

CEE-GS Newsletter

CONNECT WITH US AT NCTE!

CEE-GS Session: The Future is Now: Connecting with the Next Generation of English Teacher Educators. 4:15-5:30pm, Saturday, November 17.

CEE-GS Social: 6:00 pm, Saturday, November 17. Location TBD

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ALAN BROWN

Makenzie Selland, University of Colorado at Boulder

Recently graduated from The University of Alabama with a Ph.D in English Education, Dr. Alan Brown has been an integral member and leader within the CEE-GS community for the past two years. Originally from Summerfield, North Carolina, Alan taught high school English and coached basketball before entering graduate school. As a doctoral student, Alan has distinguished himself by earning an honorable mention from NCTE for the 2011 English Leadership Quarterly Best Article,

TAKEAWAYS

Kristin A. K. Sovis, Western Michigan University

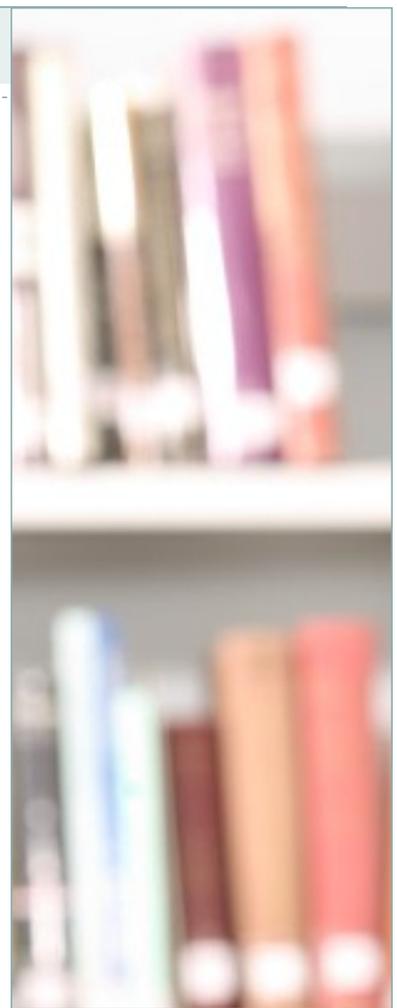
My Secondary English Education undergraduate students and I speak often about “takeaways”—the things we’ll carry with us, the things that will inform what we do in the future. We discuss student takeaways, teacher takeaways, and life takeaways as we unpack our experiences as learners, teach-

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Briefly highlight your point of interest here.



AN INTERVIEW (CON'T)

as well as through numerous other presentations and contributions to the field. This July, Alan will begin a position in Wake Forest University's Department of Education where he will be teaching ELA methods and action research as well as supervising pre-service teachers. In response to a few questions below, Alan shares some of his graduate school story and offers some advice on the dissertation and job search process. An avid baseball and Chicago Cubs fan, Alan says he realizes that "we're cursed by a billy goat, and I've accepted that we may never win a World Series. On the bright side, we have eternal optimism on our side because there is always next year."

What led you to enter your graduate program?

Ever since I decided to pursue teaching as an undergrad at Appalachian State University, I have been fascinated by the thought of what it means to be a teacher. As much as I enjoyed teaching high school English, I enjoyed learning and sharing ideas about teaching even more. I first met my doctoral advisor, Dr. Lisa Scherff, at the 2007 NCTE annual conference in New York. I was entertaining the idea of pursuing a Ph.D., and she convinced me The

"The best advice I can offer is to start planning as early as possible..."

University of Alabama was the place for me. The rest is history.

What is the topic of your dissertation?

Have you ever met a teacher who is more interested in coaching sports than actually teaching in his or her content area (e.g., English, math)? Probably so, although I hope you've also seen educators effectively balance these two roles as well. Either way, this is the topic of my dissertation. While there has been plenty of research about teacher-coaches within the field of kinesiology, the responsibilities of someone like me (i.e., an English teacher/basketball coach) are often overlooked in educational research. The title of my dissertation is 'The Occupational Socialization of Novice, Core Content Area Teachers/Athletic Coaches', and it includes case studies of first-year teacher-coaches.

What advice, tools, resources, routines were most effective in helping you complete your dissertation?

I was fortunate enough to find a dissertation topic I enjoyed early in my doctoral experience, which allowed me to utilize class assignments to build a research base, write literature reviews, sample various methodologies, and conduct a pilot study prior to starting my actual dissertation. The best advice I can offer is to start planning as early as possible, block off periods of time to devote to the dissertation on a weekly basis, and expect dissertating to take longer than you first anticipate.

What tips can you give to other graduate students who are finishing up their dissertations, and starting the job search?

