

Media-Providence Friends School

Dragon Tales

Winter 2011

Narratives of the Magic of MPFS

Powerful Learning Practice

Roland Barth, former teacher, principal, and founder of the Principals' Center at Harvard University has said, "Nothing within a school has more impact upon students in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. When teachers stop growing, so do their students."

At MPFS, teachers are passionate about learning. Practicing what they 'preach', they investigate and implement pedagogies that represent current best practices in teaching, observe one another's lessons, and discuss their work within peer networks as well as committees here at school. Research points to this ability to tap into the collective knowledgebase of fellow educators as *the most* valuable source of learning for teachers.

This year, MPFS has made an investment which broadens that knowledgebase. Six faculty members and four administrators are participating in an 11-month program called Powerful Learning Practice (PLP). PLP's focus is on understanding the global changes created by social media technologies and their implications for teaching and learning. Collaborative, job embedded professional development, PLP immerses teachers in online environments and has them building their own personal learning networks through tools like Twitter, Facebook, Skype, blogs, wikis, RSS

feeds, Delicious and Ning. They're learning the literacies of the 21st Century while discussing their craft with the best minds in education from around the world who, without technology, they would never meet.



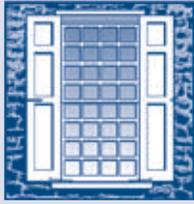
According to Head of School, Earl Sissell, "PLP is not about technology per se, but rather about using web-based tools to transform the way we design and teach curriculum so students are prepared for success in the rapidly changing world in which they live. As participants use these tools in their own classrooms, they in turn inspire learning and creativity within students and the rest of our faculty."

MPFS' PLP participants come from all divisions of the school and include T. Betty (2nd Grade), T. Roger (Math Coordinator, 6th-8th Math), T. Lisa (PreK-4), T. Daryl (4th-8th Science), T. Erica (Kindergarten), and T. Laura (Counselor). Each brings a unique perspective to the team and is finding

value in different aspects of the program for their classrooms. For T. Lisa, it's the wiki the group set up for the Math Committee to communicate about topics between meetings. For T. Roger, it's the new resources he's found for his classroom by connecting with teachers from other schools. Notes T. Betty, "PLP has deepened our relationships with each other while we're learning about students of the 21st century *as* the students of the 21st century."

Having spent the first 5 months of the year learning by doing, the PLP team has begun to reflect on that "doing." These reflections will guide work on their culminating Action Research Project in which they'll articulate a vision for ways to build capacity for change at MPFS. The Project will be presented to our faculty as well as to the 20-school PLP cohort at year's end. T. Erica sums it up well, "Web 2.0 is a new form of communication that everyone will have to master in order to succeed. We're being given the power to 'play' – and by doing so, are becoming experts for MPFS."

Students are the ultimate beneficiaries of this investment. When teachers are constantly exposed to new strategies and tools that help students pursue questions, they're able to make concepts more relevant for students. These teachers support students in developing personal learning networks of their own, so that they too can grow in their passions.



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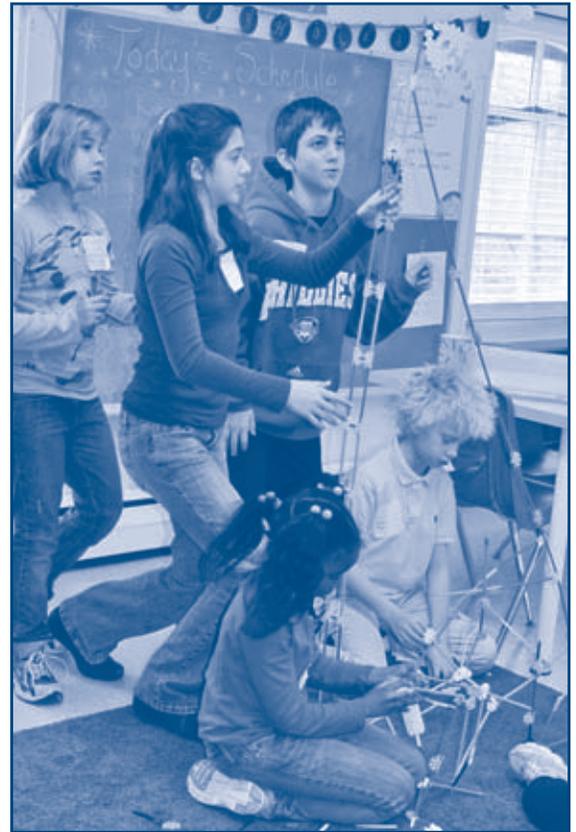
This Newsletter is a publication of MPFS. If you have moved recently or are planning to move, be sure to give us your new address so that you can continue to receive uninterrupted mailings.

