



The Needle's Eye

In a Time of Economic Change: VATE 2009

Chris Woods, VATE President

2009... this may be the most stressful year in education I can remember in my 18 years in the field. I have known budget limitations before and have been asked to cut back on copies or paper, but I have never experienced so much change and distress personally and in my professional associations. Usually a casual, "Hey, how are ya?" at the grocery store when I run into my daughters' former first grade teacher is now a mutual stress session. She can barely contain her upset and worry as she tells me that she hasn't yet completed her recertification application, and our superintendent just called for all employees to have their certifications current ASAP!

She is a phenomenal teacher, is national board certified, and has total parent support as well as great rapport with her students. Yet, she is in a panic now that we are slated to have a reduction in force of approximately 200 teachers in a system that has approximately 1000 teachers. Not only is she worried due to her recertification status, but the school she teaches in--where my girls have gone for their entire school experience and the reason I moved to our home here in Roanoke--is being shut down due to lack of funding to renovate it.

As a result of the closing, my nine year-old daughter's PLATO program (Roanoke City's elementary gifted track) is being moved to a school out of our neighborhood that I know little about and combined with another program from a third school. We are anxiously awaiting attendance rezoning information along with the decision as to whether my seven year-old daughter will be placed in PLATO or if she will go to a different school than her sister for the first time ever with different bus routes as well.

My principal told our staff a few weeks ago that we have escaped the budget knife for this year at least, and the state sent word to me via email that my national board's stipend has been approved for the 2009-2010 school year. I am not sure whether Roanoke City will be able to sustain their national board stipend commitment to me, but to be honest, I am just grateful to be working next year *and* to know so early that I am spared for at least one more year. I fear, however, that before this summer approaches, I will be hearing about my friends and family members who have been laid off, asked to resign, or simply just let go permanently from their jobs.

As a teacher of Adult ESL, I am feeling so much regret for my students who have recently immigrated to the U.S. from places like Nepal in order to escape the horrible bloodshed in the streets or from Iran to seek religious freedom and a better life for their families. These people are not only at a disadvantage because they are limited in their English skills, but also because they are the last employees hired. I cannot help but think of the utter despair I felt when I read the story *La Dynamite* in my French class. It is a story in which several desperate men are driving a truck filled with explosives and the serious sacrifices they are forced to make, which include driving over one of the men rather than risk getting the truck stuck in mud, all to make a small amount of money.

The feeling I sense from my adult ESL students is of similar distress and hardship. They just do not know what to do and their options and money are running out. Many of my

In This Issue

Conference 2009 2

Censorship and
Your Classroom 3

Writing Project 4

Affiliate News 5

Advocacy Day 6

NCTE 7

teacher-friends are in a panic trying to cover themselves professionally or jockey for a teaching position in a different school if they fear they are going to be victims of a reduction in force. It makes my worries about my girls' elementary school closing feel somewhat insignificant.

Yet again tonight at the grocery store, I ran into another Roanoke City teacher-friend of mine who teaches in the Adult ESL program at night, as I do and for the city in the day. Last year she was de-staffed from her teaching position at an elementary school in the city when our superintendent converted her elementary school into an over-age academy. Last year my friend was so upset when she found out she had to interview within the school system to find a new job like a new-hire. Of course she had an advantage over people who were new to the system. However, she was still so stressed out and unsure. This year, ironically, while others are so upset and in a panic, she is thrilled with her new position and school.

Her story makes me hopeful because though these times are so tough, maybe, just maybe, we will all emerge from this in a better situation or at least able to see the bright side. More irony... this school she is in and loves so much is the school my girls may be attending next year in the PLATO program. She assured me they would love the school and, moreover, that she would be happy to keep an eye out for my girls and to answer any questions I might have. Can you hear my sigh of relief?

Though we may not understand why things happen when they are happening, hindsight is always 20/20. I have realized for a while that economic change was imminent when I witnessed housing prices going insane and Old Navy strip malls leading the suburban sprawl. I never imagined that the situation would be this severe and that so many people would be so impacted.

VATE has also been impacted by the economic crunch, and as a result, our association has undergone some dramatic changes this year. Some changes are long overdue, such as the redistributing of conference roles for the executive board and the *Needle's Eye* going electronic. Some came as a surprise and are disappointments to me, such as Leila Christenbury stepping down as our Executive Treasurer after so many years of dedication, and our having to publish the *Virginia English Bulletin* online. I have faith that VATE will ride out this economic storm and, in the end, resume all our professional commitments when the time is right financially.

