



# Minnesota English Journal

The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English

## Continuity and Change

2011 Issue

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**Minnesota English Journal**  
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A publication of the  
Minnesota Council of Teachers of English  
*celebrating 50 years of professional  
conversation and continuing education.*

Edited by  
Brian C. Lewis  
Century College

## Editor's Introduction: Relating to "Continuity and Change"

I am writing this just a couple days after the beginning of our new year, 2011. It seems to me that the beginning of a new year is an excellent time to reflect on this journal's theme, "Continuity and Change," which we celebrated last year at the MCTE Conference. As we teachers begin 2011, we need to ask ourselves, "What remains 'continuous' in our classrooms? And how can we establish 'continuity'? Is 'continuity' always good to have?" Furthermore, we can ask ourselves questions about "change." These questions include, "What has 'changed' in our profession? Is this 'change' desirable? And are there times when we should avoid 'changing' our classrooms?"

The articles (and poem) in this journal all relate to "continuity and change," on some level or another. The most common relationship between "continuity and change" that I'm noticing from the submissions in this journal is that the submissions show how "continuity" in the classroom may inspire others—including readers of this journal—to "change" their classroom practices. The authors here, by and large, demonstrate how tried-and-true practices in the classroom may remind us about what we may need to do differently.

Another important manifestation of "continuity and change" may be seen not just in the content of the articles themselves, but in the "behind the scenes" aspects of this issue of *MEJ*. Some things about *MEJ* have remained "continuous": we still have one yearly issue, we have a beautiful cover, and we still have print articles in the same set-up as last year, for the most part, with identified topic categories within the journal and articles within them. However, many aspects about *MEJ* have also "changed" this time around. The most obvious change is with me, I suppose, in my new role of editor of this journal. As editor, I wanted to have an editorial board—this is also new to *MEJ*. Six individuals from the MCTE board—Jacqueline Arnold (our current president), Jessie Dockter Tierney, Bill Dyer (the former *MEJ* editor), Jeremy Hoffman, Rachel Malchow Lloyd, and Charon Tierney—agreed to assist me in the article review and selection process for this journal. They were instrumental in helping me choose the twelve pieces that are included here. So unlike with previous *MEJ* issues, the *MEJ* articles selected for this issue were chosen anonymously by the board and subjected to a peer review process. (As editor, I was the only reviewer who knew the names of the authors.) Through all of our work, I really gained a truer sense of what Andrea Lunsford meant when she proclaimed that every act of writing is an act "of collaboration." The result of the work you see in this journal is indeed a collaborative effort.

All five categories for our journal submissions explore both "continuity" and "change." The first is called "Part One: Defining Our Profession." With a category like this, we're obviously paying attention to traditional teaching concepts, as Richard Beach exposes in his article about Minnesota teaching over the last 50 years, and definitions that stem from ancient rhetorics, as Carol Mohrbacher shows us in her article on "style." However, it's important to note that Beach titles his article "Changes in Minnesota English Teaching"; he shows us how methods in the classroom have differed from decade to decade. And Mohrbacher's article shows us how applications of the traditional concept of "style" have changed to become relevant for our modern students.

Our next category in *MEJ*, "Part Two: Multicultural Literature in the Curricula," stems from a need to change what's continuous. All three articles acknowledge the

"continuity" of typical classroom practice that involves teaching traditional, Western, male authors in K-college classrooms. However, all three also manifest the possibilities that can come with classroom "change": Candice Deal, Corrine Ehrfurth, and Paula Schevers show how Indian novels can teach complexity of identity to secondary students; Darryl Parks reveals the importance of not clumping Native American literature together with all multicultural literature and instead viewing it within its own separate tradition of literary work; and Jacqueline Arnold and Anne O'Meara provide us with many ideas for new books we can read to bring an appreciation for cultural diversity into our English classrooms.

The next category of articles here, "Part Three: Working with New Media," may seem to serve only as a set of arguments for classroom change. After all, Linda Lein asks teachers do their best to "survive the tsunami" of online educational techniques; Molly McCarthy Vasich and Jessica Dockter Tierney show the dynamic consequences of having their students work on documentary films; and Elizabeth Barniskis shows how her students were able to open up to discuss race issues in *Huckleberry Finn* by using an online NING. Still, one commonality between all three of these articles is the desire to maintain "continuity" in writing processes to achieve course objectives. All of these instructors understand that new media tools enhance student learning but do not necessarily replace traditional, "continuous" ones.

Our final major article category, "Part Four: Why Teach This Text?," shows how new texts can be used in K-college classrooms to learn tried-and-true educational concepts. My article on the 2009 film *Precious* (directed by Lee Daniels) shows how instructors can use this film as a resource to improve their teaching of developmental writing. Dallas Crow explains that he teaches the poem "Maizel at Shorty's in Kendall" to help students grasp key poetic concepts. And Heather Megarry Traeger discusses the advantages of teaching specific novels and/or plays in her Somali charter school. Therefore, we can see that each article here shows how what's "continuous" in the classroom—those objectives that we attempt to fulfill in the classroom year after year--may be "changed" through the introduction of new film or print texts that help students engage and learn.

Our issue concludes with a "Coda," a poem from Bill Meissner--"Veteran English Teacher: The Chalk Magician." It asks us to think of an ephemeral, supposedly outdated technology--chalk--in new ways. His poem thereby reveals chalk's continuous imprint on our lives:

As the students file out, <the teacher> nods at each of them.  
He wishes they understood that chalk will outlast us all,  
leaving traces of itself long after we are gone.

The poem suggests that chalk--and the lessons taught with it--will remain with us much longer than we are aware. In this sense, "continuity" is shown in this poem as something that survives into infinity.

Does this mean "continuity," ultimately, matters more than "change" in our English classrooms? Hardly. I believe we chose the theme "continuity and change" because a symbiotic relationship exists between the two concepts. Where "continuity" is

present, "change" is as well, and vice versa. I want to thank these authors--and my editorial committee--for enhancing our awareness of this.

I hope you enjoy the new *MEJ*! For comments or questions on this issue, please e-mail me, Brian C. Lewis, at **brian.lewis@century.edu**. Or, instead of an e-mail, please consider writing a "Letter to the Editor" for us to publish in our 2012 issue. We'd like to know what you think!

Brian C. Lewis  
*MEJ* Editor  
January 5, 2011

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