

Announcing the Alan C. Purves Award Winner (Volume 40)

The 2006 Award Committee

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*The 2006 Alan C. Purves Award Committee is pleased to announce this year's recipients—Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Verda Delp, and Suzanne Mills Crawford, for “Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms” (which appeared in the August, 2005 issue of *Research in the Teaching of English*, pp. 62-126). Here, the committee discusses the implications of this work for guiding important reforms in educational practice.*

Unfurling the layers of a *Research in the Teaching of English* volume year is an intricate and provocative endeavor. Methodologies, practices, and theories are probed and analyzed, their fit tested and scrutinized, their purpose examined and explored. With such concentrated analysis, the selection of one article from a plethora of superb choices is a painstaking and sometimes agonizing task. The purpose of the selection committee's analysis, however, never veered from its task: the naming of an article that, in our opinion, would best speak to the intention of the Alan C. Purves Award—to serve as an exemplar of research that holds significant implications for informing classroom practice. After long consideration, “Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms” was our choice.

This piece affords the reader a bird's-eye view of the struggles and rewards of teaching in an untracked middle-school English classroom. As one contemplates the persistent achievement gap in U.S. schools, there is good reason to believe that differential curricular practices associated with tracking are a major factor in differential achievement. “Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms” is therefore an especially timely piece.

The article showcases a practitioner endeavoring to offer instruction to meet the needs of all of the students in her class. The process described is neither clean nor neat, but definitely realistic. The article acknowledges that such instruction is arduous and demands sustained commitment, yet shows us that it is also quite feasible. The kinds of texts that Verda's students read and consider are not exclusive to particularly well-appointed schools, as these or equivalent materials are widely available.

Students are an integral part of the intellectual processes in this learning environment. Their ideas are considered vital in fostering a community that envelops all students. As the classroom teacher, Verda Delp is cognizant of each member of the learning community and communicates with each, taking care to set high expectations for all.

Whole-group and individualized teaching are used instead of small reading groups within the class, thus ensuring inclusion rather than the re-tracking of students, a common default in otherwise "untracked" classrooms. Verda investigates the reasons that drive a student's responses. Learning in her classroom is collective and accentuates the positive through peer collaboration.

Verda is honest in addressing the obstacles she encounters when helping students arrive at the core of their learning and when they encounter difficulties managing the layers that surround new challenges and emerging understandings. Informal individualization provides academic inclusion in whole-group activities, which comprises the flywheel that helps individual sprockets move forward, whether at differing speeds or varied intervals. As one student states, "We learn from ourselves . . . to move further on" (p. 100). Moreover, Verda displays her commitment to writing as an instrument for engendering and communicating ideas and for building a community in which student writers can grow and flourish. It was not surprising that her intended goals for the class were achieved.

"Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms" is carefully designed educational research that speaks to a myriad of current issues in English classrooms. This article provides examples of strategies that can be implemented by teachers who are searching for tools that reach all their students in meaningful and challenging ways and that communicate respect for their individual ways of learning and individual interests. Along with ample explanations of learning theories, "Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms" provides an excellent model of successful teaching and learning in a secondary English classroom. Teachers who attended Verda's teacher-preparation course focusing on writing instruction saw improvements within their own classrooms, demonstrating that Verda's practices are portable and adaptable.

Novice and seasoned teachers alike would do well to familiarize themselves with "Teaching English in Untracked Classrooms." To foster needed reform, principals, department chairs, and staff developers ought to assume the responsibility

of providing teachers with opportunities to discuss material such as this, where viable examples of commendable practices are not only present and successful, but rich with implications for other classrooms and schools.

Call for 2007 NCTE Technical and Scientific Communication Award Nominations

NCTE is accepting nominations for outstanding books and articles in technical and scientific communication in the following categories: Best Book in Technical or Scientific Communication, Best Collection of Essays in Technical or Scientific Communication, Best Article Reporting Historical Research or Textual Studies in Technical and Scientific Communication, Best Article Reporting Qualitative or Quantitative Research in Technical or Scientific Communication, Best Article on Philosophy or Theory of Technical or Scientific Communication, and Best Article on Methods of Teaching Technical or Scientific Communication.

The awards competition is open to works published from January 1, 2006, to December 31, 2006. **The deadline for nominations is June 1, 2007.** To nominate a book or article, send four copies (of either article or book) to the address below and indicate to which category the submission belongs; include the author's name, telephone number, mailing address, and email address. Any work originally written in a language other than English must be submitted in translation. The NCTE Committee on Technical and Scientific Communication encourages nominations for the awards. Authors and editors of collections are welcome to submit their own work or editions.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Charlotte Thralls, Coordinator of NCTE's Scientific and Technical Awards, at charlotte.thralls@wmich or (269) 372-3774. **Send nominations and entries to:** Linda Walters, Technical and Scientific Communication Awards, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801-1096.