2012 WLU Summer Institute
St. Louis, MO • July 19-21, 2012

Reclaiming Joy in Teaching, Learning, and Research

We invite you to join us for the 23rd Literacies for All Summer Institute as we focus on the political act of reclaiming classrooms as places of joyful engagement and complex relationships.

For more information, visit www.ncte.org/wlu/institute.

Sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Whole Language Umbrella (WLU) in cooperation with the Center for Expansion of Language and Thinking (CELT)
Integrate Literacy Across the Content Areas

Reading for Learning: Using Discipline-Based Texts to Build Content Knowledge
Heather Lattimer
The author provides practical, classroom-tested approaches to helping students in grades 5–10 access and critically respond to content-based texts.
ISBN: 978-0-8141-0843-7 No. 08437
$29.95 member/$39.95 nonmember

The Power of Picture Books: Using Content Area Literature in Middle School
Mary Jo Fressch and Peggy Harkins
Featuring descriptions and activities for fifty exceptional titles, this book offers a wealth of ideas for harnessing the power of picture books to improve reading and writing in the content areas.
ISBN: 978-0-8141-3633-1 No. 36331
$29.95 member/$39.95 nonmember

Adolescent Literacy Pathways
NCTE’s Pathways for Advancing Adolescent Literacy is a yearlong professional development program that helps teachers, schools, and districts address the unique needs of adolescent learners with content on key areas such as gradual release of responsibility, contemporary literacies, supporting English language learners, content area literacy, and assessment. Price includes access for one year.
$150.00 member/$200.00 nonmember/Call for team or school pricing

On Demand Web Seminars
All Teachers Are Not Teachers of Reading, But...
Summarization in Any Subject
Content Literacy: Four Factors in Building an Effective Instructional Framework
Writing in Every Content Area
Content Reading for Content Learning
On Teaching Content: Building a Schoolwide Culture
Vocabulary Instruction Across the Content Areas
$79.00 member/$129.00 nonmember

Shaping literacy for tomorrow, today.
Visit our website: https://secure.ncte.org/store/
or call toll-free: 1-877-369-6283
Dream • Connect • Ignite!
November 15–18, 2012 • Las Vegas, Nevada

Save the date for the 2012 NCTE Annual Convention

Postconvention Workshops, November 19–20
For more information, visit www.ncte.org/annual
Editors’ Introduction

Challenging Simplicity, Embracing Complexity

Mark Dressman
Sarah McCarthey
Paul Prior

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The articles in this issue of Research in the Teaching of English challenge currently accepted assumptions in public discourses about literacy, teacher education, and assessment. Individually and collectively, the authors argue that current practices that reduce literacy to letter recognition, draw linear connections between teacher education and teacher practice, or limit conceptions of audience have negative consequences for students, teachers, and the field. In contrast, the authors embrace complexity at the global level to improve opportunities for children and adults to have access to high quality materials, at the classroom level to understand why teachers use particular tools and resources they developed from their own education, and at the professional level to examine how teacher-authors address and invoke different audiences in their scholarly writing processes. Through their depictions of assessments, classrooms, and writing processes, the three articles featured in this issue invite researchers to take a broader look at literacy inside and outside the U.S.

Jim Hoffman’s Standpoints essay entitled, “Why EGRA—a Clone of DIBELS—Will Fail to Improve Literacy in Africa,” explores the complexities of international aid efforts in promoting literacy. He offers a systematic critique of the use of Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), which he describes as a clone of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS; http://dibels.org/dibels.html) in Africa. His major concerns are that the model itself is rooted in a “simple view of reading” and that the few studies that have been conducted in African countries do not support its widespread use. Measuring only rate and word accuracy, EGRA reduces literacy to letter naming and rate of correct word reading. Hoffman argues “for a reframing of educational aid that promotes research and development efforts that embrace a broadened view of what counts as literacy, a valuing of local contexts and a commitment to be guided by local expertise and problem solving capacities” (p. 340). Arguing against simply exporting programs or assessments from U.S. contexts into Africa, he emphasizes the need for locally situated models and the importance of resources directed at teacher development.

The need to embrace complexity is also emphasized by Vicki McQuitty in “Emerging Possibilities: A Complex Account of Learning to Teach Writing.” Using
a theory of complexity proposed by Davis and Sumara (2006), McQuitty analyzes one sixth-grade teacher’s understanding of the teaching of writing. This teacher’s university preservice and masters programs, her school district contexts, and her sixth-grade classroom setting interacted to shape her writing pedagogy. Through examples of classroom practice, McQuitty illustrates how Elle, the teacher in her study, drew from seemingly disparate ideas and incompatible ideologies to create new pedagogies that fit the particular students and parameters of her classroom setting. While Elle used ideas from her teacher education courses, there was no one-to-one correspondence between ideas presented in her preservice program and how they were translated into practice. In addition, although not every recombination was necessarily the most effective for students, McQuitty argues that the hybrid practices displayed in this case could eventually lead to more effective applications of “best practice” ideals. McQuitty’s data illustrate the importance of understanding that teachers operate in multiple, nested contexts and that the attempts by current evaluations to trace specific ideologies or practices from teacher education into classroom settings are simplistic at best. Like Hoffman’s critique of the simple view of reading, she criticizes the notion that there will be a linear link between teacher education programs and classroom teaching. In contrast, it is through embracing complexity that new ideas, new practices, and new possibilities emerge.

In “Audience and Authority in the Professional Writing of Teacher-Authors,” Anne Elrod Whitney, Katie Anderson, Christine Dawson, Suyoung Kang, Elsie Olan Rios, Nicole Olcese, and Michael Ridgeman analyze teacher-authors’ writing in professional contexts, pointing to the challenges and complexities that come with new practices and identities. Through interviews of 13 teachers, taken from a larger sample of teacher-authors, Whitney and her colleagues demonstrate the complexities of power relations that operate within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These teachers, who had published in at least three flagship practitioner journals, articulated the challenges of capturing readers’ attention, describing complex acts of teaching with nuance and sensitivity, and grounding their ideas in theory. They grappled with addressing diverse audiences and how others might respond to their published pieces at different stages of their authoring processes. Whitney et al. highlight the ways teacher-authors’ writing processes were facilitated by imagining interested peers, although they rarely reported actually encountering such teachers in their own schools. Their research points to quite complex practices that involve authoring selves, others, and contexts as well as texts.

In closing, each of these articles warns against finding or making simple connections when implementing new approaches to assessment and instructional practice: Hoffman warns against the dangers of simple definitions of literacy and simplistic assessments; McQuitty recommends against simplifying the relationship between teacher education programs and teachers’ practices; and Whitney et al. press against simplified notions of audience in writing practices. By embracing
more nuanced views of literacy and seeking multiple ways to aid teachers, scholars can do more than contribute to the literature. As teacher educators and researchers, we need to seek more ways to grapple with the complex relationship between what we do in education programs, what teachers implement in their practices, and what societies ask of their citizens. Likewise, we need to be cognizant as authors of how multiple and dynamic our audiences may be, and that we cannot always predict how our research will be taken up by others.

REFERENCES


New Research in the Teaching of English Editors Announced
Ellen Cushman and Mary Juzwik, both of Michigan State University, have been named the next editors of RTE. Their first issue will appear in August 2013.