



CHARLES DUKE

Portrait of a Volunteer

In this feature, Charles Duke speaks on the wide variety of volunteer roles he has held within NCTE and how they have enhanced his career.

Dr. Charles R. Duke is currently Dean of the Reich College of Education at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina where he administers one of the largest teacher education programs in North Carolina. He has experience as a high school English teacher, department chair, curriculum coordinator, director of freshman composition programs at several universities, and has served as director/co-director of National Writing Project sites in Kentucky, Utah, and Pennsylvania; he currently works with school districts on issues related to writing across the curriculum and teacher professional development. He currently directs the NCTE/National Council Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) program review process.

What motivated you to volunteer for NCTE service?

I can trace my involvement with NCTE back to my days as an undergraduate at a small, state supported teachers college in New Hampshire; my English methods instructor, the infamous Dr. Gertie Stearns, hammered into our idealistic minds the importance of giving something back to the profession. I didn't fully comprehend what she meant until I had been in the classroom and had attended several state affiliate meetings; then I saw how important it was not only to be an outstanding teacher but also to give back to the profession through service in some way so the profession could continue to grow. I've been involved with NCTE for over 40 years now and can't think of a time when I was not engaged in some form of service to NCTE and its affiliates.

What has kept you interested in volunteering your time over the years?

The profession changes and as it changes, new challenges and opportunities emerge and since I have always found service to benefit me as well as those served, I can't turn down an opportunity to serve.

What does your current role entail?

Currently I serve as NCTE/NCATE Director of Program Reviews; in this role, I oversee with the assistance of NCTE staff, the review of all English language arts teacher preparation programs whose institutions seek NCATE accreditation. This work involves training approximately 100 reviewers around the country, reviewing their reviews as they are submitted, participating in the revision of the NCTE/NCATE standards, offering workshops on the review process at national, regional, and state conferences and working with state departments of education to assist them in preparing institutions to submit reviews.

What key roles have you played and what did you find most satisfying in carrying them out?

How key they have been, I am not sure, but over the years I have held a number of leadership positions; in addition to my current position with the Program Review Process, I have been program chair of the Conference on English Education (CEE) conference; chair of the CEE Transition to Teaching Committee; chair of the NCTE Standing Committee on Affiliates; recording secretary for the CEE Executive Committee; and I have served as a member of several key task forces, the most notable of which have been the NCTE/NCATE National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT) Committee on Assessment and the CEE Task Force on NCTE and NCATE Relations. In addition, I have served as president of NCTE affiliates in New Hampshire, New England, and Kentucky and I currently serve as a reviewer for *English Education*, *English Journal*, and the *Alan Review*. My greatest satisfaction in all of these activities is the knowledge that I am serving my profession, and that I am engaged in work that I hope will strengthen the preparation of future English teachers as well as contribute to the ongoing professional development of those already in the profession. Besides--it's fun to work with so many different groups on a variety of projects.

What satisfactions do you derive from volunteering?

The knowledge that I am engaged in work that may prove helpful to others is probably the greatest satisfaction I derive from volunteering. Service, regrettably, does not always get recognized as it should in terms of promotions, merit increases or the like--but if one approaches service simply to add a line on a vita, then don't bother; you embarrass yourself as well as the others who have expected to receive from you service that is not dictated by ulterior motives. Service should come from intrinsic motivation and knowledge that helping others is simply part of what being a professional is all about.

Why would you recommend volunteering to another NCTE member?

I have always encouraged my students and colleagues to be active in NCTE, to give something back to the organization because only through the services of its membership can the organization hope to survive and provide leadership on issues of concern to all English teachers at any level. I also recommend volunteering because it provides a way to network with others; often one sits on a committee or becomes involved in an NCTE project that calls for interactions with people from different sections of the country who bring to the table different areas of expertise. What better way to become a member of a support group of professionals than to engage in common service with them?

How or has your affiliation with NCTE improved your professional development and career?

I always learn from my involvement; I learn about people, about theory and practice, about cultures, and about ways to become a better professional. I have been fortunate to work with some wonderful colleagues over the years in a variety of settings and with a variety of tasks, and I have never come away from those collaborations without feeling I have gained immeasurably from the experience. I can only hope they feel the same. As a result of my work with affiliates and with NCTE itself, I believe I have a better understanding of how professional organizations are structured, how they operate, and how important to their existence is the care and cultivation of outstanding volunteers.

Do you have a favorite NCTE publication?

Oh, my, that's a tough one. I can say that first as an English methods student and then as a beginning teacher, *English Journal* saved my life more than once; I always looked forward to those issues coming in the mail, putting me in touch with new ideas, teaching strategies, and resources. This probably is a terrible confession to make but until very recently, I had every issue of the *English Journal* published since 1961 when I first encountered it as an undergraduate and I read every issue from cover to cover when it arrived. I may be a bit more selective in my reading at this point in my career, but I still read the *English Journal* along with *English Education* and *The Alan Review*.

What is the one book, article, or professional development experience you would recommend to other educators?

When I was teaching high school English in New Hampshire in a small, rural school with grades 1-12 in the same building (a neat experience if a person has never had it), the sixth grade teacher called me

aside one day and said she had a manuscript she wanted me to read and provide feedback on--that was my introduction to Don Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* which, to this day, I credit with turning around my whole philosophy and approach to teaching writing and which has led to a life-long love of both writing for myself and teaching writing to others, whether it be at grade 1 or to doctoral students. The sixth grade teacher just happened to be a friend of Don's and he had given her the manuscript to review and she, in turn, gave me a chance to experience the unfolding of Don's work in the teaching of writing. It pays to network with your colleagues!

How has being part of an educational community like NCTE improved your abilities as a teacher and as a leader?

Being a part of NCTE, including its affiliates (the latter an oft overlooked opportunity for service and growth), has enabled me to realize early on that others "out there" were struggling with many of the same issues and challenges as I was and that being part of a larger network of professionals brought with it both knowledge and support for continued growth. NCTE has provided me with many opportunities over the years to lead and to share; one cannot help but improve as both a teacher and as a leader when one has access to such opportunities. Sometimes people ask me why I bother any more to be an active member of NCTE, since many of my duties now take me into other fields. My response has always been--NCTE provided me with both the support and the recognition I needed as a professional during my early years, and I still find great satisfaction in providing service to such an organization in the hope that others can continue to benefit from its work as I have. Besides, once an English teacher, always an English teacher--just ask my faculty!