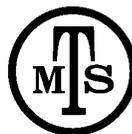




In affiliation with



The  
Manitoba  
Teachers'  
Society

Volume 1, Issue 2

Spring 2008 Newsletter

## Executive Members:

President:	Kathy Klenk
Vice-President:	Megan VanKoughnett
Secretary and Newsletter Chair:	Shelley Weaver
Treasurer, Membership, and Registration Chair:	Ange Neufeld
PD Chair:	Cheryl Kopp
SAG Conference Co-Chairs:	Nicole Mager, Carol Hill
SAG MTS Council Representative:	Kathy Klenk
Members at Large:	Angela Tascona, Hilary Carey, Lynn White, Alana White

## President's Message:

Executive Members of MAME were very excited at the success of our first annual SAG Conference in November, 2007. The event, held at H.S. Paul School, was attended by over 120 participants. Surveys about the sessions showed that participants were generally happy with the way the day went, and gave us some very valuable feedback for providing future SAG Conferences and PD events. Thank you all for your participation in our first conference!

We are currently putting plans in place for a Spring PD session to coincide with our Annual General Meeting as well as some initial plans for SAG 2008. Please see the advertisement we have included regarding this Spring PD/AGM event.

At this time, we are desperately seeking more Executive membership. Currently, most of our Executive members hold between 1 – 3 committee roles. In order to lighten our work load and provide more opportunities for our members, we are looking for other keen individuals who may help us to provide quality professional development and support for our colleagues in Multi-age/Multi-level environments. We try to meet on a monthly basis, not including December and June. If you may be interested in joining, or simply finding out more about what we do, please feel free to contact me at [kklenk@mts.net](mailto:kklenk@mts.net).

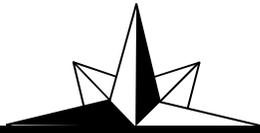
Sincerely,  
Kathy Klenk

## Events and Activities:

- In November of 2007, the Manitoba Association of Multi-age Educators hosted their first SAG Conference. The Conference included a keynote speaker, 7 sessions, 12 presenters, and lunch. We hope that the Conference addressed the needs of both Multi-age Educators and all our colleagues working with a variety of levels within their classrooms.
- On May 8 we are pleased to present **Math Activities for the Primary Years**. This session was a hit at SAG and Tamara Hawryluk has agreed to present the session again. This session is designed for Primary Teachers who want to explore current math concepts such as subitizing and ten frames. Activities will enhance Early Numeracy skills and other math strands. It will be held at Archwood School on Thursday, May 8, 2008 from 1:00 – 3:30 p.m.
- On May 8, 2008, the Annual General Meeting will be held at 3:45 p.m. at Archwood School.

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## Some Great Professional Reading from Regie Routman:

□ She reaffirms that getting to know your students and having high expectations of them and believing that they can all learn is the basis of best practice. □

### Reading Essentials: the Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well by Regie Routman, Heinemann Press, Portsmouth, NH, 2003

This published educator and author of several books, Regie Routman invites you into her classroom as a silent observer and data collector as you turn each page and read about her ideas about building a community of acceptance and trust in the classroom. She suggests that you tell and share stories about your own personal experiences in your life with your students, to ask questions in “conversations” with your students in think aloud mode as you write. Teacher modelling is the springboard for student learning. She reaffirms that getting to know your students and having high expectations of them and believing that they can all learn is the basis of best practice. The next belief is to lead your students to share responsibilities and help with the planning of how the classroom will look. She suggests building a library together by brainstorming and making a list of what should be in it. Capitalize on it and have it easily accessible for all members and share read alouds and book talks with materials from it. Building on students’ strengths and making positive comments back can help them gain an early confidence that will help them become better readers and writers. Her book’s expert advice, specific demonstrations, photos, references and easy to read style will inspire you to reflect, teach and manage your instructional time more effectively - goals we all have as educators. I rate it highly as a good professional read.

### Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results While Simplifying Teaching by Regie Routman, Heinemann Press, Portsmouth, NH, 2005



In her book titled Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results while Simplifying Teaching Regie Routman offers her knowledge in a confident and competent way. She is determined to help teachers simplify how to teach writing with skill so that students will encounter success with her practical, step by step, easy to do strategies for teaching writing well. Highlights include writing with a reader in mind with lots of modelling by the teacher, taking the time to talk and write, conference and share, and to set mutual goals. Her many ‘essentials’ such as practical ‘to do’ lists, samples of students’ work supplemented with her observations and conclusions regarding best practice, research underpinnings of her professional development and beliefs make it a good read. The book as a whole package will assist you with many ideas and suggestions that will support you to take your own action to move into a direction of change that is comfortable, professional and personally rewarding. Again, a highly recommended read if you’re looking for support for your writing program, no matter what grade level.

