

MLER

MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION RESEARCH
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

The Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research

June 2006

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Message from The President

June 2006

*Kathleen Roney
University of North
Carolina Wilmington*



It was great seeing so many of you at AERA/San Francisco. On behalf of the members of our SIG, allow me to thank, once again, those of you who reviewed proposals, presented research, chaired sessions, served as discussants, and attended as participants. Micki Caskey, our Program Chair, not only put together a great program, she

organized a reception for us with members of the Adolescent SIG. Thank you, Micki, you did a fabulous job! I am sure her message to you in this edition of our newsletter echoes my gratitude to you and I am sure she will invite you to do the same for AERA/Chicago. Please take a look at her report.

We also had a very good—fun, spirited, productive—Business Meeting during the conference. Please take a look at the minutes I prepared and included in this issue of the newsletter.

As you know, we have a very hard-working Council. For example, newly elected Councilor Penny Bishop has already volunteered to facilitate the nominations for next year's graduate student award. So, please send her your nominations. And, as Past-President, Vince Anfa is always urging us to bring in new members. So, please send him the names and addresses of potential

members. And, I call your attention to Article VII of our Constitutions regarding the SIG Association Council, which states, "...A graduate student may be included (appointed or elected) as an eighth council member. Council members must be current with both AERA and SIG membership dues." Please consider nominating a graduate student, or self-nominating if you are a graduate student, for this position. We very much would like your help on the Council with representing the issues of our graduate student members. I would like to have these nominations by August 1, 2006 so that I can conduct an election prior to our Business Meeting during NMSA/ Nashville.

I am happy to announce that Sue Thompson, Kim Hartman, and David Payton have agreed to serve on our Policy Subcommittee. Stay tuned for messages from them through our listserv. As you know, the MLER SIG has approved two Policy Briefs—*High Stakes Testing and Middle Level Principal Preparation and Licensure*. But we are aware of other issues of importance to middle

level education. Certainly NMSA's newest publication entitled, *Success in the Middle: A Policymaker's Guide to Achieving Quality Middle Level Education* (2006), invites us to speak on behalf of the young adolescents in our middle grades schools. I am confident that our SIG can provide some positive direction through its Policy Briefs to those who wish to take up the call and advocate for the improvement of middle level education.

Allow me to close with a sentiment from the writer Henry James: "Summer afternoon - summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language." I do hope you get to enjoy some lovely summer afternoons.

Best regards, Kathy

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**Are you Ready?
NMSA**



MLER SIG Officers

Kathleen Rooney, President
University of North Carolina,
Wilmington
roneyk@uncw.edu

Micki M. Caskey, President-Elect/
Program Chair
Portland State University
caskeym@pdx.edu

Sue Thompson, Vice President
University of Missouri –
Kansas City
sethompson@sprintmail.com

Nancy Mizelle, Treasurer (2004-
2006) Georgia College and
State University
nancy.mizelle@gcsu.edu

Joan Lindgren, Secretary (2004-
2006) Florida Atlantic University
jlindgre@fau.edu

Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., Past
President(2004-2006)
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
vanfara@utk.edu

Kimberly J. Hartman, Past President
University of North Carolina at
Charlotte
khartman@email.uncc.edu

Newsletter Co-Editors

Maureen Musser
Willamette University
mmusser@willamette.edu

Sue Thompson
University of Missouri
Kansas City
sethompson@sprintmail.com

Website Manager

Micki M. Caskey
Portland State University
caskeym@pdx.edu

SIG Association Council Member

P. Gayle Andrews (2005-2007)
Steven Mertens (2005-2007)
Elizabeth Pate (2005-2007)
John Niska (2006-2008)
Richard Lipka (2006-2008)
Larry Daniel (2006-2008)
Penny Bishop (2006-2008)

Report from the Program Chair

*By Micki M. Caskey
Portland State University*

MLER SIG Highlights from AERA's 2006 Annual Meeting

The MLER SIG had an impressive program at AERA's 2006 Annual Meeting. The SIG's program included 27 papers in paper sessions, paper discussion, and a symposium. Additionally, the MLER SIG conducted an executive council meeting, a business meeting, and a reception with the Adolescence SIG. Ensuring the success of our program were the session chairs and discussants. These include session chairs Annie J. Daniel (Dillard University), Stacy L. Dezutter (Washington University in St. Louis), Eileen Reilich (Saint Martin's University), and Sue C. Thompson (University of Missouri-Kansas City) and discussants Dave Brown (West Chester University), Robert M. Capraro (Texas A & M University), and Suzanne S. McCotter (Millersville University).

Abstracts for papers presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting in San

Francisco can be found on page 10 of this newsletter.

AERA's 2007 Annual Meeting

Next year the 2007 Annual Meeting will be Monday April 9 to Friday April 13 in Chicago, IL. It is time to submit proposals for this event. For SIGs, the proposal submission system is open from June 2nd to August 2nd.

We are looking to increase the number of submission to the MLER SIG, since AERA is using the number of proposal submissions to determine our session allotment. We encourage you to submit a proposal for the MLER SIG.