As English teachers, we are all over-worked and heavily scheduled, but that commitment is what makes us great teachers, professionals, and role models. Where can you help VATE? You can continue to show your support for VATE through your membership and by reminding your principals, coordinators, and state officials about the importance of maintaining a professional English teachers' association, especially now when we are feeling more overwhelmed than ever.

I hope you will take some time over your spring break to read through our newsletter about all the wonderful events and activities VATE and its members are involved in this year and decide where you might like to become more involved. Our fall conference October 30 – November 1, 2009 promises to be as wonderful and refreshing as ever. Please make your plans now to attend, perhaps present, and maybe even help out at this year's conference. As always, I cannot thank you enough for your support of VATE, and I look so forward to seeing you in beautiful, inspiring Williamsburg!

“Let the Weaving Begin!”

Adria F. Merritt, VATE President-elect

weave (weev) *v.t.* to lace together

I admit that I have a huge weakness, one I inherited from my grandmother, and if I am truly honest, I must admit it is a weakness I am passing on to my daughter. I love clothes. My night stand is littered with catalogues and fashion magazines, and although I may run into the mall with a specific purpose, I am often side-tracked by a pattern that catches my eye or the texture of a fabric that begs to be felt. As I ponder the purchase, it is the voice of my six-year-old daughter who serves as my conscience as she chants, “Mom, stay focused!”

Yet, the colors and patterns of a well tailored dress lure me away from my intended, singular purpose. I mean really, isn't it amazing how separate strands of strings when laced together form such creations as those that grace the catwalk or emanate from the pages of magazines? Of course, it takes a lot of work to create the pieces that really stand out. It

starts out as a vision that when put into the hands of a capable and committed team, unfolds into a well-crafted mixture of fabrics woven together...then behold, you have the dress that I stand gazing at!

Envisioning

Teaming

Weaving

The same principles that go into creating the perfect garment are the foundation for VATE's 2009 conference, "**The Stories of Our Lives: Weaving a Multimodal Tapestry.**" Who can doubt that educators are visionaries? Each fall, we meet our students and envision the path that our school year will take. We pull from our tool kit of strategies and resources to ensure that our students are engaged thinkers who will emerge into stronger readers and writers. We recognize that each one is an individual with a personal story and a unique set of talents. These individual stories and gifts must be honored if we are truly to "Leave No Child Behind."

We invite you to become a part of team VATE, a team of capable and committed educators who are striving to empower our students through innovative and thoughtful instruction that celebrates the multiple intelligences and gifts inherent in each child and allows each student to realize that his or her story is relevant and essential to the larger narrative that encompasses all of our lives.

Our 2009 Conference is a celebration of vision! As language arts educators, we are coming together to share the multiple ways we are engaging our students and refining their skills, gifts, and talents. Separate strands of innovation will be laced together to form a showcase of the strategies and resources Virginia's education has to offer.

Through our *Affiliate Showcase*, various regions will display what strides they are taking to motivate educators and empower students. The *Museum Mile* will allow access to some of Virginia's best resources and introduce ways to bring these resources to our students. Of course, the *Book Trailer Competition* gives the tech geniuses, musicians, artists, and wordsmiths in our classes a chance to unite as they create trailers that introduce a literary work that intrigued them this year. Our featured speakers will share their own stories and how their individual talents and passions have allowed them to do what they love and make a positive impact.

Will you weave your creativity, passion, knowledge, skills, and talents into the tapestry of VATE? Just imagine what such collaboration can do for our craft! There is no doubt that we are committed to our profession, and our students deserve our best. Our best will only be realized when we come together as a team of professionals who are willing to share, network, support, encourage, uplift, motivate, and empower one another. Our students who will reap the benefits.

Envisioning

Teaming

Weaving

Our 2009 Conference started out as a vision that is now in the hands of a capable and committed team, unfolding into a well-crafted mixture of ideas woven together...

Behold!

