

Conference Reflection

Laura Gabrion • Macomb College

Despite the cold rain that ushered us in from our various corners of the Midwest, anticipation hung in the air as participants mingled over spirits and munchies Thursday night in Madison Area Technical College's lovely atrium. Some sought old acquaintances and cheerfully recounted events of the past year while others met new faces for the first time. Regardless, the common bond of our commitment to our students as well as our desire to enhance best practices brought us together for the annual TYCA Midwest Conference in Madison, Wisconsin.

Friday morning buzzed with activity as members moved rapidly from session to session, the range of topics often making it difficult for one to choose. Lunch was a time

to unwind. The keynote speaker Joan Houston Hall filled the text-minded crowd with word origins and anecdotes, and a moving Lifetime Achievement Award for TYCA leader Paul Bodmer exemplified the atmosphere of dedication rampant in the halls of the Concourse Hotel. The afternoon continued in the same vein whether we attended a session or a "Fight Food Coma" walk through town. Leaving no stones unturned, the gracious hosts made themselves available well into the evening



hours by generating various dinner discussion topics.

As Midwesterners, we marvel at the colorful foliage fall brings, and we wait breathlessly for the first snowfall; we watch as tulips deliberately poke through the barely thawed ground, and we linger outside in the warm evening hours of a summer's night. Most certainly, as much as we depend upon these cyclical occurrences, we depend upon the rejuvenation that the annual TYCA conference brings to our pedagogies and to us.

As I wove through the now empty tables in the registration area on the final day, I paused to shake hands with a newly acquired friend and colleague. "I hope to see you at 4 C's or in Des Moines next year," I said as I reached out to shake hands.

"Yes! I am already thinking about my proposal for next year ... I think I've got a good idea!" he answered. Forward indeed.

INSIDE:

- Des Moines - Save the Date!**
Page 2
- Reflections on 2009 Conference**
Page 3
- Students Speak Office Hours**
Page 4
- Paul Bodmer Lifetime Achievement Award Speech**
Page 5
- Awards for 2009 TYCA Midwest**
Page 6
- Contacts**
Page 7
- Conference Reflection**
back cover

Message from the Chair

Paul Resnick • Illinois Central College

Dear TYCA-Midwest Colleagues,

Our 2009 Conference was a big success! Special kudos go to Sarah Johnson and the Madison Area Technical College faculty and staff for making us feel so welcome during our time in Madison. The sessions were top-notch and well-attended. The collegiality of over 190 people was outstanding. The luncheon, keynote speaker, and facilities were first rate. As the weeks go by, I find that I'm still basking in the afterglow of a great conference.

As we know, conference success is contingent on volunteers to make it happen. A few years ago, Sarah stepped forward and asked the right administrators at her college for their financial support. Once she had it, she formed a committee to plan the conference. Many of us have stepped forward to do the same over the years: Karen Busch in Duluth, Andrea Lang in Omaha, and Alan Hutchison in Des Moines, to name a few.

Now it is your turn. Would you consider hosting our conference in your fair city in 2013 or 2014? Please give it some thought and let me know if you are interested. Our future conference sites include Des Moines this year, Columbus, Ohio, in 2011 and Lincoln, Nebraska, in 2012. Budgets are tight, but interest is high. Administrators love to bring good press to their colleges, and this makes your college look great.

I look forward to seeing all of you in Des Moines, September 30 through October 2, 2010, at the Renaissance Savary Hotel. Conference Chair Alan Hutchison's committee has selected the theme "Harvesting Talent." Award winning writer Brent Spencer will be our keynote speaker. The conference location is in the heart of downtown Des Moines with a 4 mile climate controlled skywalk system.

Best wishes for a successful end to this semester. See you this Fall in Des Moines!



Des Moines - Save the Date!

The 2010 TYCA Midwest Conference takes place at the Renaissance Savery Hotel in downtown Des Moines. The grand hotel is an architectural treasure and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It has hosted presidents and visiting dignitaries, and now, English instructors.

Nestled in the fertile land between the Des Moines and the Raccoon rivers, the capital of Iowa is no sleepy cow-town. Des Moines is alive with art, culture, history, and fine dining. Stroll the river walk which connects the city's network of biking and walking trails. Cross the river and enjoy the eclectic dining, shopping, and nightlife of the East Village. Step into past at the State Historical Building or into the future at the Science Center of Iowa. In the evening, chose a restaurant or watering hole from the hot-spots that line the Court Avenue Entertainment District. Saturday morning, don't miss the Downtown Farmer's Market, where locals shop and socialize among blocks of fresh produce, baked goodies, local wines, breakfast burritos and live music. Adventurers exploring further a field can discover world-class art at the Des Moines Art Center, the walking trail around Gray's Lake, Jasper Winery in Waterworks Park and much more.