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Book Review

*By Jennifer Friend, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Urban Leadership &
Policy Studies in
Education
University of Missouri-
Kansas City
friendji@umkc.edu*

Bringing Equity Back: Research for a New Era in American Educational Policy

Editors: Petrovich, J. & Wells, A.S. ©2005 New York, NY: Teachers College Press

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform identifies three elements of high performing middle-level schools: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity. This collection of twelve essays addresses the shift in school reform efforts over the past two decades to focus on academic excellence at the expense of efforts to promote equity in education. The book presents a case for the necessity of policymakers to promote democratic schools through a balanced approach that includes equity and excellence for all students.

The volume begins with two essays describing the context for current educational policies. Petrovich provides statistical evidence of increasing student diversity and a widening of the socio-economic gap in the United States. Gittell examines the politics of equity in nine states and the discrepancies that exist in funding for urban and suburban school districts.

Mickelson begins the second part with a description of desegregated schools in Charlotte, North Carolina. The effects of tracking on racial equity are presented as “second-generation segregation” in this essay, and in the chapter that follows by Welner and Oakes. Their presentation of litigation in three communities examines the impact of mandates on efforts to promote educational equity. Clarke, Madaus, and Shore explore the relationship between testing, educational resources such as advanced placement courses and teacher quality, and college admissions, which results in limited opportunities for students of color. The inequities are further investigated by Federman and Pachón through their study of advanced placement course offerings in California.

Part III is titled, “Education Reform Since the 1980s: Excellence Trumps Equity.” The six chapters in this section address reforms related to school choice: (1) New American Schools urban high-poverty whole-school reform (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby), (2) single-gender academies in California (Datnow & Hubbard), (3) equity issues in the implementation of California charter schools (Wells, Scott, Lopez, &

Holme), (4) educational vouchers and the exacerbation of segregation by race and class (Shapiro & Johnson), (5) the voucher system in Chile, which did not improve educational excellence and increased socio-economic stratification (Carnoy & McEwan), and (6) New York City’s Campaign for Fiscal Equity in public schools (Rebell).

As a middle school principal, I experienced first-hand the mandates to improve student achievement on state assessments following *No Child Left Behind* in 2002. While the efforts to promote academic achievement for all students were extremely important, the school district’s methodology included reform measures that discontinued programs and practices aimed at developmental responsiveness and social equity. “Bringing Equity Back” serves as a reminder that young adolescents, as with all levels of students, have needs in addition to academic excellence.

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MINUTES

AERA ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
San Francisco



MLER SIG BUSINESS MEETING

Sunday 9 April 2006 -
6:15pm - 7:15pm

Elections (Kathy Roney and Sue Thompson)

Penny Bishop, Larry Daniels, John Niska were elected, and Dick Lipka was reelected, to the Council

Association Council Member: Graduate Student

Inclusion of a graduate student on the Association’s Council is an asset. Kathy Roney will send out an electronic message on the listserv soliciting nominations for a graduate student member.

Reports

AERA 2006 Program (Micki Caskey).

Total of 27 papers were presented:

3 paper sessions with 4 papers per

2 paper discussion with 5 papers per

1 symposium with 5 brief papers

1 business meeting

1 reception

Financial (Vince Anfara)

Current balance: \$2943.66.

Reimbursements

outstanding: President

(pens, badge holders, postage, etc.), Graduate Student Award (\$250); reception; shipping display board.

Web (Micki Caskey)
Portland State University continues to host our website. Updates are made regularly and serve to keep members with up-to-date information about the SIG.

Newsletter (Maureen Musser & Sue Thompson)
Jennifer Friend volunteered to assist with the newsletter.

History (Kathy Roney)
The SIG history is a living history. Members are asked to continue to send updates to Ron Williamson, SIG Historian.

SIG Policy Briefs (Sue Thompson)
Sue Thompson will send reminder to members through the listserv of the need for the SIG membership to continue to sponsor/write policy briefs.

Proposal for National Middle Level Research Project (Steve Mertens)
A meeting of SIG Council members will be held during summer '06. Updates on the project will be forthcoming.

Proposal for Middle Grades Journal (David Hough)

David Hough proposed that the MLER SIG sponsor a Middle Grades Journal. After meeting with David and working out details, the SIG Council accepted, unanimously. Officers and Council members will complete the application and forward to David by June '06.

Graduate Student Award and Presentation (Sandi Stacki)
Dr. Bogum Yoon received the 2006 Graduate Student Award. Her research is entitled: Uninvited guests: The impact of English and ESL teachers' beliefs, roles, and pedagogies on the identities of English language learners. Dr. Yoon received a plaque and a check for \$250.00, to offset some of the cost of attending AERA '06.



Sandi Stacki presenting the Graduate Student Award to Bogum Yoon

Other Business (Kathy Roney)
Call for manuscripts: The Handbook, volume VI, Focus on young adolescents. Contact Vince Anfara.

Joint Reception of the Adolescence SIG and the Middle Level Education Research SIG followed.

Respectfully submitted:
Kathleen Roney, Ed.D.,
President, MLER SIG

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It is not too late to submit proposals to present at NMSA, Nov. 2-4 in Nashville!