"The Stories of Our Lives: Weaving a Multimodal Tapestry"



Your English Language Arts Classroom and Censorship

Deborah Carrington, Ph.D.; SLATE officer for VATE

Teachers of the English Language Arts – a heads up. Print materials and non-print media that you use and keep in the classroom are open to challenge, in addition to materials housed in the school library. Resources are out there should you experience a censorship challenge to materials or teaching methods.

At some point in your career, you are likely to encounter a challenge to curriculum materials and/or teaching methods, so it's important to familiarize yourself with local school division policies regarding challenges to literary works, films and videos, drama productions, or teaching methods. Usually there are two local policies to consider when a book or other media are challenged: the approval policy and the policy once the book or other media is challenged. Policies vary by division, so be sure to ask your English Language Arts coordinator or the central office for clarification.

Censorship challenges, according to The National Council of Teachers of English Anti-Censorship Center, can be large or small in scope. For example, "all contemporary literature" taught in English Grades 9-12 in a 2007 Texas school district challenge is a large challenge. As a smaller example, a July-September 2007 report from the Center states that across the country, most works challenged were "commonly-challenged" novels, such as *Of Mice and Men*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Color Purple*, and *The Outsiders*. These texts are typically used in grades 8-12. However, the report states that one-third of the challenges (5 of the 14) were to texts used in AP or honors classes. Only one film was challenged. For updated censorship challenge reports, check the web site addresses below. These reports list nationwide censorship news of all sizes and give the status of the challenge. Direct links to media coverage are also provided.

Should you or another teacher face a challenge to literary works, films and videos, drama productions, or teaching methods, visit the NCTE website and click on the Anti-Censorship Center link. There is also a link on the VATE home page. NCTE offers advice, helpful documents, and other support at no cost to teachers. It is the first resource referenced for all who contact NCTE. All who contact NCTE will receive email, telephone, or fax responses, followed by other action, such as rationales, policies, advice, and letters, when requested. Many have visited the website before calling or filling out a Censorship Challenge Report. You may use the electronic "Report a Censorship Incident" form, or call Millie Davis, NCTE Division Director of Communications and Affiliate Services, directly at 800-369-6283, ext. 3634.

As the SLATE officer for VATE, I am interested in hearing about any challenges you encounter within our state. I can be reached at my JMU email address: carrindf@jmu.edu.

NCTE Anti-Censorship Center
(<http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/censorship>)

Five Most Helpful Resources (<http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/censorship/five>)

The materials below have been identified by teachers as most useful in preventing and combating censorship.

Students' Right to Read (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/cens/107616.htm>)

Gives model procedures for responding to challenges, including "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work."

Guidelines for Selection of Materials in English Language Arts Programs

(<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/cens/107634.htm>)

Presents criteria and procedures that ensure thoughtful teacher selection of novels and other materials.

Rationales for Teaching Challenged Books (<http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/censorship/five/108603.htm>)

Rich resource section included table of contents of NCTE's Rationales for Commonly Challenged Books CD-ROM, an alphabetical list of other rationales on file, the SLATE Starter Sheet on "How to Write a Rationale," and sample rationales for *Bridge to Terabithia* and *The Color Purple*.

Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Non-print Materials

(<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/cens/107611.htm>)

Offers principles and practices regarding non-print materials.

Defining and Defending Instructional Methods (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/cens/107614.htm>)

Gives rationales for various English language arts teaching methods and other defenses against common challenges to them.

What's in a Name? A New Identity for the SVWP

Aileen Murphy, Assistant Director of Creative Writing at Virginia Tech

The Southwest Virginia Writing Project has a new name: The Blue Ridge Writing Project!

Why? We want our name to be thoroughly of this place, like we are, like our schools and communities are, so why not call ourselves by the name of our amazing and beautiful space on the planet?

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a professional development network that serves teachers of writing at all grade levels, primary through university, and in all subjects. The mission of the NWP is to improve student achievement by improving the teaching of writing and improving learning in the nation's schools. The goals of the NWP are:

- To improve student writing and learning in K-12 and college classrooms
- To extend the uses of writing to all disciplines
- To provide schools, colleges, and universities with an effective staff development model
- To identify, celebrate, and enhance the professional role of successful classroom teachers

The Blue Ridge Writing Project returns this summer to Southwest Virginia on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. Co-Directors Dr. Kelly Belanger, Director of the Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society, and Aileen Murphy, Assistant Director of Creative Writing at Virginia Tech, are delighted to be joined by retired Blacksburg Middle School Teacher Nyanne Hicks as our Teacher Consultant Facilitator as we prepare to welcome 14 public school teachers from five surrounding counties as well as some Virginia Tech faculty and graduate students.

