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From the Editor

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From the Editor

The theme of “Professional Growth: What’s Inspiring?” reminds me of a workshop I attended years ago at The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) entitled “If Teaching is Meant to Feel So Good, Why Do I Feel So Bad?” English teachers spend countless hours grading papers, writing lesson plans, responding to parents and administrators’ angst, and preparing for various tests. We are exhausted and often unfulfilled, yearning for validation and inspiration. And then we hear some public officials insult our profession, such as when New Jersey Governor Chris Christie called some New Jersey schools “Failure Factories.”

We teachers love learning and helping others learn. That’s why we joined the profession, after all, to share our commitment to education with others.

Sometimes, though, that huge pile of ungraded papers taunts us, and we wonder how we can find our passion again. Thankfully, the contributors to this issue offer myriad ways to feel better, to be inspired, to remember the words of Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Some contributors like Edwin Romond and Rachelle M. Parker pay tribute to teachers who inspired them. Others like Christina N. Berchini and Eric Paragallo find inspiration in students who desperately need help. New technology inspires some writers like Lauren Heimlich Foley, who describe exploring twitter and digital portfolios. LeVar Harris and Jonathan Dimaio share how teaching in another country can be inspiring. Caroline Wilkinson, Audrey Fisch, Susan Chenelle, Roberta L. Tipton and Patricia Bender are all motivated by collaborating with peers.

As I have worked on this journal, I myself am inspired to hear these stories, to bear witness to others’ testimony. Nothing is a greater spark than feeling the heat from someone else’s passion in teaching.

The opposite is true too. Like Debbie Downer from *Saturday Night Live*, it is draining to listen to teachers (or anyone) regularly spew dismissive comments about the profession, each other and even students, especially when the words are without hope. No one wants to be judged on a comma splice. We need to help each other, not just in the big ways, but in the everyday moments, being more mindful of our comments and listening more openly.

I remember when one of my children had a teacher who would read aloud the worst paper submitted for each assignment. Years later, those students still remember both that teacher for humiliating them, as well as dreading English class. Conversely, if the teacher had read aloud the successful essays, the students would feel pride and perhaps be inspired to try new techniques.

I hope, like me, you find reading the poems, vignettes and articles in this issue inspiring. Teaching can often be a struggle, but it’s a noble one and it has, if we look closely, a community where we can find and give encouragement and strive to be the teacher to whom others pay tribute, like the one pictured by Rachelle M. Parker in her lovely poem “Mrs. Lang.”

A special thanks to all the editorial board, but especially the assistant editor Patricia Bender, whose input is invaluable to both the journal and my sanity. Also, much gratitude to Donna Jorgensen and Joe Pizzo for spreading word about this journal at the NCTE conferences. Thank you also to NJCTE President Susan Reese who meets the challenge of guiding us all. Finally, thank you to all the contributors and the readers, whose words, art, and reactions create this journal.

Sincerely,

Liz deBeer
Editor



Artwork by Graciela St. Onge