You still have time to be a part of the NMSA Research Poster Session and/or the NAPOMLE Best Practices Session.

CALL for PROPOSALS

Addressing Middle Grades Research

NMSA RESEARCH POSTER SESSION

Nashville, TN
November 2-4, 2006

The NMSA Research Advisory Board invites all interested researchers and scholars to submit proposals to present poster session papers to the 33rd Annual NMSA Conference & Exhibit. **We especially encourage graduate students, beginning researchers, and assistant professors to submit.** The Research Advisory Board selects the top ten proposals for presentation at the conference. The Board also recommends the top five papers for possible publication in *Research in Middle Level Education Online*.

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, 5th edition guidelines. A separate **cover page** with the following information must accompany the paper: title of paper; all Research Agenda issues, topics, and questions addressed by the

study; an abstract of 250 words or fewer; name, job title, institutional affiliation, address, phone number of the lead author (and all co-authors).

The lead author or a co-author must attend the NMSA conference, present the paper in poster format during a 75 minute session, provide copies of the paper for free distribution throughout the conference, and if selected, make any subsequent editorial changes upon request by the editor, *RMLE Online*, necessary to prepare the paper for publication. Each lead author whose proposal is accepted for presentation must complete a **final draft** of the paper and provide a copy to the session chair before September 1, 2006.

For the poster presentation, pages chosen by the presenter for display should be printed in a font large enough to be easily read from a distance of two feet and should include charts, graphs, and figures as appropriate to display information visually. Proposal Submission
To submit a proposal, please send the cover page information requested to the NMSA Research Poster Session Chair:

Dr. Micki M. Caskey
Portland State University

Graduate School of
Education
615 SW Harrison
Portland, OR 97201
Phone: 503.725.4749
e-mail: caskeym@pdx.edu

Detailed Guidelines for
Submission may be
obtained by contacting
Micki M. Caskey

**Deadline for proposal
submissions: June
15, 2006**



2006 NAPOMLE Best Practices Session Proposal

The National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education (NAPOMLE) is sponsoring a "Best Practices" session at the National Middle School Association Conference in Nashville, November 2-4. The session will feature roundtable presentations of best practices in higher education (undergraduate and graduate level). If you would like to submit a teaching idea, project, course syllabus/outline, or other resource, please complete online application at <http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?sid=nnlxpevm7gcqkds187573>

Proposals will be accepted through August 6, 2006 and applicants will be notified of the status of their proposal by September 1.

Proposals will be judged based on clarity, application for audience (professors of middle level education) and connection to the NMSA/NCATE Standards. If you have any questions, please contact Betty Dore (edore@radford.edu) at Radford University

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



MLER Now Has Its Own Publication: The Middle Grades Research Journal (MGRJ)

*By David Hough
Missouri State University*

The AERA Middle Level Education Research SIG now has its own research publication, the Middle Grades Research Journal. Volume 1, number 1 was

published in March 2006 and presented to the MLER SIG Executive Committee in San Francisco during AERA.

Editor-in-chief, Dr. David Hough, along with two associated editors, Dr. Fred Groves and Dr. Vicki Schmitt are overseeing the production of MGRJ at Missouri State University where the Institute for School Improvement is providing the resources necessary to publish two issues a year, plus additional special and/or theme issues.

Complimentary copies of MGRJ, a semi-annual, will be made available to all MLER SIG members who are in attendance at business meetings held each spring at the annual meeting of AERA and each fall at the NMSA conference. In addition, subscriptions are now available for \$10 /year, payable to the MSU Institute for School Improvement.

MGRJ, the only "hard copy" international journal devoted specifically to middle grades research, publishes original studies that utilize either positivist or naturalistic methods of inquiry that link middle grades theory to practice. The first issue 1(1) includes two

qualitative and two quantitative studies, and a special theme issue comprised of AERA papers addressing research methodologies is scheduled for publication later this summer.

The MGRJ Editorial Board and manuscript reviewers are currently being expanded with the long-term goal being establishment of an AERA MLER SIG management team to oversee both editing and publishing. MLER Executive Committee members are developing a proposal that would create a number of opportunities for participation by members. This proposal should be ready for consideration prior to the NMSA 2006 fall conference.

MGRJ founder and Editor-in-Chief, Dr. David Hough, has been conducting middle grades research for almost 20 years and edited RMLE for 11 years (July 1994 - December 2005). He is currently Dean, College of Education, and Director, Institute for School Improvement, at Missouri State University. Both Associate Editors, Dr. Fred Groves and Dr. Vicki Schmitt, are employed at Missouri State as well: Dr. Groves is

Director, School of Teacher Education; and Dr. Schmitt is Director of Research, Institute for School Improvement.

For additional information contact Dr. David Hough, Missouri State University (417) 836-4720, DavidHough@missouristate.edu

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

Call for Papers!