The Summer Institute will run from June 22nd through July 17th and will provide all participants with opportunities for writing, research, and teaching strategies. Teachers will each "demonstrate" a writing-related teaching strategy, they will research a topic related to their teaching, and they will work on their own writing projects.

If you are interested in more information about The Blue Ridge Writing Project, please contact Aileen Murphy at aileen@vt.edu or visit the website at <http://www.rhetoric.english.vt.edu/svwp/index.html>.

The Tidewater Writing Project is accepting applications for its 29th Summer Institute. The Summer Institute, which carries 6 hours of graduate credit, will meet daily June 22- July 17, 2009, 9:00am-3:00pm, at Old Dominion University. Applications are available on the web at <http://education.odu.edu/eci/tidewater/> or by e-mailing Kaa Johnson at khintonj@odu.edu. Scholarships are available. The application deadline is April 30, 2009.

VBATE's Spring Symposium: A Stellar Success!



The 2008-2009 school year has been a rebuilding year for VBATE, the Virginia Beach affiliate of VATE. Our year has been marked by a tremendous increase in membership, a New Teacher Reception to kick off the school year in September, and our most recent showcase of talent, our spring symposium, "Bridging the Gaps through Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships."

VBATE held its first annual spring symposium on Saturday, March 21, 2009, at Green Run High School in Virginia Beach. We were joined by several esteemed guests, including Dr. James Merrill, Virginia Beach's superintendent, Tracy Robertson from the Department of Education, Chuck Miller and Adria Merritt from VATE, and Tiffany Santana, a representative from the Tidewater Writing Project. Our keynote speaker, Virginia Beach's own Elizabeth Beagle, discussed 21st Century Literacies with us and showed us ways to incorporate different activities into our classroom.

Our goal for the symposium was to provide a professional development event that allowed our members to explore different instructional tools that focused on 21st Century Literacies. The symposium drew 70 attendees who had a choice of 17 different sessions with topics ranging from digital portfolios to wikis to creative writing. We even had a math teacher demonstrate how to use a SMARTboard! AP Dual Enrollment students from Green Run High School were also on hand to exhibit their digital portfolios.

Our theme for this year's symposium was "Bridging the Gaps through Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships." The sessions mirrored that goal by providing educators with a variety of tools that were relevant to building rigor into lessons while allowing us to continue to develop and foster professional relationships. It was exciting to hear the attendees say that they had tools they could begin to use on Monday.

One of VBATE's identifying activities every year is the awarding of a scholarship to a deserving senior and a savings bond to a deserving eighth grader. With a large number of door prizes donated by local business, we raised over \$100.00 to support these two worthwhile activities.

As we end the year in May with the awarding of our scholarship, eighth-grade writing contest winners, and our Teacher of the Year, we are also looking forward to next year's activities. VBATE is proud to have such a talented and dedicated membership. Be sure to visit the Affiliate table at the VATE Conference in October to see more of the great things VBATE is doing.

Affiliate Corner

PATE

"Shakespeare in Overalls"

What? Spring Mini-Conference

**Where? Hidden Valley Middle School, Roanoke, VA
Lecture Hall & Library**

**When? Tuesday, April 21, 2009
4:00-6:15**

**Who? Ricky Cox, Appalachian Studies, musician
Rachel Sailer, Salem High, drama**

**For more information, contact Lynne Payne at
lpayne@rcs.k12.va.us.**

Literacy Education Advocacy Day, April 23, Washington, D.C.

April is Literacy Education Advocacy Month. Be thinking about how the members of your local affiliate, committee, or department might participate.

NCTE has approved the 2009 Legislative Platform. This states that literacy education is a civic right and responsibility that is integral to building our nation's capacity for economic success, innovation, and global leadership. NCTE calls upon Congress to invest in building a comprehensive 21st century literacy policy. NCTE will call upon Congress to take bold action to fund the policy innovations and research required to meet the unprecedented challenges and opportunities in our society. The focus will be on the following:

- Improve accountability and assessment by taking collective responsibility for providing optimal conditions for learning in our education system.
- Advance writing and reading as equal, interdependent components of literacy development.
- Invest in making every student proficient in 21st century literacies.
- Increase the supply of outstanding teachers through systematic professional development.
- Strengthen support for the youngest literacy learners (ages 0-5).
- Improve support for English Language Learners (ELLs).
- Establish a comprehensive literacy policy on the basis of evidence developed through scientifically valid research as defined in the Head Start Act and the Higher Education Act.



