

**MLER SIG NATIONAL MIDDLE GRADES RESEARCH PROJECT**  
**Interactive Symposium at AERA/Chicago**  
**April 12, 2007**

**Synopsis of Chicago Planning Meeting**  
**July 26 – 27, 2006**

Gayle Andrews, Micki Caskey, Kim Hartman, Dick Lipka, Steve Mertens, Elizabeth Pate, and Kathy Roney met in Chicago for a two-day planning session. Serving as a steering committee, these members gathered in response to *A Proposal for Establishing a National Middle Level Research Project*, a MLER White Paper (Mertens, 2006), which called for the largest group of middle grades researchers—the MLER SIG—to develop a national middle grades research project. After Steve Mertens reviewed the project's purpose (see MLER White Paper), Elizabeth Pate and Gayle Andrews facilitated the planning session.

Day 1

**Developing Research Questions** — Used a consensus building process to develop a set of research questions in response to the following question: what do you think are the most important research questions that need to be addressed? From the set of questions, the team agreed to select the following research question: What curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices are responsive to young adolescents?

**Operational Definitions** — Drafted operational definitions for the following terms: young adolescents curriculum, instruction, assessment, and responsive.

**Methods** — Listed some basic assumptions or understandings including (1) multiple methods, (2) multiple data sources, (3) longitudinal design (via cross-sectional), (4) national scope, (5) co-ownership of data (data collector and project), (6) professional development for data collectors, (7) evolving theoretical framework, (8) no current funding source, (9) IRB approval, and (10) replicability.

**Parking Lot** — Used to store ideas and questions that needed further exploration in the future (e.g., authorship, participation, ethical issues, documentation and records,)

Day 2

**Chalk Talk** — Used a silent charting activity to elicit responses in light of the research question: (1) what theoretical frame should we use? (2) what methods should we use? This activity resulted in our collective “aha” that no explicit theoretical framework has been articulated for middle grades education. Rigorous empirical research requires a theoretical framework.

**Phase I Work Plan** — Agreed on steps to develop theoretical framework: (1) identify and map the belief documents, (2) identify theoretical underpinnings, (3) construct or identify theory for missing or weak theoretical underpinnings, and (4) formulate research that will test or refine theory.

Action Steps

- Develop a proposal for an interactive symposium for AERA 2007
- Plan follow-up planning session at NMSA 2006 in Nashville, TN
- Develop a password protected web page for the project within MLER website
- After Phase 1, check the institutional review process (IRB) for a national project