

2023

## Letter from MCTE's President

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### Recommended Citation

Mattern, Carrie (2023) "Letter from MCTE's President," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 38: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2446>

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## LETTER FROM MCTE'S PRESIDENT

# Reflections on the MCTE Community

Looking back on my time with MCTE, I conjure up the vision of Dr. April Baker-Bell. It must have been 2018, when she contacted me about presenting at THUG (The Hate U Give) Teach-In on the very campus we gather each fall: Michigan State University. That was also the first year I had ever attended a conference. While I was considered a veteran teacher (15 years), I was also a mother of four and the partner of someone who left the military and returned to college as a nontraditional student. Needless to say, I was too broke to afford conferences and the district I worked for did not help financially. Because of our previous work together, Dr. Baker-Bell connected me with the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (MCTE) diversity, inclusion, justice, & equity (dije) team, consisting of Naitnaphit Limlami, Christina Ponzio, Andrea Zellner, and many others. They mentioned conference scholarships for anyone from an underrepresented district or those who illustrated financial need. Hesitantly I applied, although they urged me to do so. I did not want to take monies away from Black, Indigenous, Asian, Arab, or another educator of color, but I figured they gave permission, so I applied. dije awarded me a scholarship and my district found a substitute to cover my classes. So in 2019, I attended my very first conference: the MCTE conference. Dr. Baker-Bell was there with a massive hug. I remember presenting alongside Andy Schoeborn about poetry; there were too many proposals that year so we shared time and have been bonded since. I remember the middle school Teacher of the Year (TOY), Stephanie Hampton, and how she bravely called out the whiteness of the conference space and our classrooms. I attended the dije session and thanked the team that awarded me the scholarship. I also sat next to Anna Roseboro, who coached me through conference protocol. I knew I had found my professional home. Since then, I have been working to decenter my whiteness, my classroom curriculum, and the spaces I enter, constantly reminding myself that without the work of Black women before me, I would not have even been invited to this room and that is truly a once in a lifetime invitation. To be a co-conspirator is daily work but when compared to the work of Black and Brown educators every day in Michigan, who are faced with skepticism and pushback, as well as LGBTQIA+ educators who are constantly outed and questioned about their motives for teaching children literacy, showing up as an ally is the absolute least I can do as a white educator. When I think about my work, the core is to center the work of others. And that is how MCTE continues to evolve: it has become a space where collaboration is rooted in antiracism and inclusivity so Michigan students and educators are seen, heard, honored, and uplifted. bell hooks reminds us of this necessity: “As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence.” Let us continue working together to ensure MCTE is the radical space bell hooks calls upon and take the time to deeply listen and connect this year to one another’s presence.

Carrie Mattern  
President, Michigan Council of Teachers of English