The Young Adolescent and the Middle School

Volume 6 in **The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education** Series Editor: **Vincent A. Anfara, Jr.** *The University of Tennessee*

Volume 6, *The Young Adolescent and the Middle School*, will focus on issues related to the nature of young adolescence and the intersection of young adolescence with middle level schooling. Examples of topics related to young adolescence include: (a) the developmental characteristics (i.e., physical, emotional, cognitive, social, ethical/moral, psychological), (b) self esteem, (c) identity

formation, (d) issues related to gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation (e) peer pressure (e.g., bullying, suicide, and at-risk behaviors). Possible chapters that focus on the intersection of the nature of young adolescence with middle level schools include: (a) appropriate structures, organizational arrangements, interventions, and practices that are developmentally appropriate; (b) curricular, instructional, and assessment issues as they relate to this developmental period; (c) the characteristics/qualities of teachers and administrators that are essential for effectively working with young adolescents; and (d) issues related to special education; and (e) the involvement of family in middle level schooling. Of particular interest to the editor are manuscripts that present the perspective of students on various issues related to young adolescence and schooling. Please check with the editor if you have any questions regarding the appropriateness of a topic.

The editor of *The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education* invites the submission of manuscripts contributing to scholarly knowledge and the improved practice of

middle level education. Submissions, utilizing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, may include but are not limited to empirical investigations, conceptual and theoretical perspectives, and reviews of research. Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in the book series. All copy should be typed, double-spaced, on standard white paper and should follow the style in the 5th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Manuscripts should be 20-20 pages in length and include a 100-word abstract. Author's information (affiliation, address, phone numbers, email) should appear only on the cover page. All manuscripts will be peer reviewed by the Editorial Advisory Board of this book series.

Intention to submit a manuscript should be conveyed to the editor no later than July 1, 2006. Manuscripts must be submitted by October 1, 2006 to: Vincent A. Anfara, Jr. vanfara@utk.edu

Also Available:
Making A Difference: Action Research in Middle Level Education, Volume 5 Published in 2005.

Reforming Middle Level Education:

Considerations for Policy makers, Volume 4,
Published in 2004.

Leaders for a Movement: Professional Preparation and Development of Middle Level Teachers and Administrators, Volume 3,
Published in 2003.

Middle School Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Volume 2,
Published in 2002.

The Handbook of Research in Middle Level Education, Volume 1,
Published in 2001.

The Encyclopedia of Middle Grades Education,
Published in 2005.

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06831, Tel: 203-661-7602
Fax: 203-661-7952 RUL:
www.infoagepub.com

Call for Submissions

North Carolina Middle School Journal

The editorial staff of the *North Carolina Middle School Journal*, a peer-reviewed journal published annually by the North Carolina Middle School Association, is seeking manuscripts for the 2006 issue. Submissions will be

accepted through **July 15, 2006.**

The *North Carolina Middle School Journal* publishes manuscripts on all topics related to the education of young adolescent learners. For the 2006 issue, we are particularly interested in articles that focus on young adolescent development and that highlight classroom strategies that are aligned with these unique developmental characteristics. We will consider all types of manuscripts, including:

- Research-based instructional techniques for middle level classrooms;
- Viewpoints, analyses, and criticism of current middle level issues;
- Ideas and techniques for strengthening middle level education;
- Reviews of books, videos, or software pertinent to middle level education;
- Research findings, interpretations, or theories related to middle level education in North Carolina;
- Articles that describe strategies for recruiting or

training future middle level teachers.

Manuscripts should be prepared according to the style prescribed by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.) and should be typed or computer-generated on standard 8 ½ by 11 paper, with one-inch margins. The typical length for articles is 1,000 – 3,000 words, though shorter manuscripts will be considered. The author's name, title, and affiliation should appear **only** on the cover page only of the manuscript. **Electronic submissions are encouraged and can be e-mailed to either of the addresses below.** Alternatively, a hard copy can be mailed with a 3.5 disk or CD labeled with the file name and software utilized (IBM -Microsoft Word preferred).

Please feel free to contact the editorial staff for feedback regarding the suitability of an idea for a manuscript, or for comments on early drafts of work. If you would like to serve as a member of the Editorial Board for the *North Carolina Middle School Journal*, please contact one of the editors listed below.

Dr. Barbara R. Blackburn,
Editor
Winthrop University
Richard W. Riley College
of Education
Rock Hill, SC 29733
blackburnb@winthrop.edu

Dr. David Strahan,
Associate Editor
Western Carolina
University
College of Education
Cullowhee, NC 28723
dbstrahan@yahoo.com

Call for Manuscripts

Research in Middle Level Education Online

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) publishes *Research in Middle Level Education Online (RMLE Online)*, an international peer-reviewed research journal. The journal prints 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 and the MLER-SIG endorses *RMLE Online*. Current and past issues of *RMLE Online*, a list of the editorial review board, guidelines for contributors

and contact information are available on the NMSA Website (www.nmsa.org). If you have questions, please contact Micki Caskey by email (caskeym@pdx.edu) or telephone (503.725.4749).

Please send manuscripts and correspondence to:
Dr. Micki M. Caskey,
Editor, *RMLE Online*
Portland State University
Graduate School of
Education, 615 SW
Harrison St.,
Portland, OR 97207



**SEND IN YOUR
NOMINATION
FOR THE MLER
GRADUATE
STUDENT AWARD
TODAY!!!**

The Middle Level Education Research SIG's Graduate Student Award is intended to promote and recognize outstanding research in middle-level education and is presented annually to a graduate student or recent graduate of a masters, specialist, or doctoral program. Nominate Masters,

Specialists and Doctoral students who have recently completed theses and dissertations. Go to the MLER Website for specific information and application/nomination form at www.middlelevel.pdx.edu

Graduate students are encouraged to apply for the MLER Graduate Student Award!

