



Happy New Year!!

Utah Middle Level Association (UMLA)

Winter 2016



From the Desk of the UMLA President:

Happy New Year!

I hope you've had a great first half (almost) of the school year! The school year always goes by so fast and sometimes I forget to stop and enjoy what I do each day. I became a teacher because I love watching and helping students learn and learning from them as well. Sometimes, I get so caught up in the mundane, day to day things that we have to do as teachers, I forget to stop and remember why I'm here. That's my *challenge to you* this new year. Take the time to stop and remember why it is you chose to go into teaching and why you are a middle level educator. Stop getting dragged down by those have to do things and rejoice in your reasons for becoming an

educator. You know the saying "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." That is true across the board in education but I think it is especially true for our middle level learners. They need to be valued and feel loved to get the most out of your class. Remember your 'why' when you get bogged down with the nitty gritty of teaching. ☺

Our annual conference will be held this year at Vista Heights Middle School in Saratoga Springs in Alpine School District. It will be held on Saturday, March 4. Save the date! ***Early registration has been extended to Feb. 14th.***

Register for only \$55 each.

It is the only conference in the state of Utah that is dedicated to the middle level educator. We are looking for presenters for this conference. If you are willing to share with us what you are doing, please contact us or let us know what some of your colleagues are doing and we will contact them. Our email is utamla@gmail.com.

*UMLA Conference –
Saturday, March 4, 2017*

Go to utahmla.org/register-now
to register for UMLA2017.

New Logo Contest

In 1996, UMLA adopted the sailboat as its logo. It was representative of the byline for the organization, "Sailing the Whitewater Years," which has been central to themes of our conference since. It is representative of the tumultuous years of young adolescence and the ups and downs of teaching in the middle.



But, those of you who have actually navigated whitewater, especially that found in Utah, have probably not done so in a sailboat. So, we are looking for a new logo that is more representative of our state. We are holding a contest open to teachers and students to design a new logo. Submissions for original artwork need to be made by May 31, 2017. The finalists will be selected by the UMLA board and will be announced in the 2017 fall newsletter. Voting for the final design will be at UMLA2018. Further information will be found at UMLA2017 in March or you can email us at utahmla@gmail.com.

The Importance of Demonstrating Care for Young Adolescents

By: Dave F Brown, Ed.D.

Many teachers recall advice they received during their first year of teaching, such as: “Don’t smile until Christmas” or, “Be really tough the first few weeks, and then you won’t have any discipline problems.” As novice teachers though, we were fighting another voice in our heads: “I hope my students like me”; and “I will never, *ever* be the hated teacher that I had when I was a student.” This is a common dilemma teachers face: attempting to maintain genuine feelings and personalities reflecting their concern for young adolescents while simultaneously frequently playing the role of master sergeant.

While middle level teachers are searching for the “right” persona, their students are on a search of their own. Among young adolescents’ immense breadth of changes, are hidden socio-emotional states and their effects on perceptions. One student described his interpretation of the middle school milieu: “What may seem, to a teacher, a classroom full of students peacefully working, may be exactly the opposite to a student. It becomes a room full of pitfalls, danger signs, and safe havens situated carefully in familiar territory.” A female student reflected,

“My own middle school years remain vivid in my memory. I was excluded, and I manipulated the exclusion of others. I could be mean; yet, in turn, I was deeply hurt by others.”

Young adolescents’ social and emotional thoughts are exacerbated by their age-level circumstances: transitioning into a new building and meeting hundreds of new classmates; experiencing greater academic demands from teachers; receiving added pressure from parents to take more challenging classes while maintaining high grades; becoming more responsible and independent; and participating in multiple extracurricular activities. Imagine the high percentage of young adolescents wrestling with vulnerable feelings of self-doubt and insecurity at various moments during the school day while simultaneously experiencing their greatest cognitive and physical growth since the ages of birth to two. Is it any wonder that many young adolescents frequently use the “S” word to describe their lives—*stressful*?

How’s a middle level teacher supposed to respond—by not smiling? Some researchers might imply that *care* isn’t a

measurable entity—but research indicates its significance to learning. Chaskin and Mendley Rauner (1995) noted that caring didn’t substitute for learning: caring established an effective culture for learning. They added, when caring attitudes are demonstrated by teachers, “trust is established and caring interpersonal relationships are built in classrooms” (p. 673). Cameron (2012) interviewed dropouts and discovered, “More than anything, struggling students need someone to wonder what is going on in their lives, and to care enough to find out” (p. 33). Other researchers found that students who perceived their relationships with teachers as warm, trusting, and cooperative had better attendance and achievement (Eshel & Kohavi, 2003).