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Brent Spencer

Before writing the works *Are We Not Men* and *The Lost Son*, author and teacher Dr. Brent Spencer starred as a serial killer in a B-movie. Perhaps that is why his work—novels, stories, poetry, screenplays and nonfiction—is so cinematic. Spencer's talent grew in the heartland. The University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, where he earned his MFA in creative writing, award Spencer the James Mitchner Award. Today Spencer is the Chair of the Creighton Department of English, where he served as the director of the Creative Writing Program and the editor at the Creighton University Press. His critically acclaimed work has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *GQ*, *The Missouri Review* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Our favorite, the tasty short story *Pie Night* appeared in the *Glimmer Train* and the anthology *A Different Plain*.

Hotel Reservations

Renaissance Savery Hotel
401 Locust Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

515.244.2151 or 800.798.2151
Fax 515.244.1408

www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/dsmbr-renaissance-savery-hotel

Ask for the conference rate: RATE



Dr. Brent Spencer

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WANTED!

TYCA-Midwest needs a Web manager who can revise and update Web pages for our organization. If you have experience and a little time to do some Web design, Web revisions, html, or other aspects of Web managing, please contact Paul Resnick at presnick@icc.edu or 309-694-5779.

Awards for 2009 TYCA Midwest

Outstanding New Faculty
 • Sarah Parlier •
 • Michelle Hudgens (not pictured) •



Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Proposal
 • Lauren Stowe •
 • Angela Palmer-Wackerly •



MATC Adjunct Faculty Proposal
 • Christopher J. Syrnysk •
 • Joshua Stokdyk •
 • Rodney Flink •



Unsung Heroes
 • Kip Strasma •
 • Jane Wagoner •



Lifetime Achievement Award
 • Paul Bodmer •



Reflections on '09 Conference

Sarah Z. Johnson • Conference Chair '09

Not too long ago, I received an email from a colleague living and working three states away. She wanted to know how my institution supports curriculum development and what processes our faculty follow to assess and redesign course offerings to meet the constantly shifting needs of our professional programs, partner universities, and myriad others who have a stake in what we teach in our classrooms. During the conference last October while we were engaged in a lively, productive exchange, I found myself thinking how grateful I am to TYCA-Midwest for making this collaboration possible. Though we met just months ago, I've already received enormous benefit from the connection. And she was only one of many new contacts I made at the 2009 conference!

While other academic conferences facilitate networking, I've seen that TYCA-Midwest, with its welcoming attitude and supportive culture, fosters long-lasting professional friendships. I certainly

have witnessed this in the years I've been active in the organization, and last year's conference was no different. The best way I can describe it is engagement. As I worked the registration table and wandered the hallways, I saw people talking animatedly—about the sessions, about their students, about their profession. Now you may say to yourself, "Well, yeah, we're English teachers. Of course we were talking. I could barely get a word in!" But as a writing center director, I've learned never to underestimate the transformative power of talk, of collaborative examination. Just listening in on your conversations, I know many of you went back to your colleges with new ideas, as well as the energy and determination to implement those ideas.

Yet as I reflect on the sessions I attended and the dozens of proposals I read, I'm also impressed at the rigor of the research, the depth of the analysis, and the willingness of my colleagues across the Midwest to scrutinize thoroughly and critically their own practices and those of their institutions. This excellence is embodied in our 2009 award-winners—unsung heroes,

adjunct faculty, new members of the profession, and a colleague acknowledged for his lifetime of achievement. TYCA-Midwest is home to first-rate teacher-scholars, and I know the organization will continue to nurture and recognize that scholarship and service.

Finally, I'd like to thank you for all the fun I had over our conference weekend. The Thursday evening reception was fabulous, and I was pleased to share my college with you. I also heard wonderful stories of Friday night dinner adventures at restaurants all over downtown Madison. Apparently, a good time just seems to follow some professions around. TYCA-Midwest conferences make me appreciate the value of camaraderie as well as intellectual engagement. Thank you, again, for making the 2009 conference such a professionally enriching and personally enjoyable experience.