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Send In Your News!

Please send any items you would like to have considered for publication in the Chronicle of Middle Level Education Research to Maureen Musser at mmusser@willamette.edu. The Newsletter is published three times annually – January, June, & October.

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Abstracts from AERA 2006

Supporting and Engaging Middle-School Students

*Meeting Young
Adolescents' Self-Concept
and Classroom
Environment Needs Across
the Transition to Middle*

School Audra Parker (The University of Georgia) The move to middle school, coupled with the onset of adolescence, is associated with a myriad of physical and emotional changes. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of different instructional structures on young adolescents' self-concept and perceptions of classroom environment as they transition into middle school. Data were collected using the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale and the Modified Classroom Climate Inventory. The data suggest that neither students' self-concepts nor their perceptions of classroom environment varied prior to or after the transition to middle school based on their fifth-grade instructional structure. In contrast, data suggest a significant time effect on students' self-concept ratings across the transition to middle school, and a mixed effect on students' perceptions of environment.

Natural Progressions: Building Language Knowledge to Reduce Reading Confusions for Struggling Middle-School Readers Francine C. Falk-Ross (Northern Illinois University) In developing a language-building approach to

support reading activities for marginalized students, reading and language specialists collaborated to share disciplinary information and strategy suggestions for both remedial and classroom-based reading programs. Marginalized middle level students included classroom members who had language differences, language disorders, and language difficulties. Struggling readers' language knowledge was supported through oral discussion, vocabulary clarifications, and reading rehearsal of content material. Using results of formal and informal language testing, literacy achievement screenings, and teacher surveys, students' challenges and successes were documented related to compensatory interventions. The results of the study provide important information about, and case studies of, trends in reading programs at the middle level.

Learning through Democracy in Action: Service-Learning at the Middle Level Virginia M. Jagla (National Louis University) With well developed abstract reasoning capacity, young adolescents are caught in a state of practicing for life.

Middle level educators are proponents of experiential learning. Through service learning adolescents experience democracy in action by planning and carrying through worthwhile activities to benefit others in society as they learn relevant subject matter. The number and depth of high-quality service learning programs is increasing in middle schools. Through qualitative research, which includes interviews of teachers and middle level students involved in some of these exemplary programs, I am garnering worthwhile data to elucidate the obvious strengths of service learning. Through presentation of the data and discussion with participants I expect to spark meaningful insights regarding this special aspect of experiential learning.

Maintaining Self-Worth in the Middle-School Years: A Developmental Perspective Kathleen Roney (The University of North Carolina-Wilmington), F. Clark Power (University of Notre Dame), Ann Marie R. Power (University of Notre Dame) Students experience a decline in self-esteem and self-competence during the middle school years (NMSA, 2003). This is not

surprising when one considers the academic, social, athletic, and moral challenges that they face in increasingly competitive and impersonal environments. James (1892/1985) and Harter (1988) note that if self-esteem depends upon the ratio of successes to aspirations, the best way to preserve self-esteem when one is not succeeding is to discount that domain. Nicholls (1989) finds that students gradually differentiate ability from effort over the middle school years. His work suggests that many middle school students may lack the capacity to discount and may thus be particularly vulnerable to experiencing low self-esteem. Using a cross-sectional sample of students from grade 1 to grade 11, we found that the discounting strategy emerged in the middle school years. We also found that the most advanced middle school students balanced a realistic appraisal of one's limitations with an emphasis on effort combined with problem-solving the sources of one's failures. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings for the mastery-oriented classroom teachers and counselors.

Adolescents Speak Out: Consequences of Early-Grade Retention for Middle-School Students

Angela G. Fiske (The University of Georgia), Stacey M. Neuharth-Pritchett (The University of Georgia)

The current study examines qualitative responses from groups of adolescents who were retained in their early elementary school years. Data suggest a negative stigma associated with the retention practice well into adolescence. Adolescents who are off the developmental trajectory for middle school may experience increasing psychological stressors impacting their academic success and adjustment to middle school. In the near future, educators will be examining growing numbers of issues (e.g. dropout rate, social policy) associated with academic failure in light of changing educational policy.

Effects of School Reform on Middle-Level Education

Dilemmas of a Middle-School Social Studies Teacher: Being Culturally Responsive in a Standards-Based, High-Stakes Testing Environment Mary Shelley Thomas (University of Louisville), Tim Holman (Meyzeek Middle School)

As co-investigators of a study, an eighth grade teacher and a teacher educator examined the relationship between standards based instruction, high stakes testing, and culturally responsive teaching in a middle school social studies classroom. This study documented curriculum decisions made by the teacher as he prepared his students for their high stakes test. When considering how to best meet the needs of his adolescent students, the teacher described tensions between the pressures of standards and testing and his commitment to cultural responsiveness. Both the teacher and teacher educator believe that the tensions and dilemmas described in this study are significant for teachers in the field as well as teacher education students entering the field in the current standards and testing climate.

