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From the Editor's Desk: 2018 MCTE Conference Reflections

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From the Editor's Desk

2018 MCTE Conference Reflections

AMANDA STEARNS-PFEIFFER

On October 19th, the Michigan Council of Teachers of English held their annual fall conference in Lansing. This year's theme was Better Together: Building the Future Through English Language Arts. The combination of a timely conference theme and Kelly Gallagher as the conference keynote speaker drew a record-setting MCTE crowd for the fall conference with 410 English educators, pre-service teachers, and administrators in attendance.

The murmur of conversation in the room was rich with enthusiasm to hear how this master teacher organizes his classroom. During Kelly Gallagher's speech, arms raised in excitement to snap photos of the ideas presented on his



MCTE 2018 crowd listens intently to keynote speaker Kelly Gallagher.

projector screen. Others fiercely scribbled notes of the major take-aways that no one wanted to forget. To begin, Kelly suggested that we've too often been asking the following wrong question: "What can we do to raise achievement?" Instead, he offered, we should be asking: "What can we do to challenge, stimulate, and engage our students?" He talked about the importance of making space for low-risk, ungraded writing in our classrooms. "Volume is foundational," he emphasized. As one first-time conference participant wrote, "Gallagher's concept of revision as a continuous process is something every young writer should benefit from. I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to hear Gallagher speak, and I can't wait to dive into one of his books!" (Aleks Luchin, Oakland University pre-service teacher).

For some, attending the conference confirmed, or reig-

nited, the call toward being an educator: "Being at the MCTE conference reminded me of why I decided to be an English teacher four years ago. I had wanted to inspire kids to read and write and explore who they are as people. Being at the conference reminded me of that dream and told me that it is still possible. I was surrounded by inspiring English teachers who truly are what I've always wanted to be. Meeting Jessyca Mathews is just one of the memorable moments from that day. And, listening to Kelly Gallagher talk about why writing is more than just essays is something I'll remember from this day on. The MCTE conference s p a r k e d the English teacher fire in



After his keynote address, Kelly Gallagher signs copies of his new book *180 Days*, co-written with Penny Kittle.

me again – to the point where I don't think it'll ever go out."

– Abby Majestic, Oakland University pre-service teacher.

Preservice teacher Gina Vila found one session about teaching students with autism to be insightful and informa-



Pre-service teachers from Oakland University take advantage of a photo opportunity with MCTE Secondary Teacher of the Year Jessyca Y. Mathews.

tive. On what she learned, she reflected: “While it is important to support students with autism, it is not helpful to altogether avoid something they can’t handle.” She went on to give an example from professor and author Robert Rozema’s presentation:



MCTE President-Elect Jonathan Bush introduces the lunch speaker Emily Kastner.

author/illustrator of children’s books) asked us to consider the following question: “How do we stay fresh, current?” Her answer? “Evolve, evolve, evolve.” The challenge to become better teachers, mentors, curriculum crafters, or leaders is profound. To be surrounded by over 400 likeminded edu-

cators who have come together for the sake of improvement is powerful. As one first-time attendee observed, “I loved meeting teachers who label themselves as both educators and activists, and who use their passion for teaching and their desire to better the world around them in their classrooms. They are not only activists themselves, but they teach their students to raise their voices and call for changes to improve our society,” (Sarah McGowon, Oakland University pre-service teacher).

During lunch, speaker Emily Kastner (the founding director of Read and Write Kalamazoo and

author/illustrator of children’s books) asked us to consider the following question: “How do we stay fresh, current?” Her answer? “Evolve, evolve, evolve.” The challenge to become better teachers, mentors, curriculum crafters, or leaders is profound. To be surrounded by over 400 likeminded edu-



Grand Valley State University professor Robert Rozema presented research he conducted for his new book *Seeing the Spectrum: Teaching English Language Arts to Adolescents with Autism*.

So, whether you were able to attend MCTE 2018, or you’re making plans to attend MCTE 2019, keep evolving, persevering, and connecting with others. As MCTE members, we already know: we really are better together.



MCTE 2018 attendees come together for a #whyIwrite moment in honor of National Day on Writing on October 20th, 2018.