Students Speak

Michelle Byrne • Summit College, University of Akron

Two years ago, the University of Akron brought Ken Bain, author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*, to campus to present his research on effective teaching. The greatest take-away for me was that the best teachers undermine their students' expectations; they surprise them. I began to wonder how I challenge my students' assumptions, so I polled my first semester Composition students during week six, asking them what has been the most unexpected part of Comp. 1 and why? Here are some of their answers:

"All the essays. I have never written so many essays in one semester before. It challenges me on a whole new level. It's hard for me since I am not good at giving specific detail."

"The fun that I have in class. The topics we discuss are fun and interesting. They help me when writing tough papers."

"The most unexpected part of Comp 1 is the fact of how much knowledge I thought I had about the specifics of writing a paper. At first, I thought it was just composing a series of ideas and writing them down. This is the most challenging part of Comp. 1 because now I feel I have to relearn the things I had the most confidence in."

"For me, the most unexpected part of Comp 1 is how involved we all get as a class. In high school we were just taught and then expected to write, but in this course our input is desired which also helps us become known as individuals."

"The amount of details required for papers. This was new to me because in high school we didn't really need details."

"I am surprised how much I have learned. English is normally just vocab [sic], 5 paragraph essays and reading. English Comp. has been so much more."

"I knew that college would be a lot faster pace [sic] than high school, but I never would have realized how fast everything needs to be done."

"I never expected to take an English class and be only writing papers. Usually, in English we read stories and take quizzes on them. I love that we just focus on writing in here though. I feel like I actually learn rather than just memorizing characters."

Their surprises surprised me. They didn't expect to be engaged, to write all the time, to take their writing to a new level. I had forgotten until I asked this question just how different Composition is for them from past English classes. But it explains a great deal: the fatigue they experience midsemester, the trouble they have with breaking past a three page essay, the discomfort with our relentless focus on process. Still, most appreciate the challenge. And at the end of the semester, when it finally all clicks, they end up surprising themselves.

NOTE: The TYCA-Midwest newsletter invites you to poll your students for a new section called "Students Speak". Any survey you give your class that would be of interest to other instructors would fit nicely here. You might ask what kind of comments they prefer, how they use your comments, or which assignments they like best and why. Your question might be a question others would like to ask their students and your students' answers might inspire other instructors to try something new. Compile your answers and send them to Michelle Byrne (mwb@uakron.edu) or Jen Richrath (jrichrath@icc.edu).

Office Hours The Joy of Repetition

Michelle Byrne • Summit College, University of Akron

My son spent much of this past summer rereading a new series called *The Lighting Thief*. He would start with the first book and work his way through each one in order. Even though he has his favorite book, characters, passages, he rereads the entire series. He's been through it five times at least and loves it all the more. He has learned that some of the deepest pleasures in reading come from rereading.

Now I am trying to convince my students of this. And they are skeptical.

We are doing literary analysis and they are grateful that after three units of personal essay writing, they will not be writing about themselves. Such a boring topic, they think. I admit I bring them to this point on purpose, make them write about themselves so much that it is the last thing they want to write about anymore. So we begin "White Angel", the heartbreaking, beautiful story by Michael Cunningham. On a rainy fall Friday, I read the first page and a half out loud. It shocks them. On Monday, they have all read it.

Discussion ensues. Is the older brother a horrible person or do we like him? Why does he push so hard? Who or what is the White Angel? They have a lot of ideas and get more and more brave interpreting the story. I'm waiting for the inevitable. "Doesn't Carlton push his father's hand away over and over? Like he wants to die? Carlton wants to die."

"Find it," I say.

The student can't because it's not in there. She admits her memory was faulty and I am relieved she admitted it to the class. We reread the section together and realize how completely different the scene is from how she recalled it. "This," I explain to them, "is why you will need to read this story at least three times. You will misremember, misinterpret, misread, and misunderstand if you trust one reading and your memory."

They all have a movie they have watched many times and can translate the experience. Watching it over and over you begin to see details you never saw. Or you see them in new ways. In the third and forth viewing, you understand things characters say early on resonate with later events. You are still afraid when a character takes a wrong turn, speaks to the wrong person. Surprisingly, knowing the ending makes the movie better, not worse.

I realized how seldom I have my students reread. Usually, we read through, examine a text from different angles: content, structure, argument, introduction, conclusion. I don't often tell them, "Go home and read this again. Find something new in it." Why do I wait until we are reading a story to teach them a lesson we practice in so many areas of lives? Appreciation comes from repetition.

Appreciation comes from repetition.



