

Distance Learning Odyssey

South Central Indiana DIAL Consortium

Finding the Heart of a Story

January 2001

Issue 5

Imagine you're a student in the seventh grade and that your class has just completed a reading assignment. As your classmates discuss the story in the assignment, you begin to wonder where the author got the idea for the story. Were the characters based on real people? Did the author write a rough draft? How long did it take the author to write the story? Why did the author decide to become a writer? Imagine again, that as a student you have the opportunity to actually talk to a real author and learn the answers to your questions.

During November, students in ten middle schools across Indiana had the opportunity to participate in a series of discussions with award-winning author Ben Mikaelson. To prepare for the connections, students read books written by Mr. Mikaelson such as "Petey" and "Sparrow Hawk Red".

Speaking from Montana State University, through an ISDN connection into the Vision Athena network, Mr. Mikaelson described his difficulties with grammar and spelling while attending a boarding school in Bolivia, South America. He talked about moving to the United States in seventh grade and the difficulties he had of fitting into his new environment. He also explained that as a child he was ashamed of who he was, but that slowly he discovered that his differences made him special and that our differences are our strengths. He told students he loves seeing children proud of their differences.



Ben Mikaelson, Author

As a child he assumed he was a bad writer, but he also loved to hide under the covers at night with a flashlight in his mouth scribbling ideas on paper. He told students that not until college did he even consider actually becoming an author. He told the story of being fearful when called into an English professor's office early in college to receive comments about an essay he'd written. To his surprise he was told that out of two hundred essays, only one had made the professor both laugh and cry. Further, the professor actually told him that he was a writer because of his ability to tell a story.

Mr. Mikaelson uses this story to explain that as he visits schools and sees students having trouble, he encourages them to work on the mechanics of writing but never to forget that writing is storytelling and that the story holds the magic. He also explained how important research is in his work. Students learned how critical it is to keep trying until they find the heart of a story and that after that it becomes much easier to tell the story.

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Special points of interest:

- To schedule a distance learning event fill out the **scheduling request form** on page 252 of the Vision Athena Catalog or on the web at <http://www.visionathena.k12.in.us/> and fax it to (812) 856-8232
- To join the **DIAL listserv** send an email to Amy Lee at adlee@indiana.edu
- For immediate assistance during an event, call the **Video Images Helpdesk** at 800-488-4336

Teacher Grant Updates

The Story of the Stone

Beth Piekarsky's fourth-grade class at University Elementary has finished videotaping all of their field experiences from this Fall. Now that the videotaping is complete they are in the process of developing their video with Justin Marquis. After the students have edited the video, it will be used during the distance learning connections as one of the ways of highlighting the work that they have done. Beth will work with coordinator Dave Bartlett on orchestrating the distance learning connections and marketing these programs to other fourth grade classes. We hope to involve the VIESN group for their experience in feedback on this project. Watch for information on the DIAL listserv to sign up for this project. We are projecting a program date of early March and hope that this project can be used as a model for other fourth-grade classes around the state to develop similar projects within their areas.

Mission to Mars Robotics class

This project was delayed in first semester because of availability of the LEGO robotics kits. The mission of the students will be to construct robots that will be assembled on a simulated Mars colony using LEGO robotics kits. This collaboration between students enrolled at Indiana University in the A290 Introduction to LEGO Robotics class and Columbus North High School will demonstrate the power of electronics collaboration through the World Wide Web and through videoconferencing.

Testing the Waters

This innovative project was very successful and was completed with some very interesting forms of documentation. Tim Soliday and Fred Walden put together a thorough scrap book showing students during distance learning connections and on field experience. Captions were written by the students themselves. In addition they created a PowerPoint presentation that was given to their entire staff at McCormick's Creek Elementary School, including video clips from various distance learning connections. Clips and a small presentation will be presented at the ICE conference in January about this project.

A Distant Drum

A Distant Drum is an interdisciplinary project designed by the seventh-grade Comets Team at Owen Valley Middle School. Africa is a required unit of study for the seventh-grade geography students in Indiana. The Comets have elected to make this unit more meaningful for their students by integrating it throughout the curriculum focusing in particular on helping the students "understand that culture and experience influences peoples perception of places and regions". From a scientific point of view, the students will look at the endangered African elephants and the environmental factors that have decreased their numbers. The unit will involve a total of six distance connections, a computer simulation, and two novels which take place in Kenya, Africa. It will also involve using both print and non-print resources for student-produced scrapbooks to document the project.

University Implementation Grant

The Corporation for Educational Communications (CEC) has developed a new form of grant called the Implementation Grant. These were created to help with implementation strategies at various schools. University Elementary School is writing the first one from the DIAL Consortium. The goal of this grant is to improve usage at all levels within the school from the most novice to the most experienced users. Contact person Karen Boswell will be orchestrating some curriculum integration workshops in conjunction with Dave Bartlett, DIAL Coordinator. Strategies include workshops, staff meetings, and strategic partnerships within the schools and with other schools. A comprehensive evaluation will be done in order to capture what was learned from this grant. This grant is very important and all schools would benefit from reading some of the design components of this grant.

