

From the Editor

Dan McQuagge, Delta State University, Cleveland, Mississippi

At this writing, the Annual Reports from SLATE Representatives are arriving at NCTE. Only 31 affiliates sent in reports. Perhaps next year SLATE representatives will have more to report about activities in their area. Teachers need to be well informed about what is happening in the nation's classrooms. They also need to know of, if not have, the valuable assistance NCTE can provide. We pay dearly for all types of insurance, but for some strange reason many of us don't bother to "insure" our future. Getting help after the fact or thinking "I wish I had . . ." or "That won't ever happen to me" is like looking at your house in ashes and wishing that you had better insurance. The fact is that bad things do happen to good teachers. What affects our professional lives ultimately affects our personal lives. As I have stated before, SLATE needs these materials; they may just save some teacher unwanted and unneeded grief.

Charles Suhor hasn't completely retired from NCTE. He has assumed the position of NCTE/SLATE Field Representative. We welcome Charlie's continued assistance and appreciate his dedication to helping make this a "safer" profession of which to be a part.

We welcome Carol Porter as Charlie's replacement with SLATE. Whenever you need SLATE help, Carol will know how to help.

I welcome your input in publishing this newsletter. If you have brief comments or wish to submit a commentary, please do so. If you find interesting items in your local newspapers, please send those along. What's happening in one small town probably is happening or will happen in some other small town. Please send sufficient bibliographical information so that we can get permission to publish.

If you attend the Convention in Detroit, please stop by the SLATE booth or plan to attend one of the sessions sponsored by SLATE. We welcome your participation.

FROM THE FRONT(LINE)

Update on Help from SLATE

Charles Suhor, NCTE/SLATE Field Representative

As the byline above indicates, I will continue to serve NCTE and SLATE by responding to calls about censorship that come to NCTE Headquarters. I have been based in Montgomery, Alabama, since leaving my post in September as NCTE Deputy Executive Director. I can be reached via voice mail at 800-369-NCTE, ext. 400, or directly at 334-280-4758 (e-mail: csuhor@wsnet.com).

In the September SLATE Newsletter I reported on censorship calls from across the country through mid-July. Below is a description of an incident in NCTE's own backyard—happily, one that resulted in a productive response from the Urbana School District.

"Informal" Protest in Urbana Spurs Board Action

The home of NCTE Headquarters was the site of an oblique attack by censors on several books taught at Urbana High School—Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Sula*; Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*; Richard Wright's *Native Son*; and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The odd strategy of a new organization called TIPS (To Inform People about Schools) was to circulate a petition in the community without bringing the matter forward to the school boards in Champaign or Urbana.

Share These Materials

SLATE newsletters are offered as resources for dealing with current issues affecting the teaching of English language arts. **Reproduce these materials** and use them to help promote better understanding of the goals of English teaching.

The petition asked “to remove offensive and sexually explicit books, materials, instruction, and influence from Champaign and Urbana school districts,” citing the above noted books as offensive. Many TIPS leaders and members had not read the books in question and were not residents of the community; some had children in parochial schools. According to the Champaign-Urbana *News-Gazette*, the group sent letters to pastors asking for help “in educating the general public and particularly the Christian community about obscene and offensive books being used now in the Champaign-Urbana schools.”

Despite the lack of formal complaint, the *News-Gazette* ran a front page story on the protests, citing TIPS leaders’ views as well as those of NCTE and Urbana Public Schools. Urbana Superintendent Gene Amberg noted that the district has in place a policy for dealing with complaints—but the petition had come forth. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Bob Nielsen pointed to the practice of giving alternative assignments when a student or parent finds a work offensive. Charles Suhor of NCTE noted that alleged “vulgarity or sexual content” in a work can be understood only in light of the “author’s total moral vision and the theme of the work and the appropriateness of the language and actions of the characters depicted.”

At a subsequent public meeting, the Urbana District’s Program Council heard comments from TIPS, NCTE, and others. The group voted to recommend to the School Board that the existing policy on complaints about instructional materials be maintained, with one addition; the current practice of permitting the reading of substitute assignments should be made explicit as part of the policy.

Letters to the editor of the *News-Gazette* in ensuing weeks were overwhelmingly in favor of maintaining the books and supporting the district’s even-handed policy for processing complaints—a policy essentially aligned with NCTE’s recommendations in “The Students’ Right to Read.” The matter concluded with a unanimous vote by the Urbana School Board to accept the recommendations of the Program Council.

SLATE ELECTION RESULTS

SLATE members recently elected two regional leaders to the SLATE Steering Committee and three 1998 Nominating Committee members. Following are the new Steering Committee members, whose three-year terms of office begin officially after the Detroit Convention.

Dale Allender, West High School, Iowa City, Iowa,
Region 5

William G. McBride, Colorado State University,
Ft. Collins, Region 8

Retiring members of the Steering Committee include Judy Duprez, Chickasha High School, Oklahoma (Region 5) and Linda Reeves, Redlands Middle School, Grand Junction, Colorado (Region 8). Continuing on the committee are Lynn Carhart, Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School, New Jersey (Region 1); Keith Younker, Southridge High School, Huntingburg, Indiana (Region 4); Shirley Wright, Longview ISD, Texas (Region 6); Hazel K. Davis, Athens, Ohio (Region 2); Daniel McQuagge, Delta State University, Cleveland, Mississippi (Region 3 and SLATE *Newsletter* editor); and Driek Zirinsky, Boise State University, Idaho (Region 7).

