

## President's Column

### *My Last First Day*

In my last news column I wrote about my summer reading list (part of the list was generated by my niece's suggested reading list for in-coming seniors) and a few trips and shows which were in the planning. In addition to those shows mentioned, Susan and I also saw *The Song of Hiawatha*, a yearly pageant in Pipestone. The poem—its relevance to Minnesotans—has long been a favorite of mine and one which I teach to my accelerated seventh graders. I read *A Confederacy of Dunces*, my favorite read of the summer. Also, and most importantly, Susan and I became engaged—ten months after our first date. Quite an eventful and fortunate summer for me. But now it's time to put away our summer reading and put our minds in gear for school once again.

The beginning of school, back-to-school workshops, and the first day of school are now behind us. For me these routine aspects of the school year—the merry-go-round we all hop on in September and step off in June—were also the last “first day of school experiences” I will have. I returned to school this year for the last time. I will be retiring after this school year, meeting the Rule of 90 in June 2003.

In the past years, it seems, I have been asked quite frequently, “When are you retiring?” or “How many more years do you have left?” I've taken it all pretty good-naturedly, I think, not assuming their query is a result of my aging appearance. My response, however, has always been a bit guarded, “Well, not for a while yet.”

This summer I have been responding differently: “I will be retiring at the end of this coming school year.” Saying it more often, I think, makes it more of a reality—easier to digest. But, it still hasn't really sunk in.

Where did all the years go? What happened to that scared, eager young teacher back in 1969? What happened to all his teaching dreams? Did my teaching make a difference? Did I ignite a spark, turn anyone on to my passion for literature and writing? Did I make a difference in the lives of over 4,000 students? I hope so. Even so, I realize it will be time to end my teaching career at age 56 and 34 years of experience this coming June.

So now I'm asked, “How does it feel to realize this is your last year?” Until recently I wasn't sure. I have now come to grips with more of how I feel. I realize that this year all of the teaching experiences I will be having will be the last ones. The realization is simple, but significant.

This group of kids will be my last group of sevens, the last time I will memorize 140 names. It will be the last experience with opening day and community-building activities. This year, as I prepared for the the first day of school for the last time, I started cleaning my filing cabinet as well. (Something I've been meaning to do for over 30 years.) Pulling the Back-to-School file, I selected those activities I planned to use and threw the old worn folder away. I've been adding to that file for most of these 34 years. I have saved many favorite activities, those that worked, and even those that didn't. I had multiple copies of each, all clipped together. I found I was still a bit uneasy throwing it all away—it seemed like throwing a part of myself away, I guess. The teacher in me saved one copy of each. Many of you perhaps smile at my vanity. I plan to continue cleaning my files throughout the year, throwing away and saving a bit for someone else. Will I hold true to such a systematic approach of cleaning? Probably not. But my intentions, like New Year's Resolutions, are good.

In many ways I view the approaching final year with the excitement of a new teacher. I have the energy to give it all another go. Throughout the summer I found myself listing units I love and want to include this year, units I could never retire and even some I have

*continued on page 2*

## In Brief

### *Fall Workshop*

There's still time to register for the MCTE Fall Workshop Reading Strategies that Work with Stephanie Harvey. Find more information, registration form, and directions to the workshop site, at [www.mcte.org/fallwork](http://www.mcte.org/fallwork)

### *New MEJ Editor*

Roseann Wolak of St. Cloud State University has assumed the editorship of the *Minnesota English Journal*, spring issue. Articles of interest to English/Language Arts teachers at elementary, middle school, high school, and post-secondary levels are needed. Deadline for submission is January 15, 2003. For more information, go to [www.mcte.org/journal/mej.html](http://www.mcte.org/journal/mej.html) or email Roseann at [rmwolak@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:rmwolak@stcloudstate.edu)

### *New Job for Micheal*

At the end of October, Micheal Thompson will be leaving the CFL to take a position in the St. Paul district as assistant director for secondary education. It will be a new job back in the district where he taught for 14 years before coming to the department three years ago. For Micheal, “In some ways, it feels like going home, though I have few illusions about the challenges the district is facing. I am looking forward to being a smidgen closer to the classroom and in working directly with teachers more often.”

