

From the Editor

In a 1966 speech in Capetown, South Africa, Senator Robert F. Kennedy made reference to a supposed Chinese curse: “May you live in interesting times.” Subsequent research has failed to locate the source of this “curse,” at least within the lore of China. A columnist for the BBCi suggests that it might have been a rather liberal translation of a related Chinese proverb: “It’s better to be a dog in a peaceful time than be a man in a chaotic period.” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/hub/A807374>). From the typical expression on my dog’s face, it is difficult to disagree. Whatever the source, one suspects that—as many of us might do with favorite phrases of our own—Kennedy heard, liked, and repeated a phrase that he thought captured the essence of a moment.

In 1989, Peter Vaill coined the phrase “permanent whitewater.” Vaill, who writes about leadership and organizational change, subtitled his book “New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change” (*Managing as a Performing Art*). “Permanent whitewater” is now something of a ubiquitous metaphor, perhaps because we so quickly understand what it represents. Other metaphors about silver linings, calm at the ends of storms, lights and the ends of tunnels—like motel commercials promising warm beds at the end of a long day’s travel—have now been replaced by a bleak vision of a world in which no respite is promised.

Such curses and metaphors have helped me to better reconcile the resistance in the mid-90’s to the imposition of Profile of Learning with the resistance this past year to its abolition. Teachers need and want a stable environment in which to work. We want to be able to focus on our students and their needs, not the state legislature and its political agenda. It is difficult for us to accept that such stability is not near at hand.

If Vaill is right—if his metaphor is accurate—then we have to put our faith in the raft and in its pilot. But here the metaphor sticks on the rocks: we do not know, or perhaps do not agree on, the source domains of the metaphor. What is the raft that stays afloat in our particular waters? Who stands at the tiller? And what is it that gives us confidence in either?

Perhaps it is neither the raft nor the pilot that matters most in our circumstance. Perhaps it is simply the knowledge that we are not floating downstream alone. If we have confidence in those who travel with us, the

journey might seem not only safe but exciting. Keep in mind that people pay good money to be subjected to whitewater, and maybe—just maybe—if the experience is truly thrilling, then the longer the ride the better.

Within the pages of this journal reside the thoughts, the advice, the reflections, and even at times the lamentations of our colleagues. Their labor is our gift, and while the metaphor strains at this point, perhaps the gift is stronger raft, advice to the pilot, or at the very least a patching kit to get us back underway. Linda Miller Cleary reminds us of the legacy of Paul Wellstone in her reflections on the place of Jeffersonian democracy in education. Raymond Philippot and Chris Gordon offer their thoughts to teacher educators facing a law that I have heard called the “No Child Left Untested Act.” Dwight C. Watson helps teachers learn more about the balm of bibliotherapy. Pam B. Cole reviews and describes fiction about the lives of gay teens. Colleen Burke describes the ways in which students can use MOO’s to experience Shakespeare in new ways. Jesse Kavadlo explores the fuzzy boundary between content in style in written discourse. Karen Babine examines the style and accomplishment of Minnesota author Paul Gruchow. Finally, Larry Gavin and Dallas Crow share poems about life and teaching. We thank them for these gifts, highly prized in chaotic times.

Perhaps Robert Kennedy wryly punned on a Minnesota euphemism when he repeated his apocryphal curse about “interesting” times. He might have said, “May you live in times that are diff’erent,” and we would have understood. We have, indeed, survived such times: the Ventura administration comes to mind. Maybe we survived because, as a profession, we had our own at the helm when we needed right guidance: Micheal Thompson comes to mind, along with the authors I have just mentioned. The writers whose work is contained here might serve as the missing sources in Vaill’s metaphor of a raft. Maybe the tiller has been ably handled all the while that we held our eyes on the rapids, not looking backward. That politicians failed to notice our own good leadership does not surprise us. May we not forget those who have served and serve us now. If we remember and we trust them, we will trust ourselves in a time of chaos.

John S. Schmit
Augsburg College