

MLER SIG NATIONAL MIDDLE GRADES RESEARCH PROJECT

What We Did in Nashville, TN—November 2006

Those Present: Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., University of Tennessee, Gayle Andrews, The University of Georgia, Penny Bishop, University of Vermont, Micki Caskey, Portland State University, Kimberly Hartman, University of North Carolina Charlotte, Richard Lipka, Pittsburg State University, Steven Mertens, Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois, John Niska, Rhode Island College, Elizabeth Pate, The University of Texas at San Antonio, and Kathleen Roney, University of North Carolina Wilmington.

Key Points:

Day One

- (1) With the addition of new members, an update was provided that involved what happened in Chicago in July
- (2) Because of the “Ah-ha” moment regarding a theoretical framework, the group felt it important to spend time coming to consensus on what theory and theoretical framework mean? This consensus would provide us with “working definitions.”
- (3) After a considerable amount of time discussing these terms, we searched for a singular theoretical framework that could possibly be applied to the research to be designed and conducted. Eight elements were identified, including: curriculum; instruction; assessment; educators in the middle grades; relationships; decision-making; health, wellness and safety; and parents, families and communities.

Day Two

- (4) Issues were put back on the table that questioned the identification and utilization of a singular theoretical framework.
- (5) Discussion quickly turned to designing a study (choosing some phenomenon to study) with all of its appropriate parameters and inviting researchers to join this research effort—utilizing their own theoretical frameworks. These frameworks would need to match the “working definition” that we agreed upon on Day One.
- (6) Emphasis was placed on attracting scholars in other disciplines that are not generally associated with middle grades research.
- (7) Discussion continued about building the “tent” into which researchers would be invited. What exactly the parameters would be. The wealth of theoretical frameworks that would be utilized would be a major contribution to middle grades research. The “steering group” would examine these varied theoretical frameworks and “do” something with this information.
- (8) We agreed that:
 - a. multiple methods would be encouraged
 - b. multiple data sources
 - c. longitudinal design
 - d. national in scope
 - e. data are co-owned
 - f. professional development would be provided to researchers
 - g. there is no current funding
 - h. the studies should be replicable
- (9) Steering group would design study, researchers would work within established parameters, professional development would occur, and papers would be presented and eventually published.