

TCTELA names 2011 outstanding English educators

By Joan Curtis, Past President

Keller ISD's Jennifer Isgett, Outstanding High School English Language Arts Educator, expresses her appreciation at the membership celebration.



Graciously accepting the Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Service Award on behalf of all teachers, Dr. Joan Shiring of the University of Texas/Austin tells TCTELA members that teachers make all other professions possible: "You are the best of the best."



Outstanding Middle School English Language Arts Educator Susan Turner, Carrollton Farmers Branch ISD, addresses the membership.



Dr. Carol Brochin Ceballos (center) celebrates her Outstanding University English Language Arts Educator award with her family (from left) Nancy Brochin Nearon, Colleen Brochin Spencer, Linda Brochin Garza and Karen Elizabeth Garza.

We all teach with exceptional colleagues, and four of those colleagues were named as TCTELA Outstanding Educators for 2011 at the annual conference in January. Dr. Joan Shiring of the University of Texas/Austin received the Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Service Award. Shiring, clinical associate professor of Language and Literacy Studies, has been described as one "whose dedication to the preparation of teachers of English has been a lifetime pursuit." Service to her students is unparalleled in excellence as she searches for the latest issues in which to engage her students deeply in thought and discussion. From brilliance as a student to brilliance as a teacher to brilliance as a conference presenter, TCTELA is proud to have its name associated with Dr. Joan Shiring.

Dr. Carol Brochin Ceballos, Outstanding University English Language Arts Educator, teaches pre-service teachers at the

University of Texas/El Paso. Ceballos is described by one of her students as one who "epitomizes excellence in teacher education." Outstanding High School English Language Arts Educator is Jennifer Isgitt who teaches English IV and serves as the ELA department chair at Fossil Ridge High School in Keller ISD. Isgett is described as one who is "steady with her work and deep with her thinking." Susan Turner, Outstanding Middle School Educator, "nurtures and supports her students and colleagues in purposeful ways." Turner teaches and is the ELA department manager at Blalack Middle School in Carrollton Farmers' Branch ISD. Soon to be among the ranks called *teacher* is Brandy Murphy, our Outstanding Future English Educator. Murphy is a student at the University of Houston, Downtown, where her professors describe her as a "force—reaching out to others, asking questions, offering suggestions, creating a network of engaged future educators."

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President's Corner

The New Year: A great time to log some metaphorical miles

By Martha Medlock

The start of the New Year is always a time of renewal and clean slates. Starting off on the right track and getting life back into some semblance of order is always my goal. My New Year's resolution this year is to "get back in shape," both literally and metaphorically. While I wait for the cold weather to subside in Austin (I know...I'm a cold-weather wimp, and Austin weather doesn't compare to what our friends in West Texas and the Panhandle are facing), I feel that my metaphorical shape is on track.

Leaving the annual Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts conference in Galveston, I felt rejuvenated and in good shape to face the seventh and eighth graders in my classroom. I came back with the equipment I needed to spark not only my love of writing and reading, but to also be the "personal trainer" my kids need. By showing them that I am a writer and a reader, they see their own potential as writers and readers too.

Of course, like a well-organized marathon, the success of any conference goes to all who work to make sure everything is in place. Emily Faulk, this year's local arrangements chair, was one of many who made the TCTELA conference a success. She coordinated pre-service teachers who volunteered as facilitators, getting their first taste of a teacher conference. Without the dedication of professionals volunteering their service, having a well-organized conference is difficult.

In addition to an organizer, a well-run marathon needs sponsors to make the shwag bag appealing. The sponsors of our conference gave the membership of TCTELA great shwag. Not only did they bring several of our great speakers, they also sponsored several events: literacy-to-service luncheon, membership celebration, and affiliate breakfast meeting. A "thank you" also goes out to all the vendors who showcased their goods and services to support education.

The conference also featured a number of Texas teachers sharing their craft by leading a concurrent session on Friday and Saturday. With topics ranging from "Transforming the Traditional Novel Study" to "Effective Reading Practices for English Language Learners," conference attendees had many choices. Teachers teaching teachers is a wonderful way to learn from the experts in the field. I always leave with a tool-box overflowing with true and tried strategies to use in my own classroom.

In order to finish a marathon, runners know they have to work with other runners to keep their pace. Taking the lead and letting others "draft" behind pays off when it is reciprocated. Those taking the lead this year and serving as TCTELA board members are Katrina Gonzalez, president elect; Julie Schweers, recording secretary; Tim Martindell, vice-president-elect; Krista Eaton, electronic communications' manager. Welcome!

When a runner crosses the finish line, there is a sense of accomplishment, a sense of relief, and the need to have a new goal. With the 2011 conference over, as president of such a great organization, I feel a sense of accomplishment, a sense of relief, and a new goal to work towards. It is with great pleasure to announce the 2012 TCTELA conference will be held in San Antonio, January 20-22. The theme of the conference is "Nurturing Lifelong Learning."

It's time to get back on the road and log some miles.



President Martha Medlock announces the 2012 conference theme to the membership—Nurturing Lifelong Learning.

Gringotts Vault (Financial Update)

By Alana Morris, Executive Secretary

Inscribed on the silver doors
at Gringotts Bank:

*Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.*

-JK ROWLING

The Ad Hoc Financial Review Committee, meeting for the second time at the annual conference on Friday, January 21, reported only minor concerns, such as duplicated forms, and completed its work in record time as a result of the changes implemented following last year's review.

These changes included a process for the managing director to review all incoming and outgoing funds to verify funding codes and alignment to the five-year strategic plan, making sure all checks are co-signed, and setting up the online banking check review process through Chase Bank.

The purpose of the yearly review is to provide transparency regarding the

financial operations of the organization. Committee members review monthly bank statements, incoming and outgoing funds, and all supporting documentation.