All students know if teachers care about them; it’s impossible to hide. Students describe caring teachers in varying ways; and caring for some students looks different than it does for others. To insure learning, teachers’ responsibilities—above all others—is to guarantee that each and every student clearly understands that they care about them.

UMLA Annual Conference – March 4, 2017

Our Annual UMLA Conference will be held in March 2017 with keynote speaker Dave F. Brown, Ed.D. Dr. Brown is an educational researcher who frequently conducts research with young adolescents and middle level teachers. Dave's research has been published in over 25 education journals, including *The Kappan*, *Educational Leadership*, and *Middle School Journal*. Dave has authored/co-authored chapters on young adolescent development in five books and has written two chapters for the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Middle Grades Education* to be published in April of 2016.

Dr. Brown is co-author of the third edition of the book, *What Every Middle School Teacher Should Know* (Brown & Knowles, 2014) that is used nationally in university classes and for professional development. Dave has presented or co-presented his research at the Association for Middle Level Education Annual Conference at 14 of the past 16 conferences. He has presented with Nancy Doda, Mark Springer (author of *Soundings*), and co-author, Trudy Knowles. He has also presented at state middle level conferences in Pennsylvania and New Jersey; and keynoted at the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education Conference in 2014. In 2013, Dave was invited and presented a keynote address at the *European League of Middle Level Education* in Rome, Italy. He has been invited to present at that conference again in January of 2017 in Vienna, Austria. In February of this year, Dr. Brown was awarded the *William Alexander Award* for his contributions to middle level education in Pennsylvania during the 2015-16 year.

Dave is the author of two other books: *Becoming A Successful Urban Teacher* (2002) and *Why America's Public Schools Are the Best Place for Kids* (2012). He was invited and participated in a *White House Forum with Pennsylvania Leaders* on education issues in 2012. He continues to meet with both federal and state legislators to influence their voting on education issues. Dave continues to be a member of the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education executive board, a position he has held since 2005. Dr. Brown continues to provide professional development to middle level schools across the nation on young adolescent development, appropriate middle school design, curriculum integration, and culturally responsive teaching. He was awarded Professor Emeritus status at West Chester University in Pennsylvania in December of 2015. He continues to teach graduate courses in literacy, young adolescent development, and urban education as an adjunct professor at Villanova University.

Call for Presenters

UMLA2017 Conference

Our upcoming annual conference will be held Saturday, March 4 at Vista Heights Middle School in Saratoga Springs. UMLA's reputation is centered around the quality of our conferences and presenters. One of the hallmarks of our annual conference is that it highlights the important work of teachers and administrators and provides a wealth of ideas for participants.

We are looking for presenters for our next conference! We want presenters who are doing innovative and fun things with and for middle level students.

Presentations are 50 minutes in length. If you are interested, please go to our website, www.utahmla.org, and register as a presenter. All presentations must be submitted by Friday, January 31, 2017.

Awards & Grant



In an effort to support the great things happening in schools throughout the state, UMLA offers several awards and grants. We seek to recognize outstanding teacher teams, school leaders and others who have made a difference for young adolescents. Consider nominating someone you know!

The UMLA grant is designed to provide seed money for a project to benefit students.

Awards and grant information can be found at www.utahmla.com

School Spotlight – Vista Heights Middle School



Vista Heights, home of the Blackhawks, is starting its 7th year this fall. Opening in 2010, Vista Heights has existed in a pattern of perpetual change. Each year, our school grows by 150-200 students. This growth brings with it new faculty

members, new programs, and new challenges. We opened as the only 7th/8th grade middle school in Alpine School District, but added 9th graders three years later after another middle school was built in our area. Even though that split occurred just three years ago, this summer we added on a ten classroom satellite to once again accommodate our growing student population.

Despite the challenges that come with change, our school has remained committed to providing high levels of learning for all students. Like all schools in our district, we function as a school-wide PLC. We work in subject specific teams to share curriculum, discuss data, and to plan student interventions. All teachers are also part of Action Learning Teams. Each team focuses on a need in our school. They study the issue together and create plans for how our school can address the need. As we address these needs and put systems in place, our teachers and students are better able to focus on the mission of our school: learning.

We also have several programs in place that are designed to help our students succeed. To help our 7th graders transition in to the middle school, all 7th graders take a student success class the first term. In this class, students learn study skills, social skills, and basic middle school survival skills. We also have TEAL time where students get help from their teachers. Students are assigned for help both by their grade in the class and by teacher recommendation. This allows us to ensure that students are not only getting the credit for their classes, but that they are also getting help before they are failing a class. We feel these programs help our students as they are learning how to succeed on their own.

Vista Heights is a great school with a great culture. We hope you can feel it as you are in our building. Welcome, and we hope you have a great conference.

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