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Editorial: Leslie S. Rush and Lisa Scherff

Opening the Conversation

Looking Back at 2011 to Inform 2012

Now that we are coeditors of a journal, when attending conferences we try to keep our eyes and ears open, picking up kernels of information and slices of data to inform our editorial writing. As registration for the 2012 NCTE Annual Convention is now open, we wanted to reflect on conversations and questions from the meeting last year in Chicago. We have grouped these under two main headings: supporting novice English language arts teachers and CEE’s role in and relationship to other groups in NCTE.

Supporting Novice English Language Arts Teachers

Waiting for her bags at Chicago’s Midway airport, Lisa struck up a conversation with two women. (Isn’t it funny how we teachers can always spot each other?) They talked about where they worked (somewhere in the Midwest) and what they did (teach and host a National Writing Project site). When Lisa told them that she was coeditor of English Education, one of the women said something to the effect of “Have you ever thought about an article about supporting new teachers? We really need something like that.” Lisa chuckled and replied, “Why don’t you write one?”

We haven’t received that article yet, but the topic—supporting new teachers—is important and, unfortunately, a perennial problem in the U.S. education system. Despite all that we know, why do so many new teachers feel unsupported? Why do half of all new teachers in the United States (and close to 40 percent in England) quit in the first five years (Hawthorne, Goodwyn, George, Reid, & Shoffner, 2012)?

Professional conversations—in the hallways, at dinner, in line for a taxi—at events such as the NCTE Annual Convention are what we look
forward to every year. Yet, funding for teachers (and teacher educators) to attend conferences is one of the first line items to be slashed when schools are trying to save money. Meth and Azano (in this issue) point out that “sustained professional conversations offer important support to teachers engaged in meaningful work . . . [and] help develop teachers' confidence” (p. 572).

Once our students graduate and begin teaching in their own classrooms, it is hard for us, even with social networking (Facebook, Nings, etc.), to continue to be there to support them. However, Stewart (this issue) suggests that “as English educators, we can help our students see how department meetings, lunchtime discussions, planning periods, and even informal chats in the hallway between classes can become opportunities for developing a community of practice where individuals can share ideas about how they might work within the constraints facing them to create learning experiences that will be responsive to their students’ needs” (p. 390).

We have written in previous editorials about the importance of joining together as a community of English teacher educators to have our voices heard. This, perhaps, is the most important of these issues: What can we do to help novice teachers be effective in their new roles as educators? If novice teachers believe that they are successful in their classrooms, however that success is measured, they will stay in the classroom longer. Helping novice teachers find their homes in a community of practice that can assist them in being successful educators is critical. It is our belief that NCTE can serve as that home or community.

CEE’s Relationship to Other NCTE Groups

Another issue is CEE’s relationship to other NCTE groups and, beyond the profession, to those outside of education. We both, for example, see our roles as CEE members connecting nicely with our memberships in ALAN and NCTEAR. At last year’s Annual Convention, for example, CEE and NCTEAR co-hosted a Monday workshop, working together to bring K–college literacy teachers and researchers together to talk about social justice and critical literacy.

As another example, the International Federation of Teachers of English (IFTE) conference will be held in the United States in 2015. The organizers are, at this point, thinking that the IFTE conference will be held concurrently with the CEE summer conference. This is an excellent op-
Opening the Conversation

Portunity to bring novice teachers to a conference put on by a professional organization—such a conference has the potential to serve as a turning point in many teachers’ professional lives. Attending international conferences is not just a “trip” away. As Louann Reid so wonderfully stated, “At home, I sometimes despair at the barrage of nonsense—or non-sense—in discussions of education reform. Abroad, I regain the wonder that brought me to English education in the first place” (Hawthorne et al., 2012, p. 308).

Regional affiliate conferences can also bring preservice and novice teachers into the world of professional organizations. For example, Leslie has taken groups of preservice and inservice teachers—all current and former students—to the Colorado Language Arts Society (CLAS) conference for one day for the past several years. Even just that one day resulted in increased CLAS and NCTE membership applications, as well as a broadened sense of the options available to novice teachers searching for a community and for assistance.

As we close down Volume 44 of our journal, we look forward to putting into practice what we have learned from the authors of articles in this issue and from our readers/colleagues in English teacher education. We are proud to be members of this community and look forward to working alongside all of you to improve English and literacy education, in all its complexity.

Reference