This year's committee included Alana Morris, committee chair and executive secretary; Janet Charpiot, Katy ISD; Sue Howell, Amarillo ISD; Becky Singley, Spring Branch ISD; and Dr. Shirley Wright, Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD.

At the time of this newsletter's publication, the post-conference financial updates are not available. The final number of conference registrants, however, was 585. Once payments have been received and conference bills have been paid, a detailed financial report will be published.

Changes to constitution, bylaws approved; membership adopts resolutions, welcomes new board

By Kay Shurtleff, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts members approved changes to the constitution and bylaws at the annual business meeting on Saturday, January 22, in Galveston.

Among the changes approved by the membership were eliminating the elementary liaison at large position, changing the name of the webmaster position to electronic communications manager, and enabling the SLATE/NCTE liaison officer to vote along with other board members. For a comprehensive review of the changes, see the [Winter 2010 edition of Texas Voices](#). The complete [constitution and bylaws](#) are posted in the Governance section of the TCTELA website, www.tctela.org.

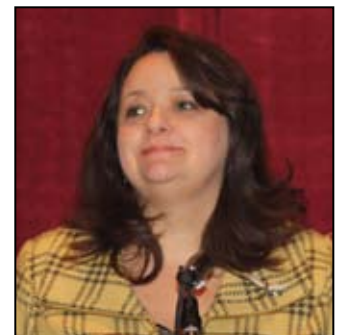
In other business, assembled members approved a resolution to create "the Mercedes Bonner Leadership Award to recognize English language arts educators of diverse backgrounds for their profound impact on the profession of English language arts education, commitment to excellence in the teaching of English, and continued dedication to service and support of the mission and purpose of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts." Bonner was a longtime TCTELA member, well-known literacy leader, and chair of the Multicultural Awareness Committee when she passed away in 2008. Outgoing chair Georgia Edwards presented the resolution to the membership. The membership also approved the minutes of last year's business meeting and the financial report presented by Executive Secretary Alana Morris.



Tim Martindell, Fort Bend ISD, joins the TCTELA Board as vice-president for membership and affiliates.



Newly elected secretary Julie Schweers compared serving the membership of TCTELA to training for a marathon. "I have been in training to run for this office. I have admired and learned from so many people who have served in various leadership roles in TCTELA."



Past President Carol Revelle relinquishes the gavel during the annual business meeting on January 22.

NCTE seeks nominees for intellectual freedom award

The purpose of the NCTE/SLATE Intellectual Freedom Awards is to honor individuals, groups, or institutions that merit recognition for advancing the cause of intellectual freedom.

The eligibility criteria for the affiliate NCTE/SLATE Intellectual Freedom Awards are as follows:

- the awardee has shown courage in advancing the cause of intellectual freedom or fighting censorship;
- the awardee can be an educator or noneducator;
- the awardee can be an individual, group, or institution;
- the awardee's activity can be related to particular recent events (e.g., as in a censorship dispute) or it can be ongoing (e.g., as in leadership demonstrated over a period of years);

- the same awardee may not be named for two years in succession.

Examples:

- a newspaper that supported, in an editorial, a teacher, school, or Board of Education action in defense of a challenged book, film, or educational method
- the teacher, school, or Board of Education involved in such a defense
- a department chair, principal, or central office leader who has over a period of time developed and/or supported intellectual freedom policies and practices
- a public official who took a stand in a difficult intellectual freedom case

In 2009, The Texas Freedom Network, nominated by the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts, received the award for supporting the state's educators and working to be sure their voices are heard. When the Texas State Board of Education

in 2008 presented and ultimately adopted a new English language arts curriculum, the Freedom Network supported the Coalition of Reading and English Language Arts Professionals in getting its position out to a wider audience through the media. Throughout the adoption process the Texas Freedom Network honored the expertise of English language arts educators while crafting and delivering the messages, and since the final vote on the curriculum, the Freedom Network has continued to support the work of the teachers and to fight for intellectual freedom in Texas schools by educating reporters and the public.

Is there someone in your school or community you would like to nominate for this award? If so, please contact Valerie Taylor at vfstaylor@sbcglobal.net. Also, for more information about the award and the nomination process, please visit the NCTE website: <http://www.ncte.org/affiliates/awards/slate>.

TCTELA hosts legislative advocacy day at Capitol

Teachers can let their state legislators know how they feel about funding for education and let their representatives get to know them and the work they do for education by participating in TCTELA's first Legislative Advocacy Day at the State Capitol in Austin on Thursday, March 24. On that day, participants will meet for a short breakfast and strategy session where they will have a chance to prepare to meet with the staff members of legislators. Teachers will then meet with legislators. Following the event, teachers will meet for lunch to debrief the experience. Also, be looking for an e-mail soon with a detailed schedule and information about parking, etc. In the interim, direct any questions to TCTELA's NCTE/SLATE Representative Valerie Taylor, vfstaylor@sbcglobal.net, or TCTELA's Legislative Action Committee Chair Jennifer Lilly, Jennifer.Lilly@scisd.net.

To find your legislators and their contact information, visit the website, Who Represents Me at <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/>.