No Child Left Behind Act in/out of Two Middle-School Classrooms

Enora R. Brown (DePaul University)
No Child Left Behind's (2001) standardization/accountability mandates ushered new chapter in public education history. Though threatening public education and social equality, few examined

NCLB's impact on middle school policy, purpose of education, classroom practices, and curricula. Inquiry explores these issues through classroom observations, textual analyses, teacher/student interviews at one NCLB and non-NCLB middle school. Piaget's, Vygotsky's, Freire's, and Bourdieu's theories of knowledge construction, pedagogy, and NCLB's assumptions undergird inquiry. Discourse analyses revealed NCLB prompted Turning Points' revisions, standards-driven, banking method learning, constricted interaction, teacher dissatisfaction, in NCLB low-income classroom; open-ended projects, problem-solving curricula, social interaction, energizing teacher-student learning in non-NCLB classroom. Inquiry suggests vulnerability of middle school reform, social equality and public education advocacy needed.

Accountability and the Changing Practice of Middle-School Teachers: Unintended Consequences
Linda L. Samek (Corban College), Micki M. Caskey (Portland State University), P. Maureen Musser (Willamette University), William L. Greene (Southern Oregon State University), Marilyn

R. Olson (University of Oregon)
This study investigated the effect of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and state level accountability requirements on the everyday classroom beliefs and practices of middle school teachers throughout the state. The researchers employed qualitative procedures to analyze transcripts of focus group and individual interviews with teachers of core subjects from 13 middle schools. Results identified changing practices in middle school classrooms in curriculum, instruction, and assessment choices and the rationale for those changes. Based on these findings, this paper concludes with policy and practice recommendations for middle school teachers and administrators, professional development service providers, and state agencies that address academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and best middle level teaching practices.

School Improvement Planning in Middle-Grades Schools Vincent A. Anfara (The University of Tennessee-Knoxville)
This mixed-methods study focuses on school improvement planning in middle schools in east Tennessee. It critically analyzes what issues,

problems, strategies, and action plans were consistently utilized; and the perceptions of both administrators and teachers regarding the school improvement process. Utilizing the improvement plans of 17 middle schools and surveys that were administered to 493 teachers and 35 administrators, this study found that there: (1) was an overemphasis on academic goals with a lack of attention to those factors most correlated to improved student performance (i.e., school culture/climate, teacher efficacy, rigorous curriculum, etc.); (2) was an over reliance on the use of "home-made" data collection instruments; (3) was a total lack of attention to the effective of school leadership; and (4) none of the research-based, middle school strategies were mentioned. Overall, the lack of utility of these school improvement plans is traced to the nature of the template that is required by the State Department of Education. Policy recommendations are offered.

Critical Issues in Middle-Level Education

Same-Gender Grouping in Eighth-Grade Science Classrooms Jennifer Ingrid Friend (University of Missouri-Kansas City)

This study examined two hypotheses related to same-gender grouping of eighth-grade science classes in a public middle-school setting. The first hypothesis, male and female students enrolled in same-gender science classes demonstrate more positive science academic achievement than their peers enrolled in mixed-gender classes. The second, same-gender grouping of students has a positive effect on classroom climate. The participants were randomly assigned to class sections. The science teachers did not vary instruction for the same-gender and mixed-gender classes. The results of this study did not indicate support for either hypothesis. Data led to the conclusions that same-gender grouping did not produce significant differences in student science academic achievement, and that same-gender classes did not create a more positive classroom climate

Understanding the Needs of English Language Learners and Its Impact on Their Identities
 Bogum Yoon (Texas Woman's University)
 Grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy, this study explored a regular classroom teacher teaching middle grades English language learners (ELLs). The purpose of this study

was to examine the teacher's belief of her roles in teaching ELLs, and the impact of her teaching approaches on the students' identities. Findings suggest that, according to the teacher's belief and approaches, the ELLs' identities were shaped through actions that positioned them as resourceful and intellectual instead of positioning them as powerless and inferior. The active involvement on the part of the teacher played a role in the mainstream peers' positioning of the ELLs as acceptable and, as a result, the ELLs' interaction with American peers was fostered.

Teacher Dispositions in the Middle Grades: How Do They Affect the Learning of Future Citizens of a Democracy?
 Holly Jade Thornton (Armstrong Atlantic State University)
 How are teachers disposed to think, to make meaning and sense of the world, and thus model such dispositions and inculcate them in their middle level students at such a critical developmental stage? How do these dispositions affect student learning and the nature of learning in the classroom, especially in terms of depth of understanding, and the nature of discourse which affects the potential to

cultivate a democratic classroom, a place where students learn to become citizens of a future democracy for the public good? A comparative study of veteran middle level teachers exemplifying "responsive" and "technical" dispositions examines these questions.