Make plans now to write to your Congressmen. NCTE will give us information on how this can be easily achieved. Make plans to come to Washington, D.C., to meet head-on with your Congressmen. Congressmen want to hear from us! They need ideas from educators actually in the field. Last April, many educators were warmly received by Congressmen and their aides. It is exciting to be in our nation's Capitol, knowing that we are helping to make a difference. Consider joining us there!

As an NCTE and/or VATE member living in the greater Washington, DC, area, you have a wonderful opportunity to participate in **NCTE's Literacy Education Advocacy Day** on Thursday, April 23. If you would like to join a group representing VATE, please email Janice Suppa-Friedman, NCTE Liaison for VATE and NCTE Region 2 Representative, at jdsfrontier@aol.com.

Register now to participate in this day-long event in our nation's Capitol.

Date: April 23, 2009

Time: 8:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

Place: Starting at the **Capitol Visitors Center SVC 212**, Washington, DC

NCTE members will meet for a morning of briefings, an afternoon of visiting legislative offices, and a debriefing get-together at the end of the day. This year members will focus on advocating for a comprehensive literacy bill and for a resolution to establish a National Day on Writing.

You are an ideal person to be involved because you have experience that legislators and staffers do not have. You are one or more of the following: a teacher, an administrator, a researcher, or a parent who understands what students need to be able to learn. Stories of your experience added to arguments for the two pieces of legislation that you will focus on during your visit will be important and persuasive information for staffers and legislators.

Now is the time for all of us to actively support what will move this country forward: education is key. Your active participation in Advocacy Day establishes your commitment to education and the ways in which NCTE leads toward better educational conditions for all students.

Visit <http://lists.ncte.org/t/1955999/10164775/10759/0/> for more information or to register. If you have questions about Advocacy Day, please email Linda Walters (lwalters@ncte.org) at NCTE's Headquarters Office.

***The Needle's Eye* has gone digital.**

In an effort to lower publication costs and go green, *The Needle's Eye* is now being published in a digital format.

Please contact Chuck Miller at cmillercrz@roadrunner.com to update your email address so that you will not miss a publication announcement.

Virginia Association of Teachers of English

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The Virginia Association of Teachers of English is committed to enhancing the quality of the teaching of English and language arts in the Commonwealth.



NCTE Celebrates its 100th Centennial in 2011 in Chicago, Illinois

There are several projects for all affiliates.

- Then and Now, a 150 word writing about how our teaching has changed.
- A New or Updated Literary Map
- Affiliate Milestones
- Honor Roll of Affiliate Members

NCTE Affiliate Awards

Consider applying for some of the awards that honor affiliates for their good work. Do you know of a High School Teacher of Excellence that can be given recognition in our state? Is your local affiliate or department doing something worthy of earning the Multicultural Program Award? Are you an active member of your state affiliate? Visit www.ncte.org/affiliates for information and deadlines. **Most are due May 1. You may contact Janice Suppa-Friedman, jdsfrontier@aol.com, if you know someone or some program worthy of either of the awards listed above.**

Other Important Dates

October 20, 2009: Encourage your colleagues, students, and community members to showcase the kinds of writing they do by participating in NCTE's National Day on Writing. Plan on working on the "Then and Now" project for the 100th Centennial, a 150 word writing. (See above.)

October 30-November 1: VATE Annual Conference, Woodlands Hotel and Suites, Williamsburg, VA. Theme: "The Stories of Our Lives: Weaving a Multimodal Tapestry."

November 19-22, 2009: NCTE Annual Convention, Philadelphia, PA Theme: "Once and Future Classics: Reading Between the Lines."