House Public Education Committee

Chair: Rep. Rob Eissler **Vice Chair:** Rep. Scott Hochberg
Members: Rep. Alma Allen, Rep. Jimmie Don Aycock, Rep. Harold V. Dutton, Jr., Rep. Ryan Guillen, Rep. Dan Huberty, Rep. Mark Shelton, Rep. Todd Smith, Rep. Mark Strama and Rep. Randy Weber

Senate Education Committee

Chair: Sen. Florence Shapiro **Vice Chair:** Sen. Dan Patrick
Members: Sen. John Carona, Sen. Wendy Davis, Sen. Mario Gallegos, Jr., Sen. Steve Ogden, Sen. Kel Seliger, Sen. Leticia Van de Putte and Sen. Royce West

Membership approves

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Morris introduced the newly elected board members: President Martha Medlock from Lake Travis ISD, President-Elect Katrina Gonzalez from Eldorado ISD, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates Kay Shurtleff from Region 10 ESC, Vice President-Elect for Membership and Affiliates Tim Martindell from Fort Bend

ISD, Recording Secretary Julie Schweers from Northside ISD, and Past President Carol Revelle from the University of North Texas.

Medlock revealed the conference theme for 2012: Nurturing Lifelong Learning.

"I believe that the day a teacher stops learning, she stops teaching. I know that

sounds a little harsh, but you can't know everything, and you can always learn," said Medlock in her presidential address.

Next year's conference will be held in San Antonio, January 20-22, 2012. Details are forthcoming on the TCTELA website at www.tctela.org.

Young addresses STAAR, holds fast to previous assertions

By Julie Schweers, Recording Secretary

“STAAR is not an assessment shift; it’s an instructional shift. It’s a change incrementally in what we want kids to learn,” said Victoria Young, Texas Education Agency director of reading, writing, and social studies assessment, at the 2011 Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts conference.

During her two sessions, Young held fast to assertions she has made all along about the new test—that preparing students for the test should not take “extra” instructional time, that the design does not lend itself to benchmarking and that, despite the increased rigor, students will do well if teachers teach them to read and write.

While Young’s assertions have remained steadfast, many details regarding the assessments are still undecided or are not ready for release. She announced that the state is seriously considering a four-hour time limit each day for the general population, adding, “Kids do not have to show strategies on every question.” She also said she was “99 percent sure students would be allowed to use dictionaries in grades 6-8,” due to the fact that some passages will be published texts. As information is finalized, it will be posted on the TEA website.

Though sample prompts will not be available until August, Young confirmed that the fourth- and seventh-grade writing

tests will span two days. Fourth graders will complete half of the multiple-choice questions and the first prompt on the first day and the second half of the multiple-choice questions and the second prompt on the second day.

At seventh grade, Young said students are slated to complete all of the revising and editing questions and to write one essay on the first day. On the second day, students will respond to one prompt, take a break, and then respond to the second prompt. Day two could be split into morning and afternoon. The field testing of prompts will be embedded into the composition test at this level and at the high school level.

High school students will complete all of the revising and editing questions and three writing prompts on day one. On the second day, they will complete the reading portion of the test, which includes multiple-choice and short-answer (formerly open-ended) questions.

Young also shared that the English I rubric will serve as the base for other rubrics though terminology will be changed according to grade level. For instance, thesis is called a central idea in the fourth grade, a controlling idea in the seventh and a thesis statement in ninth through eleventh grades. The sections of the rubric have been collapsed from five categories to three:



TEA’s Victoria Young tells members the state is “seriously considering a four-hour time limit for the general population” on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness.

organization/progression, development of ideas, and use of language/conventions.

Young said students would need to be taught to tighten their writing though she hoped teachers would not have students write only one-page essays. She added that the state wanted “real writing,” not “fake writing.”

For more information on Young’s TCTELA presentations, view her slides: [STAAR Reading and Writing, 3-8](#); and [STAAR, English I, II, and III](#). Both are located on the homepage of the TCTELA website, www.tctela.org.

Just Between You and I

Educator bemoans usage issues; pleads to give grammar its due

By Richard James, Guest Contributor

A curse of being an English teacher is that we are always editing and revising in our heads the things we see and hear. I say “we” do that because I am not ready to admit it might just be me. Unfortunately for others, sometimes what goes on in our heads accidentally slips out. OK, sometimes it is not accidental but very much on purpose. After all, our life’s work is to support others and educate them with a major goal to improve their ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

I think we can all agree there are some serious, widespread issues with proper usage. From TV news reporters to nationally known public speakers to some professional colleagues, I notice errors on almost a daily basis. The most common I’ve noticed is the misuse of “I” and “me,” even though we’ve been repeatedly told it should be “Suzy and I are going to the dance” instead of “Me and Suzy....”

Where is the breakdown? I know for certain that somewhere in our educational history at least one teacher took the time to show us right from wrong in proper usage of “and I” in the nominative case—just take the other person out of the sentence and see which one sounds better—I or me. Why didn’t this stick, and why do people argue when you try to explain the correct usage rule?

There are several valid reasons why being incorrect can have a negative impact on a person. According to Beason, “errors affect a person’s credibility as a writer or employee” (48). Errors can cause readers to make judgments about writers in several ways, such as creating the image of a hasty, careless, uncaring, or uninformed writer who is a poor communicator or poorly educated person (Beason). Although there are multiple factors making up a holistic view of a writing sample, such as logic, organization, and conciseness, technical

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Original grammar guru Constance Weaver captivates Sunday morning crowd

By Kay Shurtleff, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates



Constance Weaver, author of *Teaching Grammar in Context*, plays with language during her Sunday morning workshop at the annual TCTELA conference.

Long before Grammar Girl was podcasting, Jeff Anderson was *Mechanically Inclined* or Harry Noden was painting grammatical brush strokes, Constance Weaver was helping the language arts community understand how to teach grammar within the context of writing. Her early books *Grammar for Teachers* (1979), *Teaching Grammar in Context* (1996), and countless other articles become seminal works. By reputation, Weaver is an intimidating force. In reality, she's a soft spoken, deeply compassionate woman.

Although she opened her session Sunday morning with the words, "I have no magic bullet for editing," she did offer plenty of magical ideas. She urged participants to play with language.