My main advice for the job search is to do your homework. Know as much as possible about the city/university/college/department/faculty before you arrive. It is amazing how much more engaging conversations become when you have some prior knowledge to fall

AN INTERVIEW (CON'T)

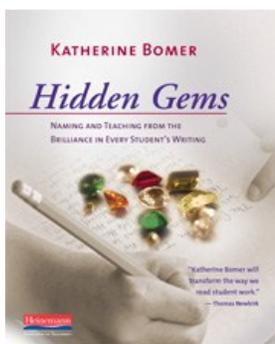
back on. These understandings will allow you to focus on selling yourself as a worthy candidate instead of searching for answers to questions you should already know.

What role has NCTE and CEE-GS played in your graduate school career?

NCTE has played a major role in my graduate student experience. Some of the closest friends I've made over the past few years are graduate students in English education, and NCTE is one of the few events where I get to see them all in one place. Many of them are also members of CEE-GS, which is truly amazing because when I look at our group, I see the future of English education. Long after my graduate student days are over, I will actively recruit for CEE-GS because it has opened so many doors in such a short period of time, and I wish all graduate students could have such an opportunity. *Thank you for your insights, Alan. We wish you the best in your new position!*

BOOK REVIEW: *HIDDEN GEMS* BY KATHRYN BOMER

Reviewed by Christy McDowell, Western Michigan University



Katherine Bomer's book, *Hidden Gems*, is a tool for helping teachers find the beauty in every student's writing. A former teaching consultant and elemen-

tary school teacher, Bomer is passionate about finding the "long language" necessary to help students embrace the writer within. Recounting her own experiences with teachers' comments, she emphasizes the impact that the words teachers use can have on students. "Teachers can help create kids who love to write and try to improve their writing by naming their hidden gems, their particular gifts as writers. Or we can destroy any desire to write by constantly pointing out what is wrong or what is missing."

Bomer provides strategies for breaking down and enhancing a writing curriculum, beginning with what should be the most basic of strategies, through reading. Borrowing from Katie Wood Ray, Bomer emphasizes that students need to read like writers, paying attention to techniques that authors employ. She then

strategizes how to help students develop a discourse for talking about their writing.

A significant section of the book is devoted to unpacking the common vocabulary used with teaching writing in accordance with the six traits of writing. Bomer argues, however, that the traits need to be expanded. "My hope is to take some of the more overused categories...and try to move us away from those sterile descriptions toward a more tactile, more elegant, and certainly more enlivening language for writing." Throughout this section, she provides strategies for encouraging student growth in each of these areas, while also providing ideas for commenting on student papers. These comments are meant to be supportive, engaging, and instructive.

While Bomer's concepts are engaging and her passion is contagious, her ideas also get repetitive. Her subsequent chapters break down her strategies for digging deeply into student writing. With her inclusion of sample writings and an appendix of reproducible graphic organizers, this book would be ideal for use in methods course for English teachers of upper elementary or middle school grades.

TAKEAWAYS (CON'T)



ers, and human beings. These classroom “takeaways” discussions along with informal one-on-one discussions with incredibly brilliant preparing ELA teachers always leave me thinking about what I—what we as English Educators—can continue to do and begin to do in best supporting both ELA students and preparing ELA teachers.

Takeaway One: my learning and teaching experiences, along with my reflections on practice are important. My time as a secondary ELA teacher and my reflections on my own practice are important to my work as a teacher educator. In fact, my methods (rooted largely in best practices and a collaborative pedagogy) that I developed over my years in the high school ELA classroom, are those

“My time as a secondary ELA teacher and my reflections on my own practice are important to my work as a teacher educator.”

INSIDE STORY HEADLINE

This story can fit 75-125 words.

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that I use now. Process, student choice, collaboration and authentic and relevant classroom activities are the cornerstones of what I’ve observed to help students, both secondary and post-secondary, as they learn and find success. This notion of providing students with relevant contexts in which to learn is critical. As McCann, et al. note in *Supporting Beginning English teachers: Research and Implications for Teacher Induction* (2005), a major contributor to beginning secondary ELA teacher attrition is that many novice teachers, while knowing what they believe and what they want for their students and selves, struggle to enact the means to get where they want to go. In other words, struggling novice teachers don’t know what to *do* in the classroom. This challenge of finding ways to teach, assess, and manage a classroom of students, along with complex and challenging institutional factors—such as having a limited voice one’s beginning teaching schedule, little administrative and collegial support and mentoring, and large class sizes—leaves many talented beginning teachers at a loss in achieving their teaching potential.

