

The



NEWSLETTER

- Spring 2007 -

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Now is not the time for alienation

Bob Dandoy

How many more times will we watch our television in fear and sadness, commiserating with colleagues after an unbearable tragedy? Once again, we've done so, our hearts breaking for the students, families, and our colleagues at Virginia Tech. The avalanche of questions pours out, as we attempt to examine motivation, laws, public policy, what went wrong, and what went right. It's already been a month and the reverberations are fading. Isn't there anything we can do to prevent this from happening again?

Is there anything we can do to prevent this from happening again?

We wait for our leaders and lawmakers to take the issue in hand. However, although I am usually not a pessimist about those who work as public servants, I don't hold our much hope for a massive change in public policy. There's too much money to be raised for these lawmakers to be re-elected, money which buys influence that weakens the resolve and initiative that events like the Virginia Tech tragedy spurs.

So do we sit back and despair with no hope in sight?

Hardly.

WE are the hope.

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Now is not the time...

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As with other initiatives and policies that have come before, it will be up to the educational community to carry the burden, a burden to be carried on shoulders already sagging under the weight of much expectation.

But we can not shirk this responsibility. Someone, sometime has to break the cycle. Someone, sometime has to teach our children that violence, hate, and intolerance lead nowhere. We can not assume that anyone else is doing it. We can not protest that it's not our job. It IS our job, more so as English teachers than anyone else for it is in the literature of the world that we grapple with the problems of being human. It is in the pages of human creativity that lie, if not the answers to this plague, the direction we must proceed.

Our tendency will be to move toward fear and paranoia, to look at each child, each situation with suspicion and negativity. We will want to hold those who are different at arms length, confining them, restricting them. We will want to isolate people, marginalizing people even more than they are now because we would sooner be "safe than sorry".

But that is not the solution. We will provide our students with safer classrooms and schools when we do not push them away but rather when we pull them closer. It will be a safer world when we are more aware of the pressures and torments that are heaped on our fellow travelers through life. We can only help those who are ill, who are troubled, who are distru



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**We encourage you to copy
this newsletter or any part
of it and pass it on to a
colleague. Spread the
news about our
organization!**

Conference 2007

**"MAINTAINING
OUR
PROFESSIONAL
WELLNESS"**

SATURDAY WORKSHOP FORMAT RETURNS WITH POPULAR PCTELA PRESENTERS

giving conference attendees a versatile, revitalizing line-up of choices at Conference 2007.

HELEN SITLER and THE PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT

Helen Collins Sitler spends her working days teaching writing and supervising English Education students at IUP. She also serves as Director of Southcentral Pennsylvania Writing Project. Her interests include teacher research and the ways that writing functions in our lives both inside and out of the classroom. These interests have led to several publications. The articles she has most enjoyed writing feature topics close to home. "Letters from Emily," published in Language Arts in 1995, featured Helen's 8-year-old niece. Today Emily is a first-year teacher with her own 4th grade class in Lexington, Kentucky. Another, "Everyday Wordcraft," about the literacy of Helen's parents, appeared in the National Writing Project's Quarterly in 1999. Recently she has been working on creative nonfiction. Her essay about the Shanksville field where Flight 93 crashed is currently under review, as is another essay about middle school girls and their loss of voice through censorship of their writing. As the PCTELA workshop will show, Helen revises a lot! And encourages her students to do the same.

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WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE CONFERENCE 2007 FEATURED SPEAKER:

JIM BURKE

Jim Burke teaches English at Burlingame High School. He is the author of numerous books, including *The English Teacher's Companion*, *Writing Reminders*, *Tools for Thought*, *Illuminating Texts: How to Teach Students to Read the World*, *Reading Reminders*, and *I Hear America Reading: Why We Read - What We Read*, all of which are published by Heinemann. He is also the author of *The Reader's Handbook* (Great Source) and *Academic Workouts* (First Choice Publishing). His newest books are *School Smarts: The Four Cs of Academic Success* (2004), and *ACCESSing School: Teaching Struggling Readers to Achieve Academic and Personal Success* (2005), both of which are published by Heinemann. His next book, *Letters to a New Teacher*, will be published in January 2006 by Heinemann. He has received numerous awards, including the NCTE Intellectual Freedom Award, the NCTE Conference on English Leadership Award, and the California Reading Association Hall of Fame Award. He served on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Committee on Adolescence and Young Adulthood English Language Arts Standards and recently worked with ACT on their high school English Language Arts standards. Visit his website (www.englishcompanion.com) for more information.



JIM BURKE WILL BE THE FEATURED SPEAKER ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20th AT CONFERENCE 2007.

plus VERY SPECIAL GUEST: STEPHEN CHBOSKY

***Author of The Perks of Being a Wallflower,
the screenplay for the movie version of "RENT",
and creative consultant for TV's "JERICHO"***

October 19th & 20th

**FOUR POINTS
SHERATON
PITTSBURGH
NORTH**
MARS, PA

THE BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN!