"When you get uptight about grammar," Weaver said, "your sentences get shorter."

Extending that idea to English language learners, she said, "Their ideas are encouraged and celebrated. And only then do we play with the grammar." In nonthreatening—even fun—ways, she showed participants how to play with a sentence, using grammatical constructs to add depth and punch.

Using what she terms "grammatical options" such as absolutes, appositives, and parallelism, she guided participants through revising and editing. Playing with options,

Weaver explained, "pulls details out of us." She suggested beginning in the very early grades with grammatical constructs such as participles and working toward absolutes, the one she regards as the most difficult. She offered Ben Mikaelson's *Touching Spirit Bear* and Carmen Agra Deedy's *The Last Dance* as wonderful mentor texts for exploring those options. "Reading," she stated, "teaches reading, writing, and grammar...Have them read, read, read, read."

Weaver's latest book is *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, published by Heinemann. She also worked with Perfection Learning on their *Writing with Power* series.

In a time when grammar has become spotlighted and popularized by those such as Lynne Truss and Mignon Fogarty and by technology such as Tweets and Podcasts, it seems fitting to remember that Weaver was grammar when grammar wasn't cool. It is on her shoulders that language arts educators stand, and those in attendance Sunday morning knew they were in the presence of a legend.

Between you and I

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features such as grammar, usage, and mechanics play a significant role as well. Often these technical features are the ones that interfere with reader comprehension the most (McCannon). As Constance Weaver puts it, grammar is "the unconscious command of syntax that enables us to understand and speak the language" (2).

In Texas this year, public school districts are in the process of adopting textbook resources that cover writing, grammar, and research skills from kindergarten to the twelfth grade. These resources are supposed to complement the literature study resources adopted last year. One reason to question this adoption is the common opinion that the grammar and writing resources adopted ten years ago were hardly ever used. Most textbooks sat in storerooms collecting dust.

My response to this question is grammar and mechanics should be given much more attention than they have in the past considering the consistent abuse of the language. Harap identified the most common grammatical errors of his time. These included subject/verb agreement, errors in pronoun case, misuse of adverbs and adjectives, use of the wrong preposition, and sentence fragments (Harap). More recently a study of reactions of business professionals to professional writing showed many of the *same* errors are still being made (Beason). These include misspellings, sentence run-ons, word-ending errors due to adjective/adverb confusion, and sentence fragments. The persistence of this issue requires it not be ignored.

However, there needs to be a distinction made between teaching grammar as a subject and teaching it as a tool. When taught out of context as arbitrary rules, grammar lessons do not stick. Covering a rule slowly and only a few at a time helps students make the connections between the rule and its purpose in making their writing more clear. As Pooley suggests, we should "teach correctness in specific situations, and use grammar as the explanation of, rather than the means toward, greater correctness" (qtd. Reid).

Please give grammar, usage, and mechanics its due. Take the time to review the resources and materials up for adoption. Studies show teaching rules and conventions out of context does not have long term benefit (Krashen). Instead we must give students ample opportunities to read and discover them on their own.

[However], even with massive reading, complete acquisition of the conventions of writing may not take place; even very well-read people may have gaps.... Conscious knowledge of grammar rules can help fill at least some of these gaps, and can be used in the editing stage of the composing process, after ideas are on the page (Krashen).

Without English teachers around to help identify these gaps and give positive, timely, encouraging feedback, communication could possibly devolve back to something similar to caveman grunts and growls—or at least as bad as continually misusing a personal pronoun.

“I’m afraid of what you’re doing in the name of the child.”

By Cindy Tyroff, Interim *Texas Voices* Editor



Patrick Shannon, professor of education at Penn State University, urges educators to rebalance their curriculum between reading for democracy and reading toward a job during his keynote address following the business session on the Saturday of the annual conference in Galveston.

Challenging our nation’s drive “to standardize the content and teaching of English language arts” and its portrayal of public schools and teachers as having failed to keep pace with the educational needs of today’s students, keynote speaker Patrick Shannon of Penn State University presented a set of international comparisons to TCTELA members at the Saturday general session in Galveston.

“Despite continuous media cheerleading to the contrary, few American institutions rank number 1 in the world,” said Shannon, citing rankings by the conservative British news weekly *The Economist*, Dubai’s Legatum Group, and Freedom House, a US non-governmental agency, all of whom gave the US low marks in a number of non-educational categories.

“That the US ranks eighteenth in democracy, ninth in prosperity, and twenty-fourth in free press points toward problems in American society that have little to do with English language arts educational standards or standardization. Those rankings were earned by the decisions and performance of government officials, business leaders,

and media moguls,” said Shannon, adding that “English language arts teachers and student performances are neither failing nor even mediocre.”

Shannon went on to outline five steps educators can take to have a voice in the changing face of education:

1. Refute the official story that proposed educational reforms are in the name of the child. “If it were, we’d be part of a new War on Poverty,” said Shannon.
2. Join anti-poverty groups.
3. Balance the ELA curriculum between reading for democracy and reading for a job.
4. Read more.
5. Sing more.

For more information about how to challenge the “official story,” read [Shannon’s complete address](#) or his recent publications *Reading Against Democracy* and *The Main Danger: Reading Toward Democracy*.

Shannon, a former preschool and primary grades teacher, is a professor of education at Penn State University.

Gallagher, Anderson emphasize imitation, coaching

By Evelyn Guzman and Maggie Behle

When people think of a sports coach, they think of a leader, a mentor and a role model. A coach motivates athletes to reach their full potential. A coach teaches good sportsmanship by teaching concepts like strategy, collaboration and playing by the rules. Famous coach John Wooden would tell his athletes, “I am not going to talk to you about winning or losing because I believe that’s a byproduct of our preparation. I would much rather focus on the process of becoming the best team we are capable of becoming.” Jeff Anderson and Kelly Gallagher do exactly this; they work through the writing process in a way that helps students fulfill their potential as writers.

