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President's Message: Come One, Come All to MCTE's Fall Conference



Fred Barton

Well, another year comes around the clubhouse turn and heads down the straightaway. I'm sure, as you look out on that group of budding scholars that has brightened your days and gave meaning to your life, you're counting the days until the sound of school bells again echo through the crisp autumn air and once more, your step lightened by joy, you tread the hallowed halls of academe.

Or, maybe not. What do I know? Maybe your thoughts turn to relaxing summer evenings, sitting on the veranda of your condo just off the eighteenth green, watching the sun set over the pines and sipping a Mai Tai.

Whatever your summer plans, I want you to know that we here at MCTE Central are constantly at work making teaching in Michigan better for you, and your students (Without the benefit of Mai Tais, I might add). Which brings me to the point of this little missive, the 2007 MCTE Annual Conference. Now I know it's a little early to be thinking about fall, but you really need to get your date book out and mark down Friday, October 5, because, sparing no expense and

brooking no resistance we have brought you, as our keynote speaker...The President.

Yes ladies and gentlemen, I give you the president...of NCTE. Kathleen Blake Yancey, author of many books and articles including most recently, *Delivering College Composition: The Fifth Canon*. President Yancey has agreed to spend the day with us talking, teaching, and sharing. And while she's doing that there are going to be some sessssiiionnnss going on! I mean sessions with a capital S boys and girls! And hey, it's not too late for you to get in on the whole presenting thing either. Check out the request for proposals form at the web site (mienglishteacher.org). Download the forms and say hello to fame and fortune.

OK, maybe not fortune, but presenters sit at the cool kids table at lunch. And speaking of lunch, besides the free seafood buffet compli-

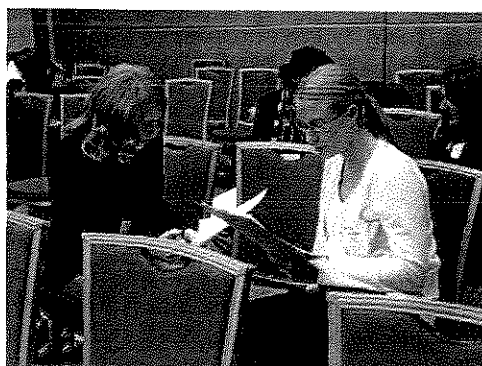
mentary mimosas and strolling Mariachi Bands, you'll be treated to a luncheon address from Elizabeth Bauer, a member of the state Board of Education. Mrs. Bauer was elected in 2002. She is a self-employed international consultant in human rights and civil society, and a former executive director of the Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service.

Oh, and about the seafood and mimosas and stuff?

Umm...not so much, but you were thinking 'Fred, where the heck did you get a Mariachi Band' weren't you? I get that a lot. And speaking of thinking, it's time to put on your thinking caps and make a nomination for the MCTE Fries and

Lawson awards. Just click "Awards" on the home page for the particulars. Here's a chance to recognize a colleague, or colleagues (we have two awards after all) unless, like, maybe you think that all the accolades and

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MCTE Fall 2006 Conference attendees Sarah Beasley, left, and Emily Johnston, discuss ideas during a pair-and-share moment in a presentation. Plan to attend this fall's conference, Oct. 5.

✱ Getting Parents Involved in Student Writing

By Melissa Brooks-Yip

During my third year of teaching, I noticed something missing from my students' writing—connections to their lives at home. I wondered to myself, *what might happen to student's language arts grades if their parents were more directly involved in the assignments?* Unfortunately, it seemed as if the majority of the parents of my eighth grade students

were not involved in their child's school lives. This affected my students on many levels: they didn't get their homework done as often, didn't study for tests, and, in turn, would earn lower grades than students whose parents did seem to be involved.

Thus, as I thought about my work for that year, I felt the area I could

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See the insert for a ready to use lesson plan and information about MCTE's fall conference.

Getting Parents Involved in Student Writing, Continued

ment and involvement in the writing process, the attainment of this critical skill will become important to their children.

Two assignments I felt were particularly effective to begin involving parents and students in writing together are "Introducing a Family Member" and the "Phase Autobiography" (see insert). I designed these assignments in a way that would get family members increasingly involved in the writing assignment with their child. Starting out with the child interviewing the adult and then journaling together, the project ended with parent and student writing together. They used a Venn Diagram for organizing ideas to write a final paper that compared and contrasted the child and the parent or family member. In order to foster parental involvement over time, these three assignments were inserted amongst writing workshops we did in the classroom throughout the year, with the Venn diagram assignment being the final parent/child assignment for the year.

After the concluding assignment, I distributed a survey to measure parent/family member opinions on these various assignments designed to bring them together as writers with their children. The final assignment described above was ranked as the most favorite, according to parents this was because:

"He picked me and it was interesting to see what a mother and son had in common."

"She was surprised by my childhood and the differences between us. I believe she enjoyed teaching me to do a Venn diagram, I know I did."

"It promoted discussion between us and a chance to laugh about some of our choices and comments."

"We did it together. He was very honored to hear what I had written, and I was excited to hear what

he thought of me."

Also according to parents, the total of six assignments designed to involve them in their child's writing process proved to be a way to do just that. Parents commented positively about such assignments:

Past studies have shown that when parents are invited to share in an assignment, they get closer to their children's learning process. Such an invitation is beneficial to students in language arts because it nurtures their understanding of the writing process and their relationships with their parents.

"Parent participation is essential in the success of their student."

"It is important for a parent to understand what a student is learning, what stage

they're at and to stay knowledgeable about their life."

"It's nice to work together, especially at this age when they're trying so hard to be independent! Thank you!"

Out of 29 parents responding, 23 stated that they would enjoy doing assignments designed for parents and children to work together, in any subject, not just English. Of these 23, one parent noted that these assignments "make us take a moment together, it's nice to have one-on-one time." As past research has shown, lack of time may be a factor in why parents are not involved, but many parents felt that assignments such as these were positive because it made them take the time to work with their child.

Overall, parental involvement in a child's education is just as important to many parents and family members as it is to me as a teacher. The research in the field and my own experiences have shown me that this is a critical part of my teaching. Having created such assignments has helped me to create working relationships with parents each year, leading to more important family/child/teacher writing projects.

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