After a exciting and well-received visit to last year's conference, we heard your requests and have invited Alex and Blake of FLOCABULARY back as our Friday featured speakers.

Flocabulary performs live shows and workshops throughout the U.S., bringing the concept of literacy through hip-hop directly to schools. Through a combination of live performance, demonstrations, and audience participation, Flocabulary's live show engages audiences with the idea that bringing passion to the classroom is essential. The result, as one Newport News student wrote, is "the best assembly ever."



Flocabulary was founded by Blake Harrison and Alex Rappaport in 2004. Since then, the creative duo have partnered with talented emcees and musicians to produce Flocabulary's revolutionary music. They live and work in New York City.

FLOCABULARY WILL BE FEATURED ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19th AT CONFERENCE 2007.

**Saturday Conference Presenters
(continued from page 4)**

PAT BELL

Patricia Bell is a tenth grade English Teacher in the Karns City School District and one of PCTELA's most popular presenters.. Pat's classroom breaks the walls of tradition, as she infuses her English classes of writing and reading with music, dance and art. Her lesson for the play *Twelve Angry Men* was published in the 2006 September issue of the *English Journal*. Her poetry has been published several times in *River-speak*, a publication from the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, and she is a regular contributor to the *Statewide PCTELA Newsletter*, with her reflective articles about the teaching profession.

Last year Patricia was awarded the Red Apple Award of Excellence in Teaching, nominated by two of her students. She was recently nominated by another student for *Who's Who Among American Teachers*. She is currently sending her poetry out "into the vast unknown", for publication, and is in the slow process of writing a novel.

Into her workshops, Pat brings, what she hopes, is a bag of delights that will reinspire and recharge your passion for teaching. Last year she had participants making "STEW" and this year we know she will continue to present current best practice in her most imaginative of ways. She is the wife of Eric and mother of Rachael (14) and David (29). Patricia graduated from Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

PROPOSED BY THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL - SPRING 2007

FOR VOTE OF MEMBERSHIP AT CONFERENCE 2007

Amendment 5

The position of Executive Vice President is eliminated

The vice president for secondary schools shall preside in the absence of the president

Amendment 6

At the beginning of his or her term of office and with the approval of the Executive Board, the president shall name from the membership an NCTE Liaison to serve during the tenure of the president. The president may serve in the position.

Amendment 7

The Executive Board shall be empowered to name and approve an executive director whose service shall be for a period of one year and at a remuneration to be determined by the board at the beginning of the fiscal year. The duties of the director shall be determined and delineated at the time of appointment. The executive director may not be an officer of the organization and does not vote.

Amendment 8

The fiscal and membership year of the council is July 1 – June 30 of the following year.

The Common Weave: Stories from the International Classroom

Patricia Bell and Ali Al Agri (Yemen)

This story is continued from the Midterm PCTELA Newsletter. PCTELA member and educator, Pat Bell, connected with international students from Penn State and encouraged them to write their conference stories. In the last issue, Pat, Ali, and Tatajana Glusjac began the sharing. In this issue, we continue with ...

Ali's Story: "My Humphrey Story – My PCTELA Journey" PART II

It was through my colleague Tanja that I came to know about PCTELA. I was not really very interested in it, as it was not a national one like NCTE or ACTFL. Besides it did not have that many sessions about technology, which was my area of interest. But I thought of it as an opportunity to see how the local conferences do look, to meet teachers in the field and learn about their issues and compare it with ours in my country. Besides I thought of it as an opportunity to discover a new place. "After all it is not too far and it is just two days". That was what I said to myself at the end, to be motivated.

The conference was not that big, just as I expected but it was really a very good sample of any national conference; well organized, lots of activities and by inviting different speakers and writers from different states, you could say it was a national one. However, if you consider having 4 attendees from 4 different countries you would agree with me that it was an international conference.

First day I was not really comfortable with being assigned to introduce one of the speakers that day, not because I am not used to, I have been doing that hundred times and we teachers are not shy! I just did not understand why I felt uncomfortable but I had to accept as I had been given a special rate as a student and so I need to do some work! But then it turned to be one of the most remarkable memories of the conference! Thanks Bob!

I was amazed by the number of the books that were exhibited (thinking of a local conference). Generally speaking, all the workshops and presentations I attended were great and I learned a lot from them. Jeff Golub's presentation was wonderful.

I liked very much the idea of Flocabulary, I bought the book and CD as I am sure my students will like it very much. I appreciate those two young gentle men coming up with this beautiful idea.

Now until this stage I was saying to myself, "You would have regretted not attending this conference, man!"