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## Conversations - Micheal Thompson

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I've been to too many meetings about testing in the past few months. The new ESEA legislation (the so-called "Leave No Child Behind" Act) is making itself felt here at the CFL, and the repercussions will soon be felt at your districts as well. I find the scurrying attention to the needs of the tests disheartening. The intensity of involvement from all angles—supporters to toiling educators to dissidents—distracts us from what is really important in our shared efforts to be better teachers.

Focusing on instructional change and growth for students and teachers internally—at the classroom level—will help us build reformed schools more effectively than the current concentration on external measures. As usual, John Dewey thought of this before. "As far as schools are concerned," he wrote, "it is certain that the problems which require scientific treatment arise in actual relationships with students." Not one of these new tests, no matter how thoughtfully constructed, will ever tell us as much about a student's growth and abilities as a single observant teacher. Sometimes it's enough just to be there consistently watching with your eyes wide open.

Fortunately, thoughtful assessment methodologies do have institutional support in Minnesota. Thanks to last summer's "Systems Integration Project," a collaboration of the CFL and Intermediate District 287, teachers from every subject and every region of the state were trained in an exceptionally insightful series of workshops called "Examining Student Work: Finding Evidence of Learning." More than 100 of your teaching colleagues learned four different protocols for looking at and evaluating student work. (A protocol, in this context, is a step-by-step process that provides a formal structure for careful examination of student work by teachers for the purpose of enhancing the teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms. Some protocols also provide information that can be used for summative assessments—just like a test, only better!)

Teachers involved in this summer's training are ready and willing to share their knowledge. If your school or department is interested in learning these terrific processes for examining student work and finding ways to gather data about your students' learning that goes beyond the reductionism of the latest standardized test score, send me an e-mail or give me a call. I will connect you to your regional Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program coordinator, who can help set up "Examining Student Work" sessions for your site. This is powerful and relevant professional development that gives us ways to be proactive about our teaching and assessing. It also gives us ways to respond to Dewey's request to teachers for "a constant flow of reports on school affairs and results."

Don't just complain about all those tests. Get even by getting articulate about how your kids are really learning!

*Micheal Thompson*

**A postscript:** Micheal will be at the CFL until October 25, setting plans for the next stages in the composition of the language arts framework for Minnesota.



### Champlin Park English Teachers

- ★ *Brad Johnson*, newspaper advisor
- ★ *Georgia Schoenkecht Larson*, yearbook advisor
- ★ *JeanMarie Burtness*, literary magazine advisor

Their publications (respectively): Rebel Times, Rebellion, and Rebel Spirit won gold and silver awards at the recent journalism convention at the University of Minnesota. The publications also earned many individual awards in student writing, photography, and layout design. Champlin Park took top honors, winning the second annual Grand Champion award for most points earned. Kudos!

### ★ Minnesota Writing Project

MWP celebrated its twelfth anniversary with a reunion on September 14. Mary Beth Blegen, in her keynote address, exemplified the personal and professional impact the Writing Project has had on countless Minnesota teachers of writing in the last twelve years.

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#### President's Column *from page 1*

never found the time to use. At the end of my career I still want to teach more than is possible—filling students' lives with my love for lting. I want to use all the ideas I have collected, but haven't found the time to use. Will I succeed? Most definitely not. Like a first year teacher I still have optimistic though sometimes unrealistic goals, but I view this as a good thing. As I begin to do each unit, grade each set of papers, assess each grad standard, record each quarter grade for the last time, I'm sure I will experience a bitter-sweet feeling of nostalgia and satisfaction.

I am anticipating this year to be one of my best. I will look back on what I have accomplished and forward to the end of the school year, a new career, and a happily married life with Susan.

*Gerry Lidstrom*

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# RESOURCES

Minnesota Public Radio has just created Sound Learning, a web-based educational resource that helps teachers reference audio and written material on MPR program websites. To celebrate the launch of Sound Learning, MPR is offering a free 24-page study guide and four-color poster (autographed by your favorite MPR personalities) to the first 2,000 teachers who request them.

MPR programs and web sites provide a wealth of resources for literacy education that support instruction in reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking, and critical thinking. Sound Learning organizes these programs and resources to make them easy to implement with current curriculum and to correlate with Minnesota State Graduation Standards. Complementary audio and text files on the MPR site help auditory learners, new English speakers, struggling readers, and even strong readers make connections between the written and spoken word.