I-69 Making Connections

I-69: Making Connections is distance learning project that will give approximately 120 eighth grade students a chance to research the I-69 project and compare their community's perceptions of the project with others in the state. These interactions will be scheduled with Decatur Middle School, South Spencer High School and through CEC. Each interactive experience will help students understand federal Interstate guidelines and their impact on communities.

School Profiles

Columbus East High School

Last year Columbus East High School was involved primarily with the Business Marketing class between Columbus North and Columbus East High Schools. Also they featured a series of connections with the Indianapolis Repertory Theater (<http://www.indianarep.com/>). Recently they hosted students from Northside and Central Middle Schools for the three part Ben Mikaelson Author series. This year they look to involve departments such as math, social studies, and English in their distance learning connections.

Nineveh-Hensley-Jackson United School Corporation

Former DIAL Coordinator Tom Bauer, now Technology Director for this school corporation in Trafalgar, recently joined the Consortium. They are using ISDN technology to connect to the Vision Athena Network. Because of Tom's involvement, they are in the development stage of many innovative distance learning initiatives that will be described in future additions of the newsletter. We welcome them and look forward to their participation in our Consortium.

Welcome to our Consortium Nineveh - Hensley-Jackson United School Corporation, South Elementary School, Hauser High School, and Mooresville Education Center!

Edgewood Early Childhood Center

Edgewood Early Childhood Center has hosted many connections for both the pre-school children and for the Edgewood Middle School students. Carol Gardner, principal of Edgewood Early Childhood Center, hosted connections with Aquatic Research Institute (<http://www.arcec.org/>), the Museum of Tolerance (<http://www.wiesenthal.com/mot/>) in Los Angeles, and the Children's Museum of Indianapolis (<http://www.childrensmuseum.org/>) for Edgewood Middle School last year. Connections for their pre-school involved the Indianapolis Zoo (<http://www.indianapoliszoo.com>) and the Children's Museum of Indianapolis (<http://www.childrensmuseum.org/>). Their facility is a unique setting because it will hold large numbers; over 100 middle school students will comfortably fit within their site.

Edgewood High School

Last year Edgewood High School conducted a German class between their German teacher, Romona Winter/Leigh, and Southern Wells High School in northern Indiana. The German 3 and 4 class extended both first and second semester. One of the marquee connections from the high school last year was a connection between German exchange students from the Ford Plant in Germany and Romona Winter/Leigh's German class at Edgewood. Smithville Telephone president Bob Mondy and Indiana University supported this project.



Edgewood High School

Eastern School District

The primary usage in the Eastern School District is within the elementary. They have two active participants in the Virtual Indiana Elementary School Network (VIESN) project. Dinah Fuller and Nancy Leonard have both been involved with the VIESN project over the last two years. Some of their connections featured a collaborative project between Eastern Hancock and Eastern Elementary on Yellowstone National Park. This year they look to continue their innovative projects.

Mooresville High School

In its first year Mooresville High School was heavily involved with many content provider events. They also involved teachers in after school graduate level classes at the site. Because this is a consolidated school, their entire school district was able to use the site last year. However, due to heavy usage they decided to add a second site to avoid conflicts. Mooresville Consolidated School Corporation serves as a model of organization and have conducted awareness sessions with other schools to explain how it is that they coordinate their technology use.

Mooresville Education Center

The Mooresville Education Center has been added as a second site for Mooresville Consolidated School Corporation. The auditorium style room will be used for connections needing larger numbers and also for board meetings with their school board and other administrators. This site has been completed and became functional December of 2000.



Mooresville Education Center

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We're on the Web!
[Http:// www.crlt.indiana.edu/dial/index.html](http://www.crlt.indiana.edu/dial/index.html)

World Wide Web Links

Teacher Institute for Curriculum Knowledge
About Integration of Technology (TICKIT)
For Middle and High School Teachers
<http://www.indiana.edu/~tickit>

Indiana Higher Education Telecommunications
System (IHETS)
<http://www.ihets.org>

Global Interactive Academic NeTwork (GIANT)
<http://www.indiana.edu/~global/giant.htm>

Indiana Computer Educators (ICE)
<http://www.iupui.edu/~ice>

Vision Athena
<http://www.visionathena.k12.in.us>

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He also described how each word must earn its space on the page and the struggle to get every sentence to speak its meaning.

At the conclusion of each connection, Mr. Mikaelson conducted a round-robin question and answer session. During these periods, students learned how difficult it is to get a book published and the importance of believing in one's self.

Overall, Mr. Mikaelson inspired both teachers and students by helping them understand the personal value and importance of writing. Readers can visit Mr. Mikaelson at his Web site at <http://benmikaelsen.com/>. Readers are also encouraged to write Mr. Mikaelson through his e-mail address ben@benmikaelsen.com.

Naomi McFall

Teacher Grant updates and details are available
upon request at the DIAL Consortium