◆ . ◆ . ◆ . ◆ . ◆ . ◆ .  
□ She is determined to help teachers simplify how to teach writing with skill so that students will encounter success with her practical, step by step, easy to do strategies for teaching writing well. □

Respectfully Submitted by Member,  
Angela Tascona

## Creating a Community of Learners

### By Carol Hill

*A Community of Learners* - I am not sure where I first heard this term, but it has always seemed to epitomize what I believe schools should be. The term, community, implies a general sense of belonging and caring, while the term, learners, suggests people who are growing and becoming as they engage in thoughtful activities. This is what I have always wanted, both for my own children, and my students. As a researcher I have read multiple definitions for the term, community of learners, like the ones below and each description renews my sense of hope for what the endeavour of education can become.

*A community of learners is a supportive, caring environment that provides time, structure, and space for individuals who, in the case of a classroom, are the students and the teacher. It is a socio-cultural system mutually and actively created by teacher and students. In a community of learners all participants are active; no one has all the responsibility and none is passive. (from Simonson as cited in Varelas et al., 1999, p. 1)*

*The students and teachers have collaboratively shared responsibility and ownership for guidance and learning where the students are responsible for learning how to manage their learning and the teacher has responsibility for guiding the students in this process. (Matusov, 2000, p. 383)*

*A positive, encouraging learning atmosphere where all students feel welcome, respect one another and take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. (Perry and Drummond, 2002, p. 302)*



As a parent, and then as an educator, I have always been attracted to the idea of multi-level classrooms because I saw these classrooms as places where communities of learners could exist. Unfortunately, in the realities of schools this has not always been the case. The MECY document, *Independent Together* (1997), states that multi-level classrooms in of themselves are not the key to transforming our schools into learning communities.

*Placing students from several grades in one classroom does not itself create a successful multi-age classroom, however. Multi-age classrooms are based on a student-centred, subject-integrated approach to learning. If a teacher assigned to a multi-age, combined, or multi-grade classroom uses approaches traditionally used in single-grade classrooms and attempts to teach separate and discrete curricula to each grade-group, the benefits are lost. (p. 1.5)*

It is only when educators see the possibilities inherent within the multi-level setting that multi-level classrooms become communities of learners.

What is it, then, that creates communities of learners? To answer this I think it is important to look first beyond strategies and structures to a deeper investigation of the core beliefs that educators who embrace the concept of a community of learners must have. Teachers who “do” cooperative learning, class discussions, student self-assessment and goal-setting, experiential learning, and a multitude of other “best practices” do not necessarily create learning communities if at their core the teachers function from a behaviourist perspective. From this perspective the teacher holds all the answers, which they will tell students, and then look to students to demonstrate that they have learned the correct answer.

In contrast to this approach is the sociocultural theory of learning and development. John-Steiner and Mahn, explain that “sociocultural approaches emphasize the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge” (p.1).

□ It is only when educators see the possibilities inherent within the multi-level setting that multi-level classrooms become communities of learners. □

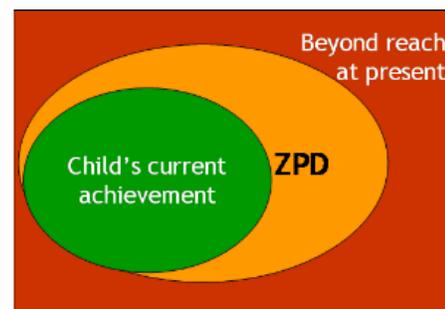
## Creating a Community of Learners

This statement first of all suggests that as constructors of knowledge students must be active creators. Secondly it suggests that learning is about the interaction between the individual and others. Thirdly it suggests that the importance of individual processes that occur in learning; reflection and metacognition are necessary components of learning. If a teacher holds these fundamental beliefs as true then it follows naturally that in her class she will facilitate, or guide, the students as they make decisions about, discuss and reflect on their learning not because these are good practices, but because they support her beliefs about teaching and learning. In essence this teacher will be a social constructivist.

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire, (2005) a Brazilian educator, and perhaps the leader of the critical literacy movement, compares the student-teacher relationship in a traditional, didactic setting to that of a banker who deposits information into the student's mind. In this transmission model of education students are the passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge. For Freire, who was concerned with people achieving humanity, this banking approach was considered dehumanizing, as students are not active, or called upon to critically reflect on their realities. He called for a problem-posing education as a way to help "people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (2005, p.83). He sees this approach as affirming because people can believe that both they and their world can change; can become better. I believe that it is the deep respect Freire demonstrates towards people in his belief in the ability, and the right, of all people to take charge of their lives, and to have an impact on their world that is at the heart of a true community of learners. As teachers, it is our desire to empower students that gives us the freedom to move from being transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning.

