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President's Message

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Jennifer Swisher-Carroll

President's Message

Greetings Colleagues,

There are two reasons I absolutely love the theme of this edition of the Language Arts Journal of Michigan "Past, Present, and Future: Where Have We Been, and Where Are We Going?" First, it perfectly encompasses so much that is currently impacting education. As teachers, we know that we must acknowledge and reflect on the mistakes and accomplishments of the past, recognize the present challenges, and use that knowledge to move forward. We have all been doing this for years, but lately, the focus has only been on the mistakes. In this current culture of constant educational change, it's so important to reflect not only on what practices need to be changed or abandoned, but on those that should be retained and celebrated because they promote student engagement and learning.

The second reason I love this theme is because of these four words: Where are we going? So much has changed so quickly, and there are so many conflicting messages about how to move forward. As educators, what we know and believe is so often at odds with what and how we are being asked to teach. I heard these conflicting messages before the school year even started. In August, my colleagues and I participated in three full days of professional development. We listened to and interacted with various presenters who delivered very different messages. Our first presenter explained that tests should not matter in American education. Teachers should only be concerned with fostering a love of education and inspiring creativity in their students. His message was uplifting, but my colleagues and I were quickly grounded as our next session focused on common assessments and preparing our students for the Michigan Merit Exam.

The next day, we attended an all-day Common Core State Standard workshop where we were told to focus only

on the new standards and "raise the bar" for our students. On the last day a visiting author hosted a creative writing workshop and inspired us to focus on creativity, imagination, and writing for enjoyment in our classrooms. These were all interesting sessions, but after three days my colleagues and I felt pulled in a multitude of directions and were more confused than ever.

We had so many questions. What's next? How do we work with all of this information to do what is best for our students? How do we accomplish what needs to be done with the limited time and resources available? Where ARE we going?

I believe that this question is on all teachers' minds. I don't feel there is one right answer, but just beginning the discussion can give us a sense of direction. In a time when many teachers feel helpless in their own professions, it's important to remember how much power we have in our classrooms and districts. We are the individuals who make the difference in our classrooms for our students. We are the experts. Our voices matter, and we can accomplish so much by collaborating and working together.

I believe that the members of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English should share their voices and help to lead this discussion. After reading the inspiring articles included in this month's journal, I encourage you to visit our site <http://mcte.info> to begin or take part in an already established discussion about what questions you have and what you need to discuss. Where have you been, and where are you going? What are you discovering with your students in your classrooms that you could share with others? You are the expert, your voice matters, and using that voice can make an impact. Use that voice to contribute to the discussions that will help to lead English Language Arts education into a very bright future!