On the Move!

Message from the WLU President

I am writing this column on the day a new president is inaugurated into office. By the time you read it, four months of a new administration will have passed. I am hopeful for four months of peace and mending after a contentious, lengthy campaign. This past year has only affirmed for me the importance of taking a big picture view of the systems in play, not only in our own towns, states, and country, but in the world beyond as well.

I work as magnet coordinator in a school that focuses on project-based learning and systems thinking. In my travels, I’ve discovered that not too many people know much about systems thinking, so here’s a brief primer. Systems thinking is a worldview, an understanding that the world is made of interconnected systems that within themselves are made of interconnected and interdependent parts. When one thing changes in a system, something else will change in another part of a system. It’s not always easy to anticipate where, how, and when those changes will take place, because it is difficult to see the entire system when we are in it. That is where the habits of a systems thinker come into play. These are habits of mind, like looking for patterns of change over long periods of time, like considering the short- and long-term and unintended consequences of cause-effect relationships, and like being able to change perspectives to increase understanding of the system. These are habits we work diligently to help our students develop, and yet daily, I see examples of adults and organizations that do not think in these ways.

We tend to see the world from our own perspectives, but the students in our classrooms come to us from varied language, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic communities. As much as we profess to welcome this diversity, we still are likely to judge others from the positions of our own cultural values and personal beliefs. This year’s Whole Language Umbrella Literacies for All Summer Institute will offer us a chance to make that all-important change in perspective. The theme, “Global Literacies, Global Conversations: Celebrating Our Connections,” invites us to give voice to the languages, literacies, and cultures of the diverse students in our classrooms and communities and among ourselves as professionals. Together in preconference workshops, symposia, panels, and other types of breakout sessions, we can consider what it means to be literate, how we become literate, and how literacy and access to it positions us socially, economically, and politically. Classroom teachers, teacher educators, and people working in communities in other roles can help us examine our mental models and look for ways to provide the holistic, responsive, and relevant learning experiences all of us need and deserve.

It is my fervent hope that many of you will choose to join us in Tucson, Arizona, from July 20–22, 2017. You will love the desert, the mountains, the dark starry skies, and maybe a monsoon thunderstorm or two. And yes, it is a dry heat!

For more information about systems thinking, visit the Waters Foundation Systems Thinking in the Schools Project at www.watersfoundation.org.

— Caryl Crowell, President, Whole Language Umbrella

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WLU Award Winners Announced

The 2017 Lifetime Membership Award recipient is Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, Saint Louis University, Missouri. This award is presented to a member who has, throughout his or her career, made an outstanding contribution to whole language in general and/or the Whole Language Umbrella in particular.

The 2017 Service Award recipient is Jane Baskwill, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. This award is presented to a member who has made a particular contribution to the Whole Language Umbrella in terms of the work they have done for the organization.

The 2017 Reclaiming the Joy of Teaching Award recipient is Elisa Waingort, Academia Cotopaxi, Quito, Ecuador. This award honors a preK–12 teacher who inspires authentic progressive literacy learning.

The award presentations will take place on Thursday, July 20, 2017, during the Opening Session of the WLU Literacies for All Summer Institute in Tucson, Arizona.

Additional information about each of these awards as well as past award winners can be found on the WLU website at www.ncte.org/wlu/awards.

Candidates Announced for the 2017 WLU Elections

Board Members (two to be elected):

- Kelly Allen, University of Arizona, Tucson
- Mary Fahrenbruck, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces
- Yueh-Nu Hung, National Taichung University of Education, Taiwan
- Ted Kesler, Queens College, CUNY, White Plains, NY
- Michele Myers, University of South Carolina, Columbia
- Penny Silvers, Dominican University, River Forest, IL
- Yang Wang, University of South Carolina, Columbia

Ballot information was emailed March 15, and votes must be cast by June 15, 2017. Election results will be announced on the WLU website, and the new members will be introduced at the Delegates Assembly on Saturday, July 22, during the Literacies for All Summer Institute in Tucson, Arizona.

Further information about the candidates and the election process can be found on the WLU website at www.ncte.org/wlu/elections.

Call for Nominations: Donald H. Graves Writing Award

The Donald H. Graves Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Writing annually recognizes teachers in grades K–6 who, through the teaching of writing, demonstrate an understanding of student improvement in writing. The NCTE Elementary Section Steering Committee selects an award recipient from the portfolios and essays submitted during the year. Nomination information can be found on the NCTE website at www.ncte.org/awards/graves and must be submitted by June 15, 2017. Results will be announced in September, and the award will be presented at the Elementary Get-Together during the 2017 NCTE Annual Convention in St. Louis, Missouri.