Tell Me Your Names: A Seminar on the Poetry of Lucille Clifton



The Furious Flower Poetry Center has received funding to do the seminar, "Tell Me Your Names: A Seminar on the Poetry of Lucille Clifton." It will be held on the James Madison University campus, from June 14 through June 21, 2009. The seminar will engage participants in an intensive course of study led by senior scholars who are authorities on African American poetry in general and Lucille Clifton's poetry in particular. The seminar has will enhance the participants' ability to teach African American poetry, assist teachers in preparing lesson plans on Clifton's poetry and related poetry, and reanimate the dialogue within and beyond the academy about the importance of teaching and writing about poetry.

All Virginia teachers who attend will be able to use this course for Virginia Licensure, if they desire.

Please go to our website for more information, www.jmu.edu/furiousflower or contact Joanne Gabbin, Director of the Furious Flower at James Madison University 540- 568-6310.

CALL FOR NOMINEES

VATE has a number of board positions open for 2009. Please consider nominating yourself or a colleague for one of the following open positions:

Vice President – This person will serve for four years, starting as Vice President, then becoming President-Elect, then President, and finally Past President. Responsibilities include attending all board meetings and working on the VATE conferences.

College member-at-large – This person will serve for two years as a representative of college ELA educators in Virginia. Responsibilities include attending all board meetings and serving on various scholarship and award committees.

High school member-at-large – This person will serve for two years as a representative of high school ELA educators in Virginia. Responsibilities include attending all board meetings and serving on various scholarship and award committees.

Middle school member-at-large – This person will serve for two years as a representative of middle school ELA educators in Virginia. Responsibilities include attending all board meetings and serving on various scholarship and award committees.

Elementary school member-at-large – This person will serve for two years as a representative of elementary school ELA educators in Virginia. Responsibilities include attending all board meetings and serving on various scholarship and award committees.

More details for each position are available at http://www.vate.org/pdf/other/VATEPolicyManualRev09_Jan.pdf.

If you are interested in running for an open position, please complete and send the form below to Carrie Perry either electronically (email the information) or by regular mail. We must have all nominee information no later than June 15. Ballots will be distributed in the August *Needle's Eye*.

Carrie Perry, VATE Past President
carolyn.perry@loudoun.k12.va.us
Loudoun Valley High School
340 N. Maple Avenue
Purcellville, VA 20132

Please consider running for a VATE board position. This is a great way to network with other English language arts educators, build your own résumé, and support ELA instruction in Virginia.

✂-----

Yes, I would like to serve as a board member for the Virginia Association of Teachers of English.

Your name: _____

Email: _____

Phone number: _____

Institutional Affiliation: _____

Position (please check only one):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vice President | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle school member-at-large |
| <input type="checkbox"/> College member-at-large | <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary school member-at-large |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High school member-at-large | |

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS ELECTRONIC ISSUE

Virginia English Bulletin Spring / Summer 2009, Vol 59, #1

In a move to conserve money and trees, this issue of *VEB* will go to press in an electronic format only.

English Language Arts Education For Real:
For Real Classrooms, For Real Kids, For Real Results

The *Virginia English Bulletin* invites authors to submit articles, essays, poems, or reviews for the Spring / Summer 2009 issue, which will be devoted to the theme of **English Language Arts Education For Real: For Real Classrooms, For Real Kids, For Real Results**. We seek real stories and real essays and real poetry about making learning the real thing in our classrooms and for our kids, whatever their ages, whatever their interests, whatever the standards.

What is the reality of our classrooms and our teaching and learning? What connections do we forge between that reality and the real lives of the learners, of their reading and their writing and their thinking? For as we read and write, teach and learn, across all socio-economic classes and widely divergent ability levels and widely divergent interests, we perhaps cannot keep it as "real" as we like; but we have an inescapable obligation to try. Yet we all, learners every one of us, must somehow negotiate the divides between the real and unreal that we encounter. We must negotiate – often for our learners – the balance between competence and performance, the lines between realistic effort and realistic challenges that lead to enhanced learning versus unrealistic expectations and unrealistic demands, the gulf between learners' one-on-one needs and the classroom's one-on-25 environment. And in such an environment that sometimes inverts realities, pretending that the unreal can be made real without regard for cultural contexts, socio-economic status, or the inherent diversity of a pluralistic society, we have an obligation to help students learn to negotiate such paradoxes for themselves, to be critically conscious. How do we help students to be as real as possible, as active and successful and self-directed as possible, as befits real participants in a democratic society? What are our strategies? Our resources? Our assignments? Our assessments and evaluations?