To get your free 24-page study guide and four-color poster, go to [www.soundlearning.org](http://www.soundlearning.org) or send an email to [soundlearning@mpr.org](mailto:soundlearning@mpr.org) with mailing instructions.

**April 25 & 26**

**MCTE Spring Conference**

**St. Cloud Civic Center**

## The Page and the Stage



Watch your mail later this fall for call for session proposals. Information will also be posted on the MCTE website in mid-November.



### Minnesota Writing Project

Nominations are currently being taken for the 2003 Selective Institute

Retreat: June 18 - 20

Institute: July 7 - 25

Fellows of the Selective Institute examine best practices of writing instruction, research a topic of personal relevance, collaborate with other teachers of writing, write, and participate in writer's groups. The Institute is held on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. Fellows must participate for the full length of the retreat and institute.

Application deadline: January 31, 2003  
Information and application form:  
<http://mwp.cla.umn.edu/inst/selective.html>

# Web Cites



## Study Guides & Strategies

While intended to give college students a boost, this site from our own University of St. Thomas offers a lot of help for middle school and high school students. Topics range from basic writing, reading, and test-taking skills, to the importance of attitude and tips for effective collaboration, class participation, and using internet resources. Parts of the site have been translated into 16 different languages.  
[www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides](http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides)

## Poetry Resources

Poetry Forge

No, this is not a plagiarism site; it's forge, as in foundry. This site features several "tools" for generating poetry. Try the "Found Poetry" –just scroll down to the bottom of the page and click to load it. It uses existing lines from published poetry (which you add to the database), plus your own original phrases and images. Unfortunately, you can't save your entries; instead, you have to start from scratch each time you load the program. But fun anyway.

[www.poetryforge.org/teaching.htm](http://www.poetryforge.org/teaching.htm)

Poetry Express

This site includes 15 poetry writing activities for students from upper elementary through college. All of the activities use the work of famous poets as models, with all poems linked within the site so students can use these activities independently. Many interesting writing ideas.

[www.poetryexpress.org](http://www.poetryexpress.org)



## Book Ends

**Young Adult - Catalyst** by Laurie Halse Anderson

Set in the same high school as *Speak*, chemistry whiz Kate Malone is on edge, awaiting admission to MIT, the only college to which she applied. To this already unstable element, add a minister father who takes in Teri, an outcast from Kate's class and her younger brother when their house burns. Discovering the secrets in Teri's life sets off a series of chain reactions for Kate that gives her a new perspective. Though I cared about the characters, Kate's response to the tragedies at the end was puzzling and unsatisfying. I agree with a teen reader at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) who commented that the book suffers by comparison with *Speak*, "like a hard working girl who does everything she can to find something she is best at, but is always overshadowed by her older sister." SH

Editor's Note:

With this issue, MCTE News resumes its traditional quarterly publication schedule. With the Minnesota English Journal back in regular production and the website gaining frequent use, the need for the additional newsletters has eased. In addition to the four yearly newsletters, look for special mailings regarding workshops, conferences, and calls for conference presentations.

## >> Fast Forward: Humor from [www.lawhaha.com](http://www.lawhaha.com)

A summary and opinion of the Michigan Court of Appeals as printed by West Law:

### *Summary of the case:*

Plaintiff commenced this action in tort against defendants Lowe and Moffet for damage to his “beautiful oak tree” caused when defendant Lowe struck it while operating defendant Moffet’s automobile. the trial court granted summary judgment in favor of defendants pursuant to GCR 1963, 117.2(1). In addition, the trial court denied plaintiff’s request to enter a default judgment against the insurer of the automobile, defendant State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company. Plaintiff appeals as of right from tort liability for damage to the tree pursuant to SS 3135 of the no-fault insurance act M.S.A. SS 24.13135.

### *The actual opinion of Michigan Court of Appeals:*

We thought that we would never see  
A suit to compensate a tree.  
A suit whose claim in tort is prest  
Upon a mangled tree’s behest;  
A tree whose battered trunk was prest  
Against a Chevy’s crumpled crest;  
A tree that faces each new day  
With bark and limb in disarray;  
A tree that may forever bear  
A lasting need for tender care.  
Flora lovers though we three,  
We must uphold the court’s decree.

Affirmed.