Arkansas Middle-Level Best Practices Study
 Calli A. Holaway-Johnson (University of Arkansas), Charles E. Stegman (University of Arkansas), Kristina A. Fritts Scott (University of Arkansas-Fayetteville), Sean W. Mulvenon (University of Arkansas), James E. Truelove (University of Arkansas), Crystal Beshears (University of Arkansas)
 The Arkansas Middle Level Best Practices Study examines high-performing and average-performing middle schools in order to identify practices that school systems are using to improve student achievement. This study is part of the NCEA state-comparable Best Practices studies. Data collection for this study will occur from August to October 2005, and all analyses will be completed by December 2005. Data will be collected through interviews with district administrators, school administrators, and

classroom teachers. Data will be analyzed using areas identified by NCEA as related to best practices: Curriculum and Academic Goals; Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building; Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements; Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data; and Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments.

Meeting the Needs of Adolescents: Assessing the Condition of the Middle School in Northern Kentucky

Shawn A. Faulkner (Northern Kentucky University), Chris Cook (Northern Kentucky University)

This study examines the implementation of the essential components of the middle school philosophy in Northern Kentucky middle schools and the impact of state assessment programs on instructional practice. Responses from 215 certified personnel from seventeen middle schools indicate widespread acceptance of the middle school philosophy; however, most of the essential components of effective middle school programs are lacking in reported implementation. In addition, classroom teachers acknowledge the importance of instructional strategies that are engaging

and meaningful to students, but choose, rather, to employ more teacher-focused approaches, which they perceive as more effective in meeting the demands of state-mandated assessments.

Examining Effective Practice in Preservice and Inservice Middle-Level Education

Writing in Middle-Grades Mathematics Methods: Developing Mathematical and Pedagogical Understanding

David K. Pugalee (The University of North Carolina-Charlotte), Patricia Douville (The University of North Carolina-Charlotte)

Writing is an important part of mathematical communication; however, few studies have focused on writing as part of a methods course. Students in middle grades mathematics methods wrote descriptions of their problem solving approaches each class session over the course of a semester. Products were assessed using a rubric focusing on mathematical content, conceptual understanding, procedural understanding, problem solving ability, and mathematical reasoning. Data indicate that students' performance relative to these five facets or domains improved after

explicit course emphasis on writing. Pre and post survey data on attitudes toward writing in mathematics showed shifts in views reflecting an intent to use more sustained and in-depth approaches in their own classrooms.

Middle Grades Teaching Practices: A Validation Study

Steven B. Mertens (University of Illinois), Nancy Flowers (CPRD-University of Illinois), Matthew Hesson-McInnis (Illinois State University), Cari Bishop (CPRD-University of Illinois)

This paper will provide the results of a factor analysis of teacher reports of levels of interdisciplinary team and classroom practices based on a large-scale sample of middle-grades teachers from four states. This validation study is part of a larger structural equation model, designed to measure the impact and effect of various components of middle-school restructuring (i.e., structures and organization, school contextual factors, teaching practices, and student outcomes, including experiences, socio-emotional, and achievement). The results demonstrate the validity of the measures used in this study and provide the foundation for subsequent

exploration and research of this model for school improvement.

Exploring the Experiences of Young Adolescents

Orienting to the Common Good: Developing a Moral Self in the Middle Years

Kathleen Roney (The University of North Carolina-Wilmington), F. Clark Power (University of Notre Dame), Ann Marie R. Power (University of Notre Dame)

This year's conference challenges middle school researchers to investigate the extent to which schools prepare young adolescents to commit themselves to serve the public interest. One way of assessing the children and adolescents' orientation to the common good is through their emerging self-understanding. This study analyzes middle school student's descriptions of the ideal, real, and dreaded selves. Less than half of the participants describe themselves with at least one moral characteristic and many of them focus narrowly on attaining material and social success. These findings raise questions about the hidden curriculum of individualism in schools as well as in the wider culture.

School Engagement and Drift Among Middle-Level Students in Ireland

Emer C. Smyth (Economic & Social Research Institute), Allison Dunne (ESRI), Selina M. McCoy (ESRI), Merike Darmody (ESRI)

This paper explores the identity of second year secondary students in Ireland, caught between first year in which they adjusted to a new school setting and third year which is strongly oriented towards a State examination. It draws on quantitative and qualitative data on over 900 students in twelve case-study schools. Firstly, the paper explores students' experiences of being in second year, comparing their perceptions of their learning and school workload with that in their first year of secondary education. Secondly, it examines the extent to which students are already oriented towards the Junior Certificate examination. Thirdly, it looks at changes in attitudes to school life between first and second year.

Students' Responses to an Experiential Learning Program: Exploring Academic Momentum With Eighth Graders Who Have Not Done Well in School
David B. Strahan (Western Carolina University), Victoria Faircloth (Western Carolina University), Sally Hundley (Haywood Co. Schools),

Micky Cope (Haywood Co. Schools)

This study chronicled the responses of middle school students to their teachers' efforts to provide them with experiential learning opportunities. Working with two teachers and their team of 42 students selected as "academically at-risk," researchers observed lessons, interviewed participants, and analyzed students' work samples. Results documented ways that teachers established a sense of community and co-constructed experiential learning experiences with students. Thirty-five students on the team developed a stronger sense of academic momentum, attributing their accomplishments to changes in attitude, task-specific successes, and supportive relationships with teachers, better self-control, and opportunities for community service. Results affirm the power of caring and energetic teachers to connect with students and underscore the complexity of remediation in the middle grades.