In reflecting on my own development as a teacher, I know this to be true. Fortunately, through my methods courses, I acquired a solid grounding in best practices of teaching writing and in culturally relevant pedagogies, especially as related to teaching literature. I also had opportunities to experiences to teach: to

muster courage to be in a room with students as their teacher; to plan lessons I'd actually carry out; and to "test out," reflect upon, and refine these practices in the future. Without this experiential learning, I would have been at a loss for what to do in the classroom and how to make the hundreds of teaching decisions per day that I needed to make, all in an attempt to facilitate my students' learning. In navigating difficult teaching situations involving an abused student, a disruptive student, a reluctant student, a disappointed parent, an inquiring administrator, or a non-participatory colleague—I always had the practices that I had enacted and in so doing supported students with, to frame my thinking and decision-making.

Takeaway Two: my students' learning and teaching experiences, along with their reflections on practice are important.

Given my experiences as a teacher and developing teacher educator, I've made it a point to grant my preparing teachers access to authentic student bodies and to practicing teachers in preparing, enacting, and reflecting on their teaching methods. And in so doing, my students have articulated the greatest takeaways of the semester. For instance, after students in *English 4790: Writing in the Secondary Classroom* completed guest teaching in first-year writing classrooms at Western Michigan University, their reflections were culminations of that which we had worked to do all semester: finding ways to blend our own personalities with both best practices and the diverse students and situations that account for our profession as teachers. Their takeaways revealed authentic learning and inspiration to continue their teaching journeys. One

wrote, for instance, "I saw firsthand that students can have fun in the classroom and still learn. I want to be a teacher that never forgets this." And another reflected, "This experience reminded me of why I want to be a teacher. I was on the fence about my major for a moment, but after guest teaching, I realize secondary English Education is what I'm made for." Their takeaways also revealed critical reflection on practice, as noted by in the following student response: "A better lead-in to the purse activity would have helped students; we had to individually consult with groups about the task and the goal of the activity. So, there were a few minutes of "wasted" time that we couldn't get back." And another student commented on his frustrating teaching experience in a very thoughtful way: "I've had bad experiences like this one before, and I'm sure I'll have more, but evolving as a teacher because of the experience is what I'm most optimistic about. This experience has helped me contextualize the type of students I may encounter in the future, and helped me begin to think about the type of classroom structure I want to promote...I saw this: Students are not given a chance to grow as writers if they are focused solely on an outcome, and not how to obtain and create that outcome. Plus, creating is the fun part; seeing your creation is just a bonus."

NCTE and NCATE's 2003 position statement builds on the notion that teacher beliefs are developed by methods course and that a diversity of experiences support preparing teachers. Repeatedly, the document notes that preparing ELA teachers experience "a strong blend of theory and practice" in their preparatory programs and that these students "use both theory and practice" in preparing to teach their future students. To use both theory and practice as teachers, preparing teachers have to teach. McCann et. al, echoes this

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notion in recommending that English teacher preparatory programs and methods courses “frequently and explicitly link theory and research about teaching to practical problems novices will likely face.” And Collier asserts the same in *Council Chronicle*'s 2011 article, “Successes in English Teacher Preparation: Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers—What Are the Best Practices?” when she writes that preparing teachers need to “get into the field early and often.” And as my students' reflective takeaways illustrate, this is most certainly the case.

Takeaway three: Our collective experiences and collaborations as English Educators and teacher educators are important. The methods course is a space of great potential as it can support preparing teachers in developing their identities as teachers; enable them to develop skills and confidence to persevere, problem-solve, and succeed; help them develop as reflective practitioners that carefully considers culture; support them in developing and refining methodologies grounded thoughtfully in theory. It is now 2012, and in the most standards-driven public education system our country has ever seen, coupled with an urgency to support a diversity of students, investigation into the role that the methods course plays in the development of preparing teachers is as critical, if not more so as teaching is becoming increasingly complex, than ever.

As English Educators and teacher educators, we can turn to our experiences in reflecting not only that which we ourselves experience as classroom teachers and teacher educators, but also in providing our students with teaching and reflective experiences that support the shaping of their teaching identities and development of their teaching methods. In collaborating with one another regarding our pedagogies and methodologies and our reflections as learners and teachers, we just may discover, together, new and innovative strategies and ways of thinking that will mentor and teach preparing teachers to always be striving for, reflecting on, and acting on their own and their students' takeaways.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

JOLLE@UGA 2013 CONFERENCE

Conference Theme: Activist Literacies: Inspire, Engage, Create,
Transform

The University of Georgia, Athens, GA

February 22-23, 2013

For more info visit: <http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/2013conference/>



A Little Levity . . .

FIVE SIGNS YOU ARE A GRADUATE STUDENT

1. “Fun” movies and books remind you of your research.
2. You discuss your classes or research at social events, like at parties and on dates.
3. You know the area of the library or coffee shop with the most outlets.
4. You value books more for their bibliographies than their content.
5. Summer is no longer about vacations—it’s about uninterrupted reading and research.