Lifetime Achievement Award Acceptance Speech

Paul Bodmer

Paul and Judy Bodmer

Oh, the places we go. When Paul Resnick called last spring and asked if we were planning on coming to Madison in the fall, I said, "No, we really hadn't planned on it." Then he said that TYCA MW would like us to be your guests for the conference to show appreciation for the work over the years. We thought, "Oh, this could be very nice. We will enjoy a fall drive through Wisconsin—maybe stop at the Dells and just enjoy some scenery." I told Paul I would be glad to do something—Q&A, prognosticate the future. He said he would let me know. He was a bit vague, and I didn't think much more about it.

I contacted Paul in late summer to clarify arrangements and see what he wanted me to do. He said they would like me to speak at the Friday luncheon for about three minutes. Okay, I could do that. Then I read the program online. I was to get a Lifetime Achievement award? A rather daunting concept. My first question was, "Why? Why me? Why now?" And that lead me to thinking about what I owed the Midwest.

The TYCA Midwest conference occurs at a good time in the academic year. The term has started, and most of the classes have gotten over their initial chaos and disorder, and the routine has settled in—time for a break, time to take a breath, enjoy the camaraderie of friends across the region, and get some good stimulation from what they are doing. It is also a good time because it is in anticipation of the first collegiate growth spurt. I always enjoyed the period between the end of October and into November. That is when most of my first-year students found their voices. Regardless of age or experience or prior writing work, they began to discover that they could have a voice in an academic world. It was a huge growth spurt for them as they began to become comfortable with their voices in this environment.

That is what TYCA Midwest did for me. It gave me a voice. In the spring of my first year at Bismarck Junior College, my department chair brought me to the Midwest Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College. I had taught high school English for three years, served as a graduate teaching assistant for one

year, and now had an appointment as a full-time instructor in a community college. And I was green. The MRC convention introduced me to young faculty like me as well as seasoned veterans such as Bill Doster of College of DuPage, Ray Henry of Toledo, Ohio, Mary Celnicker from Wisconsin, Don Halog from Delta College in Michigan, Mariestelle Brown from Iowa, Dick Friederich and Angela Harris from Forest Park, along with Liz McPherson, Dick Cowan... These seasoned veterans, along with those of us who were just starting out, helped me to find my voice as an academic in an academic setting.

That voice I gained allowed me to go places I had never dreamed I would go. Here I was, the kid from the high plains of North Dakota being asked to draft the framing structure for the national organization. You gave me the confidence and voice to do that. Then I had to negotiate with the "university folks" in the other NCTE organizations. I remember in the midst of that coming back to a TYCA Midwest meeting with another draft after another round of discussions. I was unsure of how the changes would work. Mark said, in a public meeting, "Paul, keep working on that national stuff, we know it will be all right. But we have the business of the regional to worry about." That kind of confidence in me and support of both regional and national work reinforced my commitment to continue working for all of TYCA.

When I got the opportunity to join the staff of NCTE as the Associate Director of the College entities within NCTE, I found myself working with people on a level I could not have anticipated. As part of that job, I found myself sitting in the office of the Director of Graduate Studies in English at the University of Illinois, Chicago, looking out his window at the Chicago skyline. He was justifying his graduate program to me, and I thought, "Not bad, just what a person who has spent his life in a community college should be doing, sitting in judgment on a graduate program." Or later, sitting in the board room of the Association of Research Libraries and looking across the landscape of Dupont Circle



toward the National Cathedral. And, of course, the whole Washington scene. Oh, the places we have been.

It has been a good run, but I didn't just get my start here. This is where I returned to get my bearings, to make sure I was still on track. As I listen to you talk about your work, I am drawn back to the essential part of mine, as a faculty member whose primary interest was in getting students to find their voices. Not only did you give me my academic voice, you kept me honest and grounded in that voice. While at NCTE, I tried to visit as many of the regionals as I could, and particularly the Midwest. It was always a place that helped me see that our real work in education is to open worlds for students, and community college English classes are the best place for that to begin. It has been a very good professional life.

A professional life cannot exist outside a personal life. So this award is as much to Judy and because of Judy as it is for me. She has always been the first to validate my voice. She has read all I have seriously written. She has provided a framework for me to work. She has been the first to say, "Of course you will/can/should do it."

So I thank you, TYCA Midwest. Certainly for this award. But more than that for reminding me of what you have meant to me throughout my career. The friendships, yes. The camaraderie, yes. But ultimately for giving me a voice in the academy and for the yearly reminder of the profundity of our work. A lifetime achievement. It has a nice glow to it. And this is a lot better than getting it posthumously. Thank you.