Media-Providence Friends School is a PreK-8 Quaker day school which provides a rich educational experience where academic challenge is combined with the teaching of values.

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A Study in Perspective

MPFS faculty seek to foster balance between individual learning and achievement and the growth and respect that come through interaction with others. Central to that growth is teaching openness to other points of view. A recent multi-grade collaboration, growing out of Guidance lessons about respect and a Social Studies unit on Native Americans, demonstrates the complexity inherent in this aim. In a spin on the Sioux proverb "Don't judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins," students were given an opportunity to try "Walking in New Shoes."



Counselor T. Laura first provided students with a framework for understanding how people can look at the same situation differently. 5th graders examined optical illusions and found that, literally, they all didn't see the same thing. 3rd and 4th graders took part in a "Cross The Line" activity... e.g. Cross The Line If: "you're a boy and you've been told you shouldn't cry"; "you've ever felt unwelcome"; "you've been teased because of the color of your skin". This exercise shed light on classmates' different and similar experiences.

With groundwork laid, students considered their personal character traits and behaviors. Were they silly or serious, leaders or observers, shy or outgoing, etc.? Next, they selected a new positive character trait to "try on" for a morning (focused, helpful, optimistic, patient, calm, etc.) and developed a plan to demonstrate this trait. Finally, wearing labels to remind each other of the traits they'd chosen, they worked in teams in their "New Shoes" to build the tallest stable K'nex structure they could. Afterwards, the groups reflected on what they noticed about each other's changed behaviors, how successful they felt they'd been in demonstrating their own change, and how it felt to act in a new way.

This experience freed students to envision being something else... to look at life from a different perspective. Normally reserved children who chose to be leaders had "permission" to have a strong voice while others felt what it was like to let someone else direct an activity. Each student had the chance to see how they might be viewed by peers from the other side.

That many chose to continue wearing their New Shoes for the rest of the day was evidence of a lesson in flexible thinking sinking in.

Profiles in Philanthropy

At the school's Fall Cornerstone Awards Breakfast, attendees gathered to honor Trustee Nancy Fitts Donaldson, a kind and generous soul who exemplifies the qualities MPFS seeks to instill within its students. Friend of the school, friend of Nancy and former honoree Bill Ravdin said of the occasion, "I dare say that you have not had an opportunity to recognize anyone who has had a more profound impact on Friends primary education."

Nancy's relationship with MPFS is a long one, beginning as a student in the 1930's. Her first years at Media Friends, as the school was known then, were spent at the Gayley Street location with her sister Ellen Fitts Millick. She moved to the little school house at our current location for 3rd-6th grade, graduating in 1937, an important year in MPFS' history when it became the first area independent school to welcome an African-American student. Thereafter she continued to matriculate at Friends institutions, first at Friends Central and then Swarthmore College.

Passionate about Quaker education, Nancy is a career educator whose CV includes headship of Shipley's and Abington Friends' lower schools as well as Lansdowne Friends. Her counsel has been sought by Swarthmore College's School of Education, whose student teachers she has supervised and mentored, the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools as an accreditation evaluator, and by the heads of

many Quaker schools including Stratford Friends and Friends Central. Former MPFS Head, Lynn Oberfield describes Nancy as "...a careful thinker with long and deep perspective, who is always open to new learning."

Today, although busy with commitments at White Horse Village where she resides and at Willistown Meeting where she is a member, Nancy remains a strong advocate for MPFS saying, "As an alumna, I want to ensure that MPFS thrives so that children can benefit from the same wonderful start in life that I received here." To that end, she recently took on Clerkship of the Board's Meetings Partnership Committee, believing that, together, MPFS and area Meetings will be a more effective voice in the larger community for peace, equality and justice... ideals she learned well at Media Friends nearly 8 decades ago.



Friends Flip for Flip Cameras!

Grants from the Friends Council on Education and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting have garnered MPFS 14 new Flip video cameras for use in classrooms through the school. Teachers are enthusiastic about the Flips because they afford prospects for learning that match the curious and inventive natures of their students. That video cameras offer opportunities for collaborative work and problem solving, openings for creative expression, and windows for discovery through self-reflection makes them all the more worthy.



The Flips can be utilized in myriad ways in classrooms. So far this year, they've been used to document Kindergarteners' exploration of author Lois Ehlert's works, weather reports en Espanol in 6th grade Spanish, 5th graders' reflections about the process of making their class Rights & Responsibility Tree, 2nd graders' collaborative book reports, the performances of our Middle School rock bands and much more. The inherent "beauty" of video is that its possibilities are limited only by the imaginations of faculty and students!

Each month throughout the school year, a new classroom videography project is posted on our website Mash Up page: The Window (www.mpfs.org/thewindow). Please peek in for a small view into the amazing things that take place here each day!