At the 46th Annual Conference and Exposition of TCTELA, Anderson and Gallagher gave an engaging and practical seminar titled, “Coaching Adolescent Writers Throughout the Writing Process,” in which they presented strategies for promoting and improving student writing. Anderson and Gallagher began by emphasizing the need to recognize the power of imitation. They said, “What we read shapes us, shapes our world and shapes our writing.” The key for teachers is to provide excellent modeling in our own work and expose students to well-written mentor texts.

Anderson and Gallagher stressed the importance of *demonstrating* the writing process in action by taking students through each step as teachers compose a text themselves. As they pointed out, people master skills most efficiently by imitating a mentor through a process. Not many would let an ER doctor who had never observed a live surgery before operate on them? How much easier would it be to learn how to ride a bike if parents demonstrated first, instead of hollering “Pedal!” from the safety of the sidewalk? Writing is no different. Taking students through the steps of revision and editing undoubtedly will increase their confidence and build a path to skillfully crafted writing.

The next step that Anderson and Gallagher suggested was to put students in pairs to talk about what they notice in a mentor text, what they find effective, and most importantly, what they would like to try in their own writing. As Gallagher said, “Deeper learning comes from meaningful talk.” When students discuss why a text is effective, they begin to realize how they can replicate those skills effectively.

When it came time to talk about revision and editing, Anderson laid out a game plan useful for every writer. As he stated, “Anybody



Teaching for Transformation

Remembering the 2011 TCTELA Conference

The University of Incarnate Word's Stephanie Grote-Garcia shares the results of a study of the written discussions of undergraduate students and preservice teachers in her concurrent session, "Collaborative Learning Through Written Conversations."



Experimenting in Gretchen Bernabei's workshop, Kelly Smith of Alvin ISD said, "A knitting needle can be described as revolutionary in Madam Defarge's hands," while Helen read of Lakeworth ISD counters, "A pair of knitting needs is a version of my love."



"Boys think reading should be functional," announces Jeff Wilhelm, author and educator, at the opening of his workshop, "Inquiring Minds Want to Read and Write."

Left: Always the learner, Edmund Farrell takes copious notes during Andrea Lunsford's workshop, "How Students Write Today: Findings from Two Research Studies."

Concurrent session presenter Judith Youngers demonstrates a vocabulary manipulative to a packed house in her session, "Transformations: Transparent and Transportable Academic Vocabulary Strategies Using Foldables."



Workshop presenter Aimee Buckner demonstrates how to use writer's notebooks to inspire students.



Teaching for Transformation

Remembering the 2011 TCTELA Conference

Gretchen Bernabei, teacher and author, leads workshop participants in a bit of "jerk talk" during her session, "Inner Streams: Teaching Students to Create Compelling Expository Writing."



TCTELA members Suzi Lockamy and Terry Thompson reconsider the art and science of teaching and learning with Alana Morris, TCTELA executive secretary, in her session, "Classroom Instruction REWIRED."



Workshop presenter Andrea Lunsford of Stanford University contends that the most important part of rhetoric is "delivery, delivery, delivery."



Jim Cummins, well-known educator and lecturer, shares a letter to the editor from a Toronto teacher describing his struggles to teach second language learners.

Kay Shurtleff, Region 10 ESC, and Greg Reeves, Region 17 ESC, demonstrate effective ways to structure expository writing in their session. "In this workshop, I am going to tell you...: Avoiding the Trap of Formulaic Expository Writing."



Chad Jones, Lamar CISD, whips up a batch of cookies to illustrate a low-stress way to introduce Advanced Placement timed writing to middle school students. If only he'd had an Easy Bake Oven and large glasses of milk for participants...

Learning to serve others: lessons in compassion, humanity

By Alana Morris, Executive Secretary

One of the worst feelings in the world has to be sitting in a meeting when everyone seems to know something you do not know.

While planning for this year's annual TCTELA conference, Carol Revelle, then president-elect, announced some of the speakers she was considering. She talked favorably about a woman named Cathy Berger Kaye. A couple of people asked a question I was too embarrassed to ask. They asked about her literacy specialty. We were told that she had done extensive work with service learning. At that time I was unclear as to exactly what service learning included. I made several inferences based on the language, but the truth is I had no experience with service learning. So I made a note to attend the Literacy-to-Service Connection Luncheon featuring Kaye; Donalyn Miller, author of *The Book Whisperer*; and Dr. Teri Lesesne, renowned book talker and author of *Reading Ladder* at the 21st Century Luncheon. I knew it was an event I would not miss. I looked forward to discovering more about service learning.

During the luncheon, Kaye spoke about the importance of learning being "real, relevant, and engaging." She shared numerous concepts and skills explored through a variety of texts and then service action that stemmed from the exploration of the texts. Miller and Lesesne deepened the conversation by sharing additional books that offer themes of action and compassion for others.

What I discovered is that service learning is synonymous with concepts master teachers practice daily: engagement, community, and conversation. I also discovered that while I may not have known the label *Service Learning*, schools and districts throughout Texas, including the district where I spent close to a decade as one of the ELA program directors are utilizing the principles of service learning.

One campus, Hill Intermediate in Aldine ISD, not too far from Galveston where our speakers shared insights about teaching students literacy while teaching about humanity, had recently been involved in a relevant literacy project that served the needs of others: Pennies for Peace. For a matter of fact, this world-wide project was



Book talkers Donalyn Miller and Terri Lesesne banter about books during the Literacy-to-Service Connection Luncheon.

referenced by our panel speakers. Hill Intermediate is a magnet school focusing on economics, foreign language, and entrepreneurship; and during this project the teachers, parents, and community assisted with blending content learning standards with standards for discourse, standards for humanity, and standards for looking beyond themselves and toward the needs of others.