And so, for this issue of *Virginia English Bulletin*, do you have lessons or units that bring the realities of contemporary American society into the classroom and to the attention of students? What technologies realistically help you and them? In your own life, what experiences have you had that have prepared you to be more realistic in your teaching and your expectations for learning? How will your students learn to connect their life experiences with their real learning, their own critical consciousness? We seek articles, stories, and projects that address all notions of what constitutes real learning in a contemporary English Language Arts classroom, for any age, any level, any learner. Please share your successes (and even your disappointments) with the rest of the English language teaching profession. We look forward to your submissions.

Virginia English Bulletin is a fully refereed journal. In addition to publishing full length articles on English language arts teaching and learning, we feature teaching ideas in our Great Teaching ideas column.

Deadline: May 1, 2009

Authors should submit their articles electronically as e-mail attachments, preferably Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect; however, other formats and word processing programs are acceptable. We do not accept simultaneous submissions. **Please include your mailing address, as well as a short biographical sketch including the name of your school, position, courses taught, and a brief statement about your professional life; also include a statement of submission noting that the work has not been submitted elsewhere simultaneously for publication.**

Send to rohwilli@radford.edu, for the attention of Robert Williams, Radford University, P.O. Box 6935, Radford, Virginia 24142. The editor reserves the right to modify manuscripts to fit length and language considerations. Please include "VEB Submission" in the "Subject" line of your e-mail. Alternately, interested individuals may call the Editor at 540.831.6372.

GREAT TEACHING IDEAS CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS *Virginia English Bulletin*

The *Virginia English Bulletin* invites you to submit articles of two to ten pages describing great teaching ideas. Chosen submissions will be featured in our Great Teaching Ideas column, which appears in each issue of the *VEB*.

No one teacher possesses all the knowledge required to teach the ever widening range of topics and students that we face from year to year. Yet there is a solution. We can learn from each other. This column asks you to share with fellow teachers the activities, materials, or assignments that have worked for you and your students. By sharing ideas and borrowing ideas teachers work together to develop repertoires of strategies that work. We invite your submissions.

2009 DEADLINES:

ELECTRONIC ISSUE **Spring / Summer 2009: May 1st** ELECTRONIC ISSUE
Fall / Winter 2009: October 1st

Authors should submit their articles electronically as e-mail attachments, preferably Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect; however, other formats and word processing programs, such as Open Office, are acceptable. We do not accept simultaneous submissions. **Please include your mailing address, as well as a short biographical sketch including the name of your school, position, courses taught, and a brief statement about your professional life; also include a statement of submission noting that the work has not been simultaneously submitted elsewhere for publication.**

Send copies to Robert Williams, Radford University, P.O. Box 6935, Radford, Virginia 24142. The editor reserves the right to modify manuscripts to fit length and language considerations. e-mail address: rohwilli@radford.edu. Please include "VEB Submission" in the "Subject" line of your e-mail.

A Note from VSRA...

Silvia Babcock, VATE/VSRA Liaison

Making connections with educators across the state of Virginia is invaluable both educationally and professionally. Educationally, VSRA links teachers together both globally and regionally. Take a moment to explore the "Reading Links" under <http://www.vsra.org> and review <http://www.rwct.org> a link to Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT), an organization which promotes active, inquiry-based learning and democratic classroom practices worldwide. The RWCT connects educators with worldwide literacy projects and educators in places as far away as Russia. Sample articles from the journal include the following topics:

Professionally, commit to sharing best practices at 43rd Annual Virginia State Reading Conference. This year it is March 11-13, 2010, in sunny Virginia Beach, Virginia. The calls for program proposals for the conference are available online and are due on August 1, 2009. Listed below are the presentation categories.

Teaching the Dimensions of Reading:

What key teaching and learning strategies increase reading and writing performance?

Developing Instructional Leadership:

In what ways do leaders engage the community in school-wide improvement?

Creating Environments for Literacy:

What classroom management procedures and resources nurture literacy?

Closing the Achievement Gap:

What are effective ways to close the achievement gap for diverse subgroups of learners?

Enhancing the Quality of Instruction:

What professional development activities improve teacher and student performance?

Planning, Assessment and Accountability:

What processes improve learning and raise achievement?

Remember that it takes all of us to help literacy thrive and to insure a better future for students.