Alumni News

Our 8th graders sent finals-week care packages to the Class of 2006: **Isaac Adam** at Shippensburg; **Alana Bowers**, a Biology major at Widener; **Dan Coneghen**, who is pursuing a degree in Music at Bloomsburg; **Eric Dixon** at Ohio Wesleyan; **Cori Gaston** who is studying Creative Writing at the University of Southern California; **Shelbi Hall**, a Pre-Med/Psychology major at Howard; **Dilys Hall**, an Engineering student at Virginia Tech; **Morris Lowitz-Coia** at Drexel; **Rebecca Marcus** who is taking a gap year with Carpe Diem Education in Central America and New Zealand before heading to Kenyon College; **Bonnie McFarland** who is considering Early/Special Education at West Chester; **Samantha Miller** who's at DCCC; **Amanda Silverman** who is exploring Chemistry at Earlham; **Patrick Smith** at York College; **Maggie Smythe** at Carleton; and **Alan Wilson**, a Criminal Justice major at Delaware Valley College.



LAURENCE LINDENMAIER, '76, wrote from Bend, OR recalling how important middle school biking and camping trips were to his education.

ERIC GRAVELY '77, teaches at Abington Friends where he is the Assistant Athletic Director and Assistant Director of the Sixers Basketball Camp.

ALLEN DICKERSON, '79, is living in Portland, OR where he works for Hewlett-Packard. He wrote to recount fond memories of T. Jennifer Gibbon and the time capsule his class buried.

TRACY DAVIS, '79, works at the San Juan Basin Health Department in Durango, CO and is a travel guide to India, having first visited with T. David Camp when he took a small group of students from MFS to there in 1976.

SUSAN HIGNUTT, '80, lives in Clayton, DE with her husband and 2 sons and works with people with disabilities.

JENNIFER PAYNE, '86, lives in Downingtown with her husband and 3 children. She works at the Willistown Country Day School.

DANA OLITA-OGDEN, '87, now lives in Hershey with her husband and two children. She works at the Hess Corporation and hopes to organize a Providence Friends HS reunion.

REBECCA CHAMBERLAIN, '87, is living and painting in Brooklyn with her fellow-artist husband and two children. You can see some of her works at www.rebecca-chamberlain.com.

BETSY ENGLAND DUCKWORTH, '89, has many wonderful memories of her time at MFS and PFS, "...so many amazing and kind teachers, and how our individuality was fostered by not making being different an issue, but by respecting who we all were." She lives in Connecticut where she is a writer and works in Emergency Medical Services for a local hospital.

JIM HARDY, '93, teaches social studies at Kensington Culinary Arts High School in Philadelphia while his bother, **BRIAN HARDY PhD, '94**, works in aerospace R&D in L.A. Says mom Pat, "Our sons experienced the joy of learning in the supportive and stimulating environment of Friends. We're thankful for the good start in the world given them by the excellent teachers at MPFS."

JEANINE SWEZEY, '98, is living in Arlington, VA where she is an RN.

JACOB WEISFELD, '98, a Brandeis grad, is attending Yeshiva Univeristy's Cardozo School of Law where he's specializing in Art Law.

KATRINA ROGACHEVSKY, '99, is living in Cambridge, MA where she works as Massachusetts State Senator Barry Finegold's Chief of Staff.

BRYN ARCHARD, '99, recently married Mohamed Klouj in Tunesia and is now living in Philadelphia.

JAKE EHLEITER, '01, is pursuing a PhD in Religious History at the University of Chicago. He's interested in Ancient Egyptian religions and may be the only MPFS grad who can read hieroglyphics.

LESLIE ARCHARD, '01, graduated from Penn State in 2009 and works at Thrivent Financial as a Financial Advisor.

EMILY MAYNARD, '02, graduated from Rutgers last spring and now teaches English in Korea.

SIERRA FIRN, '02, is pursuing her Masters in Special Education at the University of Pittsburgh.



2007 classmates Zach Summers, Marcus Bonner, Austin Shoenkopf and Sara Nivala stopped in to catch up with Teachers Roger and Nancy this fall.

Vertical Class Groupings

Over their years at MPFS, students might find themselves in single grade classes common in traditional schools, as well as multi-grade groupings characteristic to progressive schools in which students from two grades are combined to make up a class. No matter the schema, MPFS provides a student-centered educational experience. In every classroom, instruction is routinely differentiated to reflect the diverse learning styles, abilities and points of view within it, and students encounter teachers who meet them “where they are” and challenge them to move forward.