Lucky me I was assigned for the "Making STEW" workshop with Patricia Bell, which made my level of appreciation at its highest, and I then said to myself "Oh man! You would really have committed a BIG mistake by not attending this conference."

Pat did a very great job in her workshop. I, as all the other participants, was so amazed by her creativity, motivation, energy, love to her students, and all the efforts she does to make learning so humanized and appreciated by students as part of their life journey. The idea of Wholeness is really extraordinary and very human. However, I believe that not everybody can apply it, if they don't have "Pat's spirit". What I learned and still am learning from Pat, is how to get "Pat's spirit" into your class and into your daily life as well. I have a list of different excellent ideas I learned from her that I can't wait to try back in my country.

The Common Weave: (con't from page 6)

I give a special thanks to Katherine P. McFarland, who was kind enough to take us to Harrisburg by her car and gave us free sight-seeing around the city. She is such a wonderful lady. Thanks Kathy, you are so kind and friendly, an excellent representative of the American people.

Patricia's Story:

Different from the international teachers, for me, going to PCTELA was like going home to a family reunion. The only hesitation I had was making quite sure I developed a workshop that would revitalize, nurture and support my fellow educators.

I walked into the room of shining faces, complete with anticipatory smiles and gracious nods. Of course, I had the music playing, and loved as they all took in the sights and smells of the workshop I was about to unveil for them. I welcomed familiar faces and then one by one the room took on a whole new meaning, an international meaning, as the faces of Ali, Alpha and Tanja appeared.

There is something rare and magical in the eyes, is there not?

There was that day; each introduced themselves, all boundaries were crossed, all separation removed, and by the end of the class, I knew I had been blessed, once again, with not only the Pennsylvania attendees, but the international students as well. It was not enough for us to have that brief two hours, and so we planned to meet two weeks later at Penn State.

Thus I found myself in an open air lounge, the quiet of the building surrounding us, and we thread the needle of commonality of passion

for education. Their individual stories were heartwarming. Each had, at first, refused the notion of traveling to America to study. Each was prodded by friends to apply. Each arrived in this country with a mix of excitement and reservation.

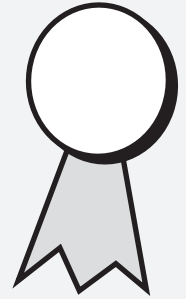
What they discovered, and what I discovered, is that the passion of teaching, which burns inside an individual, transcends language or belief. As we sat there in our small group, and they questioned me about Wholeheartedness, we stumbled and tumbled over one another's words, validating and encouraging that which makes us educators. Their eyes lit up as they spoke of their homelands, and of the tribulations they face each day as teachers. It brought a perspective of my own classroom, that I had taken for granted.

Ali, Tatjana, and Alpha will visit my high school this spring. And it was not until Tatjana said, "Just think, Pat, next year at this time, children in Serbia and Yemen will be learning from Mrs. Bell's lessons", that I realized the scope of what PCTELA has to offer. What we as educators have to offer.

The crisp November day hung blue gray as we said our good-byes. And as I looked into each of their eyes, the thread of friendship tied the invisible knot that will hold firm these new found treasures.



PCTELA AND NCTE AWARDS FOR EDUCATORS



PCTELA, as an affiliate of NCTE, has the opportunity and privilege to recognize teachers and other individuals who have greatly contributed to or impacted literacy education.

The following is only a sample of the awards offered by NCTE and its affiliates.

Edwin A. Hoey Award

This award recognizes exceptional English language arts teachers of grades 5-8 who have demonstrated excellence in teaching English language arts and inspired a spirit of inquiry and a love of learning in their students.

Deadline February 1, 2008

Richard W. Halle Award

This award honors a junior high/middle level educator who has worked to promote understanding of the developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents, especially in the English language arts.

Deadline June 1, 2007

Secondary Section High School Teacher of Excellence Award

**THE DEADLINE HAS BEEN
EXTENDED TO JUNE 10, 2007**

The NCTE Fund Teachers for the Dream Affiliate Award

The NCTE Fund invites affiliates of the National Council of Teachers of English to implement initiatives aimed at recruiting English language arts teachers of color.

NCTE Literacy Award

Given to a public figure or group, outside the teaching profession, who has promoted literacy.

We wholeheartedly encourage you to help us identify the exemplary educators throughout our state.

For more information about these awards including criteria, applications, and deadlines, go to www.ncte.org/about/awards OR contact PCTELA President Bob Dandoy.



2007

NCTE Annual Convention
“Mapping Diverse Literacies
for the Twenty-First Century:
Opportunities, Challenges,
Promising New Directions”

November 15-20, 2007

Sessions will be held at the Javits Convention Center and the Marriott Marquis Time Square.



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