ANOVAs were run to compare instructional practices of teachers who teach in schools with developmentally responsive organizational practices and those who teach in schools with more traditional/bureaucratic organizational practices.

Findings indicated that 7.1 percent of U.S. middle schools could be characterized as having organizational practices that support the development of "small learning communities", while the organizational practices of 43.7 percent reflected a traditional/bureaucratic" pattern. Passive learning activities were more frequently employed than were active and/or developmentally responsive instructional strategies: Seven of the top ten most frequently used teaching methods found in the study reflected traditional, teacher-centered practices. Examination of the differences between the instructional practices of teachers in schools reflecting developmentally responsive organizational practices to those in schools with more traditional, bureaucratic organizations provided some, though slight, evidence that teachers in schools organized as "small communities of learning" reported more frequent use of nine of the ten selected developmentally responsive instructional practices than did teachers in the more traditionally-organized schools.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision*

By Peter Irons, Viking Penguin, New York, NY, 2002, 347 pp. , \$29.95, ISBN: 0-670-88918-0

(Reviewed by Sue C. Thompson)

Secretary of Education Rod Paige stated at the forum at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History to kickoff the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brown decision in May 2004, that the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court case stands as one of the greatest decisions ever handed down by the Supreme Court. This case set the stage for the dismantling of Jim Crow traditions and practices in the South and

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## MLER SIG Award Winner

Nancy Barnes  
Mansberger, Ed.D  
Western Michigan  
University

After *Turning Points*:  
Evidence of the  
Adoption of Middle

has had a profound impact on social equity and justice in the United States.

Peter Irons' recently published book *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision*, is a must read book for every educator who struggles with issues related to desegregation and equal educational opportunities for every child, adolescent and adult in the United States. Mr. Irons follows the struggles of these efforts from the 1894 lawsuit filed in Boston by Benjamin Roberts, after his five-year-old daughter was turned away from the primary school nearest her home "on the ground of her being a colored person" and beyond the Brown decision in 1954, through the desegregation cases, among others, in Little Rock, Arkansas, Prince Edward County, Virginia, Birmingham, Alabama, Charlotte, North Carolina, Detroit, Michigan, Boston, Massachusetts, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and Kansas City, Missouri.

Irons states that the Supreme Court's trio of rulings between 1991 and 1995 in the *Dowell*, *Freeman*, and *Jenkins* cases "effectively closed the doors of federal courts to black parents whose children were now consigned to "separate and unequal" schools" (p. 289) and eroded the *Brown* decision in Supreme Court rulings in the 1990s. Now with the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, it is evident that separate and unequal is not going to support the intent of this legislation, which is to ensure that "all students will be given the opportunity and resources to achieve" (George, 2002, p. 20).

Perhaps the most provocative role of Irons' book is to challenge the current state of education in America today. While the Brown case, without a doubt, changed the political, social and racial framework of the country, as Irons points out, "The number of black children in schools that were between 90 and 100 percent black—and could properly be called Jim Crow schools—has also increased during the past decade" (p. 292). Irons makes the point that segregation affects students of all races. He quotes the 2001 Civil Rights Project at Harvard University entitled

*Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation* as saying that "white students are by far the most segregated in schools dominated by their own group. Whites on average attend schools where less than a fifth of the students are from all other groups combined" (p. 292). This, in light of the fact that there is only a generation before the entire country becomes majority non-white or non-European in origin.

As middle level educators who are committed to creating high-performing middle schools that are academically challenging, developmentally responsive and socially equitable, Irons' book will refresh our understanding of the role that history has played in creating the schools that we have today and make us question the kinds of schools we must build to meet the needs of our students today to live as adults in tomorrow's world.

Sue C. Thompson is an assistant professor in the Urban Leadership and Policy Studies in Education Division of the School of Education, University of Missouri, Kansas City.

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## Spring Ahead with the MLER Website

[www.middlelevel.pdx.edu](http://www.middlelevel.pdx.edu)

By Micki M. Caskey, Portland State University, [caskeym@pdx.edu](mailto:caskeym@pdx.edu)

The MLER Website is a valuable resource for middle level researchers and educators. Not only is our SIG's website continually updated, it also provides announcements about upcoming events and serves as a record of previous activities. Take a stroll around our website to see how it has blossomed.

*Conferences and Meetings* links to the foremost middle level gatherings

of the year and including AERA's Annual Meeting and NMSA's Annual Conference. A recap of the recent Symposium on Middle Level Teacher Preparation is just a "click" away. Other past events are found in our archives. Springing ahead, you can find the sites of future AERA meetings and NMSA conferences. Also read the Calls for Proposals that are listed.

A visit to the *Constitution and Bylaws* section reveals the MLER-SIG's purpose is "to improve, promote, and disseminate educational research reflecting early adolescence and middle level education". This document of organization is always available for your reference.

Please be sure to view the SIG's 2003 Graduate Student Award Recipient, Nancy Barnes Mansberger, who is showcased in the *Graduate Student Award* section. Read an abstract of her research entitled, *After Turning Points: Evidence of the Adoption of Middle School Reforms in the U.S. 1987-2000*.

Other sections are also constructive. The *Membership* section invites individuals to become members of MLER, while the *Officers* section identifies the leaders of our group. Openings in the middle level field are posted on the *Position Announcements* page. Find other middle level resources in *Related Web Sites*. Though changes are planned for the *Research Interests* section, it remains a key source for middle level expertise.

See our *Publications* section for past issues of *The Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research*, book announcements, calls for manuscripts, and abstracts from recently presented papers. If you have a call for papers or a publication that you would like posted, please contact Micki at [caskeym@pdx.edu](mailto:caskeym@pdx.edu).