Educating At-Risk Urban African-American Children: A Comparison of the Effectiveness of Two Types of Middle Schools
Leo Mickey Fenzel (Loyola College in Maryland)

Evidence is clear that urban high poverty public schools are failing to meet the educational needs of its students, particularly students of color. The present study examines the effectiveness of two types of high poverty parochial schools for 354 African American middle school students. Results show that alternative middle schools, known as Nativity schools, are more successful than traditional schools in helping students improve in standardized test scores. Further analyses show that, regardless of school type, students perform better in school when their levels of intrinsic motivation for school work is higher. Intrinsic motivation is influenced by students' self-worth perceptions and perceptions of their class environments as engaging and their schools as enjoyable and fair places. Implications for urban schooling for African American children are discussed.

Symposium: Relevant Methodologies for Relevant Middle-Level Questions

The aim of this symposium is to examine research methodologies that are relevant for middle-level education research questions. The session brings together five middle level researchers who will share pertinent research

methods for the systematic study of middle level issues. The researchers will describe a variety of methodologies including quasi-experimental factorial designs, large-scale quantitative methods, mixed methodological approaches, visual methods, and action research. Each researcher will discuss the merits of specific methodologies for addressing significant questions in middle level education. Collectively, these researchers will focus on the critical need for more disciplined inquiry to expand the research base in middle level education. This symposium affords researchers with an opportunity to exchange ideas and think critically about relevant research methodologies.

Quasi-Experimental Factorial Designs Richard P. Lipka (Pittsburg State University)

"The world is not a world of main effects; rather it is a world of interaction effects." "For well designed difference question studies, a finding of no significant difference may have as many policy and practice implications as significant differences." Using the aforementioned two postulates, this presentation will show participants how to employ naturally occurring

variables such as grade level, age, gender, etc. in quasi-experimental factorial designs that ascertain both main effects and interaction effects. If time permits, the researcher will show participants how to employ chi square with qualitative data.

The Relevancy of Large-Scale, Quantitative Methodologies to Middle-Level Research

Steven B. Mertens

(University of Illinois)

This paper will discuss the benefits and relevancy of utilizing quantitative methods with large-scale, longitudinal data sets to address research questions and policy issues. Research utilizing large-scale study samples (longitudinal or cross-sectional) offered the ability to generalize to the larger population. Generalizability of research findings is essential if research is to inform policy decisions. The use of large-scale quantitative data sources also afford the research the ability to partition the data by any number of independent and dependent variables, and apply multivariate statistical methods. Other topics discussed during this paper will include data collection from multiple sources, triangulation of data, multidisciplinary approaches, and mixed

methods approaches to research.

The Importance of a Mixed Methodological Approach to Middle-Grades Research

Vincent A. Anfara (The University of Tennessee-Knoxville)

This paper will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of utilizing mixed methodological approaches to study issues related to middle grades schools. Part One of the discussion will be grounded in mixed-methods research already published on the organizational health of middle schools and its impact on student achievement (Henderson et al., 2005). Part Two of this paper will discuss the evolution of a purely qualitative study (Brown & Anfara, 2002) into a purely quantitative study and the eventual development of a quantitative instrument to measure the developmental responsiveness of middle level principals (Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, & DuCette, 2004). The qualitative findings and the results of the factor analysis conducted during the development of the Middle Level Leader Questionnaire will be compared and discussed. Researchers who have studied middle grades issues have typically focused on one research paradigm or the other. The

time has come for more mixed methodological approaches.

The Promise of Visual Methods in Accessing Middle Schoolers' Perceptions

Penny Bishop (University of Vermont)

While quantitative methods can yield the generalizability so important to informing policy decisions today, middle grades educators also require trustworthy evidence to inform their day-to-day local decision-making. Consulting learners directly about their schooling experiences can provide important information regarding conditions of academic engagement.

Concomitantly, accessing student perception has historically presented unique challenges to researchers. This paper considers these challenges; asserts the importance of the student as a valuable and underrepresented data source in educational research; and proposes visual methods as a means to access student perception. In particular, the paper provides a brief overview of four qualitative research studies conducted in middle schools, in which the use of drawings, photographs, and videotape revealed the potential of these alternative data sources.

The Value of Action Research in Middle-Level Education Micki M. Caskey (Portland State University)

This paper will address the value of action research in middle level education. Action research compels educators to take action and think reflectively about those actions to bring about positive educational change (Mills, 2000). This cycle of systematic inquiry affords educators with opportunities to gain insights into teaching and learning processes. Action research is associated with (1) the development of critical pedagogy in preservice teachers (Liston & Zeichner, 1987), (2) increased learning among new teachers (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001), and (3) expanding practice-based knowledge of inservice teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). Educators conduct action research in a range of contexts (Zeichner, 2001). In middle level education, action research accounts for nearly 20% of the research studies published from 1991 to 2001 (Hough, 2003). Action research holds an important position in teacher education, professional development, and school reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