After teacher Kathy Kennedy read *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, she became excited about bringing its message of peace and hope to the teachers and students from Hill. The students would spend the next few weeks collecting pennies that would provide literacy aid to students living in the Middle East. Teachers worked to involve parents during family nights and PTO meetings. In addition, community members were notified and quickly got caught up in the contagious energy to impact others. One company, MH Cleaners, owned by Michael Nesbit, announced that they would match the student collections dollar for dollar while Shawn Jones Homes, a local home builder, donated a pizza party for the team that collected the most pennies.

After essay contests, pictographs, lessons in estimation, lessons in geography, numerous literary connections, and, of course, thousands of collected pennies, Hill was ready to cash in the copper coins. Luckily a bank in neighboring Tomball, Texas, agreed to count the pennies for free.

Perhaps when they began their service adventure no one could have estimated the amount of pennies these young students

would collect, but their final contribution will certainly go a long way toward building schools and providing supplies for young children in the Middle East. Hill students collected 117,478 pennies, which translated into \$1,174.78. With the matching funds from Nesbit, the total amount going to Pennies for Peace was \$2,349.56.

Hill Intermediate was certainly not the first to fill containers with pennies, and they will not be the last. One trait this group of students and teachers showed, however, was intense empathy. Poverty is a trait most of the students at Hill and the students they were on a mission to help share. Lack of resources by one definition certainly does not mean lack of resourcefulness. Their contributions will fund almost four teacher salaries, close to eight advanced students' annual scholarships, or 15,663 notebooks for students in Afghanistan.

And in efforts to pay it forward, David Mortenson, whom teachers Kennedy and Ayesha Kayani met at a book signing in December, used a grant from the publishing company to provide free copies of the *Young Reader's Edition of Three Cups of Tea* for every student at Hill Intermediate.

The academic lessons learned for the students were many, each one documented in weekly lesson plans. The lessons of compassion and humanity are not as easily measured or assessed, but they will, no doubt, be remembered and perpetuated by the students and teachers who shared this experience. The importance of reaching out to people in need across the ocean, across the country, and even across the street will resonate long after the pictograph images and geography lessons have blurred and faded.

Since that early conference planning meeting, I have discovered that service learning goes beyond a simple label; taking the concepts our students are led to understand to the level of community action is perhaps the highest form of comprehension. And these projects of service learning are not an accidental moment that hopefully happens at least once during a student's education, they should be ongoing and planned with intent. Anne Frank reminds us, "How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment before starting to change the world."

Literacy and service learning: transforming hearts, minds, and schools

By Katrina Gonzales, President-Elect



Author Catherine Berger Kaye outlines the benefits of using service learning to engage students.



Students from Hill Intermediate in Aldine ISD raised over \$2000 for Pennies for Peace.

As a featured panelist at Friday's literacy luncheon, Cathryn Berger Kaye, a nationally- and internationally-known expert on service learning, brought her energy and enthusiasm about service learning to a full house of English language arts teachers. Then, on Saturday, she aided approximately 50 workshop participants to understand the process of using service learning as a literacy strategy. Kaye said, "We have to change, 'I have to' into 'I want to,'" and service learning does that.

To demonstrate the power that words have in people's lives, Kaye began with an activity using quotations. Participants stood and, after introducing themselves to someone new, shared quotations. If the quotations read by the partner was one that the participant preferred, he or she could switch. From the Chinese proverb "Talk does not cook rice" to Aristotle's "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all," and so many others, quotes were switching from hand to hand, at times, quite reluctantly.

After explaining how the five stages of service learning flow from investigation, to preparation and planning, to action, to reflection, and, finally, to demonstration, Kaye asked for an example of service learning conducted on a campus. One participant explained that, at her school, students were in the midst of a food drive. Kaye immediately turned to her stash of

books and pulled out several that related to food and hunger. She then asked the audience to look at the typical food drive which provides simple service and explore how one could weave the food drive into curricular areas. Within minutes, an ordinary food drive became a fully-integrated service learning project that could impact not only the ELA classroom but science, math, social studies, and others.

Another activity Kaye modeled was the "One-Minute Think Tank," a quick way to turn to a neighbor and create a new strategy. She asked the audience to think of a favorite book, one recently read or a lifelong favorite. After a few seconds to think of titles, Kaye asked the audience to participate in a "One-Minute Think Tank" to first discuss the book and then to find a social justice theme in the book. As Kaye said, "There is a social justice theme in EVERY book."

As the workshop came to a close, Kaye asked, "Now, how many of you think you might try service learning in your classrooms when you get back home?" Across the room hands thrust high into the air.

Educators want transformation; educators want to change "I have to" into "I want to." Service learning transforms educators and students by using their intelligence and experience to achieve a common good. As one attendee said, "It is a way to change the world!"

Technology committee sets sights high Group plans to introduce need for effective staff development

By Arden McLean, Standing Committee on Technology Chairperson

The Standing Committee on Technology set two goals for the upcoming year when members met during the 2011 Conference in Galveston. The first is to write a series of columns for *English in Texas*. The first column in the series will introduce the need for effective staff development for technology, as well as discuss how technology savvy English language arts teachers must be proactive in making sure their colleagues are provided staff development opportunities on how to integrate technology into the curriculum. Future columns will provide a focused technology lesson idea and a discussion of how it can be implemented in classrooms.

The committee's hope is that readers will set up a series of professional development activities in their schools or districts based on the columns.