Also central to the understanding of social constructivism, and therefore the development of a community of learners, is an understanding of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as described by Vygotsky. Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, wrote in the early 1900s, but his works were not translated into English until the late 1950s. Vygotsky examined the relationship between learning and development. He

found that there was a difference between what a child could do independently, and what she could do with guidance from an expert, which could be either an adult or a peer. He labelled this difference the ZPD. The important idea that comes out of understanding the ZPD is that, to propel the learning forward, the learning environment should be a little in advance of development; Vygotsky did not see development occurring before learning, rather the learning which occurs in the child's social environment is integral to the developmental process. The teacher's role is to be aware of the ZPD of her students and to provide the scaffold they need to reach the next level in their learning. In a community of learners it is my opinion that this scaffolding can be provided by interactions with people, as well as tools, such as books and computers and structures within the class. In a community of learners, the whole classroom, not just the teacher, operates as the scaffold to provide ZPD that students need for their learning and development to progress.



Building on the sociocultural theory of learning, Rogoff, Matusov and White define learning "as a community process of *transformation of participation* in sociocultural activities" (1996, p.388). If what we believe is that learning is changing participation in a community rather than transmission of knowledge our approach to teaching and learning will undoubtedly be different. To learn information our students will work collaboratively as they carry out purposeful activities that are connected to what we believe is important within our community.

□As teachers, it is our desire to empower students that gives us the freedom to move from being transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning.□

## Conclusion of *Creating a Community of Learners* By Carol Hill

If a teacher does not operate from this stance of social constructivism it is unlikely that any strategy or structure used in her classroom will create a community of learners. However, if this is the stance taken the following strategies and structures will be present:

Students will be given many opportunities to talk to and learn from one another.

Students will be taught the social skills they need to collaborate with one another.

Student questions will guide learning.

Students will have opportunities to construct their learning socially as well as experientially through hands-on activities.

Students will engage in activities they see as meaningful and purposeful.

Students will have opportunities to self assess, i.e. rubrics, journals

In a community of learners teachers view themselves differently:

They recognize that the connections they make to students are the spring board for building community within the classroom.

Teachers will see themselves as co-learners, collaborators in learning, or facilitators whose job it is to scaffold student learning.

Teachers value the students' out of school experiences/home literacy.

Teachers value the involvement of the students' community in the school; this includes parents, neighbours, businesses, and outside experts.

When teachers act from a position of social constructivism, rather than from a position of transmitters of knowledge, schools will become communities of learners. This is a paradigm shift for many of us as most of us were taught in the "banking system" of school. People who value education as a chance to help all people achieve their potential, rather than a place to sort students, will see the potential in creating schools where everyone is valued as learners.

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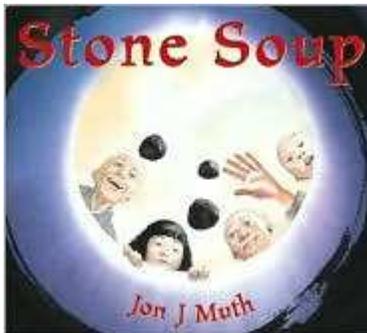


The Manitoba Association of Multi-age Educations would like to thank our colleagues for taking the time to share their research, philosophies, reflections, professional reading recommendations, and classroom experiences! If you would like to contribute to the MAME newsletter please forward submissions to Shelley Weaver at [weavne@aol.com](mailto:weavne@aol.com).

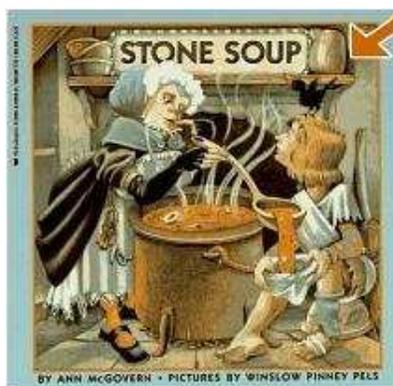
**Teaching Primary Multi-level Students**  
**Stone Soup Folktale Study:**

**By: Hilary Carey, Primary Teacher**  
**George McDowell School, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Our early years' class was beginning to explore our cultural backgrounds. I wanted to incorporate a folktale study into our explorations so that we could begin to think of stories coming from different cultural backgrounds, eventually leading to stories from our own cultures.



I discovered that there were a few versions of Stone Soup that were set in different parts of the world. We began our study with me reading aloud different versions of the story. This soon led to rich discussions of the similarities and differences in the stories. We used Venn circles to compare two of the versions: the students wrote or drew characters and events on cards and placed them into one or the other Venn circle, or in the middle if it appeared in both stories.