The SLATE Steering Committee consists of eight persons, all of whom are elected by SLATE members. Each SLATE leader has responsibility for a designated region; the SLATE regions are determined on the basis of affiliate regions for the purpose of holding periodic leadership conferences. The term of office for members of the committee is three years, with terms occurring in a staggered sequence.

Following are the newly elected 1998 SLATE Nominating Committee members:

James E. Davis, Ohio University, Athens, Chair
Willie Mae Crews, Birmingham Public Schools,
Alabama

Rebecca Bowers Sipe, Anchorage School District,
Alaska

The Nominating Committee will hold two open meetings at the Annual Convention in Detroit. The first is scheduled for 10:30 a.m.–11:15 a.m. on Saturday, November 22, and the second for 8 a.m.–9 a.m. on Sunday, November 23. The committee will nominate two candidates each for Regions 2, 3, 6, and 7 and six candidates for next year’s SLATE Nominating Committee. Please bring your nominations to the open meetings or send nominations by December 1 to James E. Davis, SLATE Nominating Committee Chair, 4606 Old SR 56, Athens, OH 45701.

Full-Time Work for Part-Time Pay

by Carol Jago

The United Parcel Company strike focused attention on the issue of part-time labor and the part-time wage scale. Pundits and negotiators talked themselves into exhaustion trying to find the balance between business' need for temporary, flexible help and workers' right to fair pay. Do casual employees like summer student workers or holiday-rush help deserve the same compensation and benefits as permanent staff? If profitable business practices are abandoned can a company survive? Can we find a common ground where both employer and employee can thrive?

These questions challenge both industry and academe. Janice Albert, a teacher in the Chabot-Las Positas Community College District for more than thirty years, describes how part-time employment in community colleges distorts working conditions. "While a full-time, tenured instructor with a Master's degree might earn \$48,000 teaching 30 units at one community college, a part-time instructor teaching 30 units drives hundreds of miles a week to commute between two or more campuses. The pay of part-time instructors is calculated on an hourly basis which does not include time for preparation, evaluation of student work, or meeting with students outside the classroom."

Under California law, anyone who teaches 61 percent of a full load of fifteen units becomes eligible for tenure. Consequently, the course loads of part-time faculty are carefully monitored. Instructors in search of a living wage are forced to commute between campuses, cobbling together a full-time equivalent salary. The only limit to the number of courses they may attempt to teach is personal stamina. Deep knowledge of the freeways is essential.

In 1990, the California legislature approved AB 1725, a bill requiring that 75 percent of all course hours would be taught by full-time faculty. The legislature did not, however, provide funding for this reform. As a result, colleges meet the requirement campus-wide at the expense of certain departments. It is not uncommon for a community college English department to have a part-time staff roughly four times the size of its tenured staff.

The impact of such practice on teaching is profound. Instructors who spend up to 20 hours a week commuting must make significant personal sacrifices in order to teach as well as they know how. They are continually frustrated that time which could be spent reading student papers is instead spent in gridlock. Traveling teachers also realize their students have few opportunities to interact with them outside the classroom and try to compensate in other ways. It isn't easy.

The term "community college" suggests an institution of higher learning that is attached to its local community, dedicated to meeting the community's intellectual and technical needs. But how can a staff of part-time, itinerant instructors ever come to know let alone serve their local community?

Community colleges keep the American dream alive. They offer higher education and technical training at a price almost anyone can afford and at hours a working person can attend. Exploiting the individuals who provide these services is unconscionable. If UPS can find a compromise, so can academe.

Carol Jago teaches English at Santa Monica High School in Santa Monica, California, and directs the California Reading and Literature Project at UCLA. She serves as the director of the NCTE Commission on Literature.

CALL FOR PERSONAL OPINION PAPERS

You are invited to submit a Personal Opinion Paper (POP) for possible publication in *SLATE Newsletter*. The focus can be on any sociopolitical issue that relates to teaching and learning. Send POPs (maximum 500 words) to Editor, *SLATE Newsletter*, c/o NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

CALL FOR SLATE STARTER SHEETS

SLATE members are invited to submit Starter Sheets on sociopolitical aspects of education. Samples of past topics have been tracking and grouping, the English Only movement, access to computers, and censorship.

SLATE Starter Sheets are intended as action-oriented information sources for English and language arts professionals. The format for Starter Sheets should include, but is not limited to, the following: (1) presentation and background of the issue/topic; (2) general discussion, usually including NCTE positions; (3) recommendations for action or further examination; and (4) a brief list of references and/or core resources. Starter Sheets manuscripts will undergo blind review by at least two outside referees who have expertise in the area. Please submit four copies of the manuscript, typewritten and double-spaced on 8½" × 11" paper with one-inch margins. Use your name and affiliation on a title page only. Manuscripts should be between 2,000 and 4,000 words in length. Send manuscripts to: Lynn Carhart, Editor, 18 Seward Dr., Ocean, NJ 07712.

SLATE TO YOU—The function of SLATE is to influence public attitudes and policy decisions affecting the teaching of English language arts at local, state, and national levels and to implement and publicize the policies adopted by NCTE. As part of its charge, SLATE is officially recognized as NCTE's intellectual freedom network.

SLATE Newsletter is sent to individuals who contribute \$15 or more per year to support the activities of the NCTE/SLATE Steering Committee on Social and Political Concerns. Send your contribution to NCTE/SLATE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096.

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