The committee's second goal is to develop and execute "Bring Your Own Laptop" sessions for the 2012 TCTELA conference. These sessions would allow participants to learn about technology applications in a "hands-on" environment. Questions are posted on the committee's "Connected Community" site, https://tctela.org/Connected_Community.html, and committee members encourage any individuals who are interested in this proposal to visit and comment or make suggestions.

Using new media to engage students in the classroom

By Krista Eaton, Electronic Communications Manager



Grammar girl Mignon Fogarty points to an unusual error.

Formerly a magazine and technical writer, Mignon Fogarty, aka “Grammar Girl,” lost her dream job in Silicon Valley and turned her hobby of podcasting into a successful profession. Author and creator of *Grammar Girl’s Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing*,

Fogarty has found some quick and effective ways to tackle some of the most common communication mistakes people make. She shared these student-engaging techniques with over 200 attendees at her workshop during the TCTELA conference in Galveston.

Fogarty’s session provided attendees with attention-getting techniques such as music, videos, blogs and podcasts to engage students in the study of grammar. Fogarty recommended attendees start with just one of the new techniques to test students’ responsiveness and eventually work in all of the techniques to create variety in classroom instruction.

She began the session with music, talking about the grammar errors in lyrics written by artists such as The Rolling Stones, whose “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” contains a double negative; Bob Dylan, whose “Lay Lady Lay” should be lie; and Bo Diddley, whose “Who Do You Love” should be whom. Through lyrics, students can learn new vocabulary words, as well as identify incorrect usage. Fogarty also shared a technique of having students create their own songs using new vocabulary words or new lesson material. If students make the song, they will retain, not memorize, the information.

Fogarty also suggested using video programs such as “Grammar Rocks,” created by School House Rocks and available on *YouTube*, where downloads are free. She played entertaining video samples on grammar and vocabulary that she said helped struggling students who process information better with a visual aide. She also recommended www.GrammarBooks.com by Jane Straus as a credible source for video clips about grammar.



Gilmore ISD educators Lynette Munoz, Sherry Connor, and Erin Denny don’t let a packed conference room prevent them from learning from the Grammar Girl.

Bomer issues challenge: seek hidden gems

By Valerie Taylor, SLATE/NGTE Liaison



Katherine Bomer urges members to use the language of the writer’s craft, rather than the language of rubrics, to respond to student writing.

Katherine Bomer, one of our not-so-hidden Texas gems, challenged teachers to expect greatness and to approach each day as a possibility for greatness in her conference workshop, “Hidden Gems.” Having this attitude and approach not only about our days but also about our students’ writing is the subject of Bomer’s newest book and was the subject of the workshop. And how do we find the positive comments to make about our students’ writing? Here are Bomer’s suggestions:

- Read widely.
- Notice what is different, what captures our attention.
- Write.
- Look at art (all kinds).
- Listen to how writers, artists, filmmakers, choreographers, architects, fashion and interior designers, chefs talk about their crafts.
- Copy the positive blurbs from the backs of books, from movie, music, book and art reviews.

Example:

“Your words dance on the page.”

“Your writing is like a love letter to...(basketball)”

“Your writing has Zen-like simplicity.”

“It reads like a ride in a car without brakes.”

Bomer also suggested that we learn to name what our students’ writing is and what it can be. For example, when an Indianapolis fourth grader named Christina wrote this poem:

“Today I write
with no subject
but I still write.”

Bomer responded with, “This is a Twitter poem.” What a great way to value our students’ voices, to affirm our students’

identities, as Jim Cummins, well-known bilingual educator and TCTELA conference presenter, suggested we should. Bomer also suggested that in responding to students’ writing in such ways, can help them begin to see their writing as art, for as four-year-old artist Marla discovered, if we call something art, if we say something is beautiful, then it becomes so, then the world treats it as so. (Check out the *60 Minutes* documentary on Marla.) Another example of this kind of story appears in the Peter H. Reynolds picture book *the dot*, where a young girl’s teacher places value on her art, her dot, by framing it and placing it on the wall above her desk. What would happen if we began to “frame” our students’ writing and hang it on the wall? What if we realized that each and every one of our students is trying to say something, trying to mean something?

So, let’s accept Bomer’s challenge and find ways to talk about our students’ writing through metaphor, to help them see the value of their writing in concrete terms. Let’s publish (frame) their writing often. Let’s celebrate their ways with words.

For more on Bomer’s ideas, check out her book (published by Heinemann): *Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student’s Writing*

Rethink assignments to help prevent plagiarism

By Cindy Tyroff, Interim *Texas Voices* Editor



Author Barry Gilmore explains the need to increase student investment and ownership in assignments.

Because, according to researcher Eric Anderman of Ohio State University, students who cheat “worry about school, perceive school as focused on grades, believe they’ll receive rewards for grades, attribute failure to outside circumstances, and avoid deep-level cognitive strategies in problem solving,” TCTELA workshop presenter Barry Gilmore contends the teacher’s role

is to increase investment, ownership, and motivation for students. “Our job has to be to bring them back to that intrinsic joy,” said Gilmore.

The best way to do that, according to Gilmore, is to rethink our assignments, but not by making them more specific, more personal, or by comparing a studied text to other unlikely texts. These strategies, while they may make it a bit more difficult or time-consuming for students to plagiarize, do not really help them learn to think deeply. As he said in his article “Speaking My Mind: What I Learned from Plagiarists,” “If the opposite of plagiarism is originality, then we should consider that true originality starts not with the teacher creating the perfect prompt, but with students thinking for themselves before the need for plagiarism ever begins.”

Gilmore provided TCTELA members with a clear list of steps to follow so that students can generate their own writing topics related to a literary text being studied.