In the course of the past two decades, we’ve chosen to create vertical classes in our elementary program more years than not. Sometimes they’ve taken the form of a single class with two grades (e.g. 2nd/3rd or 3rd/4th) and at others, two grades might be split between two vertical classes (e.g. two 4th/5th groups). Always, when grouping two grades, we seek to maximize the strengths and talents of the two classes, academically and socially. Having the flexibility to balance gender, race, personality and class sizes helps tremendously in meeting this goal.

A typical day in the life of a vertically grouped class at MPFS actually doesn’t vary dramatically from that of a single grade class. While schedules vary from year to year, this year’s 3rd/4th vertical provides an example: they begin their day together in morning gathering prior to several concurrent hours of extended academic time when their teacher might present a Language Arts or Social Studies lesson and then workshop with small groups of students with support from Language Arts Coordinator T. Shirley and/or other faculty. They separate by grade for Math, Spanish and Science and travel in various combinations to other activities and specials throughout the day: together for recess, lunch, gym and chorus, and in two equal but mixed grade groups in turns to art, computer, Quakerism/library and music.



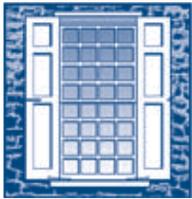
Although best-evidence meta-analysis of the research comparing multi-grade and multi-age classrooms with single grade classrooms shows that there are no statistically significant cognitive advantages or disadvantages for students in any configuration¹, verticals can and do offer benefits. They facilitate more complex activities, make for more multifaceted group interactions, and foster community within the school. Broadly speaking, younger students are exposed to more advanced concepts and skills. They have many opportunities to participate in deeper discussions than they might initiate on their own. Older students develop their own expertise and assume the role of the more experienced learner or leader. In that role, they are continually reinforcing their knowledge while being challenged to advance.

Likewise, teachers observe benefits in vertical arrangements. T. Shirley, who has taught in a number of vertical classrooms in her 20+ years here, feels they offer prosocial advantages, remarking, “Students form close, cross-grade friendships in vertical groupings that serve as a source of connection and well-being throughout the remainder of their time here.” T. Jenny says this of her 3rd/4th pairing this year, “Overall, I think this combined class paints a bigger picture of what school is all about for kids. They notice skills and concepts taught repeatedly throughout the years, but seeing two combined helps them realize the huge leaps of growth between years and how exciting that is! They can more easily see learning as a long-term phenomenon.”

And that, folks, is what’s “up” with vertical groupings!

1 “Cognitive and noncognitive effects of multigrade and multi-age classes: A best-evidence synthesis”; Veenman, Simon. Review of Educational Research. Washington: Winter 1995. Vol. 65, Iss. 4; pg. 319





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Meet Teacher Angela — 5th Grade Teacher

Ever enthusiastic and engaged T. Angela DiMaria exudes the essential qualities of an excellent elementary educator. Excessive alliteration aside, truly, there's just no missing her genuine curiosity, openness, and passion for teaching – a career that she hadn't initially envisioned for herself.

After obtaining her BA in Psychology and Sociology from Goucher College, Florida born and bred Angela moved to Boston for a research job documenting the experiences of inner city girls who were bused to suburban public schools. Project funding dried up, however, so her supervisor connected Angela with a local school where she joined the afterschool program team. It was her first real encounter with children and she found that she loved it. She recalls going home at night still thinking about how she could help each of the different kids she'd come across that day. That was when she decided to get her Masters in Education, choosing Wheelock College's collaborative teaching-learning program. Upon graduation in 1997, her mentor suggested that a socially progressive Quaker school might be up Angela's alley. Luckily for us, her search in Philadelphia, the presumptive "U.S. Quaker Capital", coincided with an opening

at MPFS. Attracted by the school's size and history, Angela quickly found a home teaching 5th and 4th/5th grade vertical classes here.

She enjoys the upper elementary ages because it's when students begin to develop their own identities, beliefs and passions, saying, "I want kids to bring their whole selves to my classroom... that's the material I get to work with and how I keep learning and developing my practice." That quest to improve and help her students informs all her work, and is why she attends weekly middle school faculty meetings to better understand the expectations for her students as they move on.

Angela brings similar energy to her personal passions. She enjoys dance and reading, and has participated in two SheRox Sprint Tri's, each comprised of an 800 meter swim in the Schullyll, a 15.5 mile bike ride and 5 K run. She notes, "It's actually not as bad as you would think to swim in the river!" She and husband Matt Lane, who she met at age 7 at piano lessons, also keep quite busy with daughters Hope, a Kindergartener here, and Ruby who will join our PreK-3 next year (the two girls were the reason for T. Angela's 5 year hiatus from MPFS between '04-'09).

We're so glad she – and her effervescent energy – are back!

IMPORTANT DATES: Spring Auction: April 15 • Graduation: June 8