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Visit the MLER-SIG website often!  
Like spring, ideas for enriching the  
website are always welcome.

Vince Anfara at [vanfara@utk.edu](mailto:vanfara@utk.edu) The  
deadline date for voting is July 10,  
2003.

of this “call” to the NMSA Research  
Poster Session Chair:  
Dr. David Hough, Dean College of  
Education  
Southwest Missouri State University  
205 E. St. Louis Street, Suite #203  
Springfield, MO 65806  
Phone: (417) 836-5254; VOICE: (417)  
836-8853; FAX: (417) 836-8881;  
e-mail: [DavidHough@smsu.edu](mailto:DavidHough@smsu.edu)

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## Proposed Revision to MLER Constitution & By-Laws

By Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., President

The Association Council met in Chicago and decided to put before the membership a proposal for the addition of a historian as a SIG officer. Dick Lipka spoke briefly at the business meeting about the need to document our history as we experience tremendous growth as an organization. The SIG’s history will be published in booklet format and will be made available to all SIG members.

Specifically, we are asking that Article VI, Section 7 of the Constitution and By-laws be amended to read, “*The Editor(s) of the newsletter, the Web Manager, and the Historian will be ex-officio, non-voting members of the Executive Committee. The Editor(s) of the newsletter shall publish a minimum of three newsletters annually. The Web Manager shall: (1) keep the SIG’s website update, and (2) provide the general membership with easy electronic access to information regarding SIG-sponsored activities. The Historian shall keep the SIG’s history current and submit an annual report at the AERA business meeting.*”

The Historian’s term of office would be set by the historian, and upon resignation, the Association Council will seek someone to fill the vacant position.

The Association Council requests that the membership agrees to the creation of this office and that Ron Williamson be appointed as our first historian. Please send your vote on this matter to



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## CALL For PROPOSALS

### “ADDRESSING THE AGENDA” NMSA RESEARCH POSTER SESSION

Atlanta, Georgia  
6-8 November 2003

By David Hough, Editor RMLE Online

The NMSA Research Committee invites all interested beginning researchers and scholars to submit proposals to present poster session papers to the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual NMSA Conference. We especially encourage graduate students, beginning researchers, and/or assistant professors to submit. Papers will necessarily vary in length, but most should range from 15 to 25 pages (4,000 to 8,000 words). Format should follow APA, 5<sup>th</sup> edition guidelines.

### Proposal Submission

To submit a proposal to present, please send the cover page information requested, per the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph above

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## “Call” For Assistance: Wanted

### A Few Good Field Researchers

The NMSA National Data Base Planning Team (NDBPT) is accepting applications from interested scholars and researchers for consideration of participation as a Field Research Associate (FRA). FRAs will collect data by assisting the NDBPT in the administration and collection of survey questionnaires and will conduct site visits to middle level schools where they will schedule and conduct three 40 minute focus group interviews—one each with 5-12 teachers, 5-12 parents, and 5-12 students; interview the school principal; and observe middle level programs taking place in each school. All focus groups, personal interviews, and observations will follow a predetermined, structured protocol. The NDBPT anticipates data collection by FRAs to begin as soon as spring 2004, pending funding.

*Qualifications:* Thirty FRAs will be chosen by the NDBPT based on the following criteria: Applicant’s research

**June 2003**

experience; geographic proximity to sample schools; ability to follow through with commitment to the project; ability to facilitate focus groups, interviews, and observations; ability to analyze/write/report qualitative findings; availability to visit sample schools during the normal school day and procure their own support for this travel.

*Application Process.* Interested scholars and researchers must complete and submit by September 2, 2003 an application form; a letter of interest (not to exceed 250 words); a letter of support from the college, university or other organization to which the individual is responsible; and a resume or vitae to Dr. David Hough, Dean College of Education, Institute for School Improvement, 205 E. St. Louis Street, Suite #203, Springfield, MO 65806.

## Call for Manuscripts & Papers!

### Action Research at the Middle Level: Teachers and Administrators in Action

The fifth volume of *The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education* will focus on action research conducted at the middle level by teachers, administrators, and researchers. Contributors are encouraged to submit manuscripts that target such areas as content area teaching methods, effective instructional strategies, parent involvement, developmentally appropriate practices, technology, literacy, etc.

Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in this series. All copy should be typed, double-spaced, on standard white paper and should follow the style in the fifth edition of the *Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association*. Manuscripts should be 20-30 pages in length and include a 100-word abstract. Author's information (affiliation, address, phone numbers, e-mail) should appear only on the cover page.

Deadline Date for submissions: January 15, 2004. To submit manuscripts and for additional information, please contact:

Micki M. Caskey, Ph.D.  
Portland State University  
Graduate School of Education  
P.O. Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207-0751  
Work: 503/725-4749  
Email: caskeym@pdx.edu

Kathleen Roney, Ed.D.  
Vice President, MLER SIG  
Rosemont College  
1400 Montgomery Avenue  
Rosemont, PA 19010



## Ballot for Revision to MLER Constitution and Bylaws

\_\_\_\_\_ I accept the proposed revision to the Middle Level Education Research  
SIG's Constitution and Bylaws.

\_\_\_\_\_ I reject the proposed revision to the Middle Level Education SIG's  
Constitution and Bylaws.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please cast your vote: Options...

- Email to Vince Anfara at [vanfara@utk.edu](mailto:vanfara@utk.edu)

- U.S. mail to

Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.  
The University of Tennessee  
College of Education  
A321 Claxton Addition  
Knoxville, TN 37996

- MLER SIG website at [www.middlelevel.pdx.edu](http://www.middlelevel.pdx.edu)

**N. B.** Results of the vote on the proposed revision to the SIG's Constitution  
will be announced over the SIG's listserv and on the MLER website.