Gilmore’s Tips

1. In small groups or as a class, brainstorm topics and make connections.
2. Choose an individual topic.

3. Find textual evidence, and write a thesis.
4. Share the thesis statement, discussing it in pairs or groups.
5. Draft a first paragraph and outline the remainder of the essay.
6. Write the essay.

While Gilmore admits such an approach may not eliminate all instances of plagiarism, it does help students develop the habit of thinking deeply to solve problems.

For ideas on ways to educate students about the ethics of attribution, for options when responding to academic dishonesty, for information on the use of honor codes, and for strategies that teach students the tools they need to avoid plagiarism, read Gilmore’s book *Plagiarism: Why It Happens and How to Prevent It*. He also has an article in the most recent edition of *English in Texas*.

Gilmore, a National Board Certified Teacher, currently teaches ninth-grade English at Hutchison School in Memphis, Tennessee, where he also serves as Humanities chair. He is a past president of the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English and has received numerous honors for his teaching.

Using new media

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To give students a “baby step” into publishing their own work, Fogarty advocated using a blog, an on-line discussion board. Fogarty said, “Knowing there is an audience excites kids to write.” The site www.kidblog.org provides a free, user-friendly, blogging network that doesn’t require a student e-mail to activate.

Fogarty ended her session with her weekly-created podcast “Grammar Girl,” voted Best Podcast of the Year in 2008, 2009 and 2010 by Apple. These audio productions, available through iTunes, cover topics such as “who versus whom,” comma splices, and misplaced modifiers, to name a few. The podcast is one of

Fogarty’s favorite ways to use media to engage learners. She has found her success in offering memory tricks and clear explanations that help her followers recall and apply troublesome grammar rules. Fogarty provided attendees with information on how to engage students in their own creation of a podcast. Through this medium, students are able to listen, comment, interact, and create a production that can be published and shared with a large audience.

Attendees left the session loaded with immediate ideas and programs to implement in their classrooms the day they returned from the conference.

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Members share breakfast, ideas, and enthusiasm for affiliates

By Kay Shurtleff, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates



Jennifer Lilly, Concho Valley Teachers of English, discusses the role of the affiliate in teacher professional development at the annual affiliate breakfast.



Katherine Powell, Conroe ISD, and Valerie Taylor, SLATE/NCTE liaison, share a laugh at the affiliate breakfast.



First-time conference attendee Luci Juarez listens carefully as affiliate leaders describe the work of their organizations.

When affiliate leaders and other guests came together on an early Sunday morning in Galveston to discuss affiliate activity and to gain ideas and support for growing affiliates in their own areas, the collective conversation was as energizing as the substantial breakfast.

Affiliate activity varies widely throughout the state from conferences that draw big crowds to small groups of teachers trying to develop professional networks for support.

Tim Martindell, TCTELA vice president-elect for membership and affiliates and West Houston Area Council of Teachers of English president, described the conference hosted by his affiliate. “We brought in Victoria Young from TEA to talk about the test. Then Gretchen Bernabei, teacher and author, followed her to talk about ways to teach. Having them tag team was really a good experience for us, and it definitely increased our membership,” said Martindell.

Others at the breakfast sought advice and ideas for starting affiliates in their areas of the state. Molly Adams, from Longview ISD, talked about the benefits of forming an affiliate. “Now more than at any other time teachers need to join together to help each other professionally—not just to provide staff development, but also to share best practices and just support each other.” Echoing those sentiments were Clara Lopez and Martha Cantu of Mission High School, Mission, Texas, as well as others.

Greg Reeves, language arts consultant at Region 17 Education Service Center in Lubbock suggested that service centers can partner with district educators in starting affiliates. “What I’d like to do,” he explained, “is offer space in our building for the districts in our region to come together to organize. I can also help facilitate staff development.”

Among the other comments was one shared by Donalyn Miller, teacher in Keller ISD and author of *The Book Whisperer*, who said, “I think it’s important that as we start these affiliates, there’s a way to clearly communicate goals and invite participation from everyone in the area.”

As the breakfast ended and attendees prepared to attend the Sunday morning workshops, the enthusiasm was palpable.

Currently there are six regional affiliates: San Antonio Area Council of Teachers of English (SAACTE), West Houston Area Council of Teachers of English (WHACTE), Central Texas Council of Teachers of English (CTCE), Concho Valley Teachers of English (CVTE), North Harris County Teachers of English (NHCTE) and North Texas Teachers of English Language Arts (NTCTELA). Information about membership is posted at <https://tctela.org/Affiliates>

Anyone interested in starting a local affiliate should contact Kay Shurtleff, vice president for membership and affiliates, or Tim Martindell, vice president-elect for membership and affiliates.

Imitation, coaching

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can write; rewriting is where *it* happens.” Their system, called RADaR, shows students how editing can be as simple as four steps: Replace, Add, Delete, and Reorder. While students will have to go through these steps several times throughout the writing process, they can be broken down into these easy-to-remember categories. Anderson encouraged teaching our students that editing is not a process to undergo for correctness, but instead is for creating meaningful effect. By giving students a reason why mechanics

matter, they will begin to use these skills with more command. While all the information and guidance was invaluable, the part of this seminar that was most memorable was how Anderson and Gallagher took the audience members through this process with them.

Watching them imitate a text was effective and entertaining. Writing an individual text using their methods was rewarding. Participants not only saw how valuable this would be for students, but also felt their own writing improving by going through the process. In addition, Anderson’s and

Gallagher’s positive and reassuring words made the process smooth and enjoyable. Everyone walked out of the presentation with a big smile.

In their new program “Writing Coach” Anderson and Gallagher contend that meaning is deeply rooted in the mechanics of writing. If teachers lead students through the writing process the same way coaches guide their team, students will master these skills in ways that will improve both their academic lives and their personal lives.