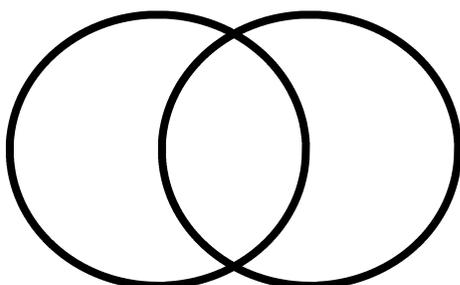


We then looked at the ingredients for Stone Soup, as laid out in the stories, and we chose two story versions: a meat version and a vegetarian version. From these stories we created recipes. The children asked their parents if they could bring in one ingredient, such as a carrot, to add to the soup. On the soup making day, we all chopped up the vegetables and placed them in the pots, with 3 shiny clean stones per pot. That day the aroma of wonderful soup found its way around the school, tantalizing the noses of other staff and students. Many of these people asked what we were making. When we replied, they often asked why it was called Stone Soup.



We decided we needed to explain the story to the rest of the school with pictures and words, so we planned to make a bulletin board. We first made a class graph of our favourite version of Stone Soup, and chose the class favourite to illustrate in mural form, in this instance, Marcia Brown's version. Each student took a character or item from the story to draw and paint on large paper, then cut out when dry. I gave each a coat of PVA (polyvinyl acetate) to give the illustrations a shine. Then, each student printed out a caption to help summarize the story on the bulletin board.

To conclude this experience, we took a class survey to see how many of us liked Stone Soup. Finally, we wrote about the experience in our writing notebooks. It was an event not soon to be forgotten!



**Bibliography**

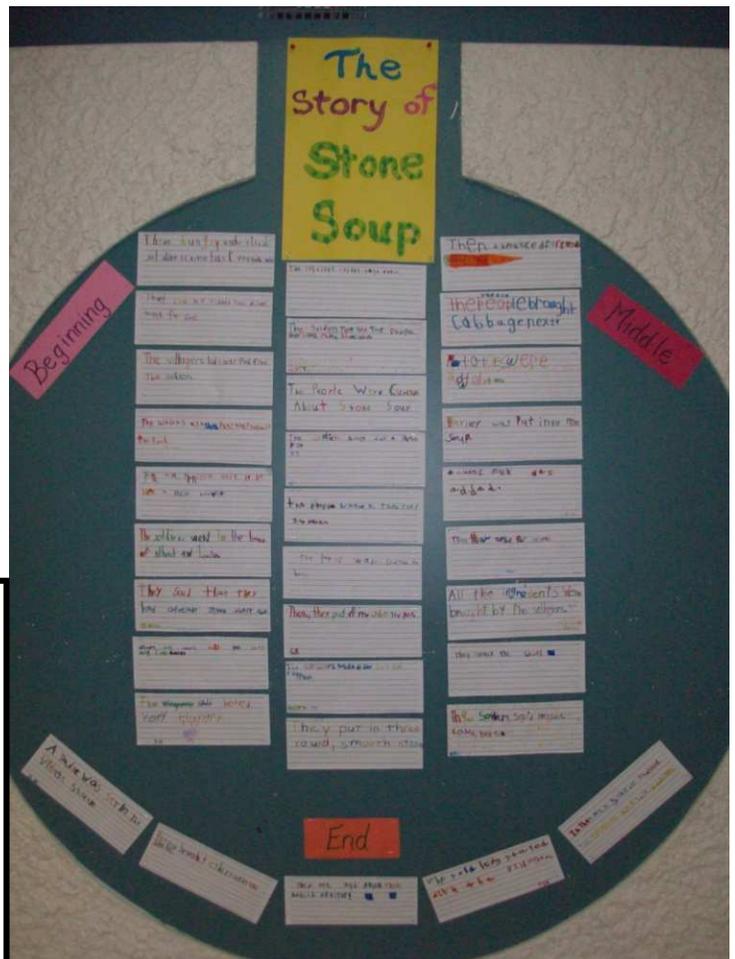
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This is our bulletin board with the painted illustrations.



Then, each student printed out a caption to help summarize the story on the bulletin board.



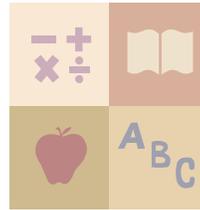
This is the wall next to the paintings, with the written story summary.



is proud to present...

## Math Activities for the Primary Years

Presenter: Tamara Hawryluk, Primary Teacher, Pembina Trails S. D.



Early Numeracy focus

An informative, practical hands-on workshop with ideas, games and a Make and Take component

Thursday, May 8, 2008

1:00 - 3:30pm

Archwood School Library (800 Archibald St.)

Registration Fee: \$21 (Members), \$40 (Non-members)

MAME Membership Fee: \$20

Registration Deadline: May 6<sup>th</sup>. Spaces are limited.

You are cordially invited to attend our

Annual General Meeting

following this session

3:45 pm Archwood Library

Refreshments will be provided.

E-mail any questions to Cheryl: [cheryl\\_k18@hotmail.com](mailto:cheryl_k18@hotmail.com)