

Diversifying the Professional Organization: NJCTE

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Professional education organizations intend to further teaching and learning, the interests and challenges of educational professionals, and public interest. One such organization is the New Jersey Council for Teachers of English (NJCTE), which is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English. According to the NCTE, they amplify “the voice of educators through personal connection, collaboration, and a shared mission to improve the teaching and learning of English and language arts at all levels (NCTE, n.d.). As part of that mission, the New Jersey affiliate NJCTE is “committed to applying the power of language and literacy to pursue justice and equity for the students and teachers of New Jersey” (NJCTE, n.d.). This white paper addresses the lack of ethnic inclusion in the NJCTE and proposes to rectify it through expanding inclusion and building specific resources.

The NJCTE’s mission of equity, though significant, is not the same as diversity or inclusion. According to Bolger (2019), diversity is the presence of different individuals from a variety of identities, including ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Generally, diversity refers to the presence that includes “identities that have received (and still receive) systematic discriminatory treatment, and create advantages and barriers to opportunity and resources” (Bolger, 2019). Inclusion stems from diversity. An inclusive environment welcomes, values, and encourages growth for people with marginalized identities (Bolger, 2019). Finally, equity is a process that attempts to provide everyone, including marginalized identities, access to the same opportunities through addressing imbalances (Bolger, 2019). There is indeed a difference between diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); equity is an ongoing process, whereas diversity and inclusion are outcomes

The Problem

DEI in education is vital for students. According to the US Department of Education (2016), the percentage of students of color is growing increasingly more quickly than the number of teachers of color. In New Jersey in 2016, 84% of teachers were white, while 44% of the student population identified as white (US Department of Education, 2016). This fact is disconcerting because while ethnically diverse teachers with strong academic skills improve outcomes for all students regardless of ethnicity, when students of color are taught by at least one teacher of color in grades K-5, the students' graduation rates and standardized test scores increase (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Additionally, DEI in educational communities is important for teacher retention. Research shows that a greater diversity of teachers increases feelings of inclusion and reduces the sense of isolation, which may lead to leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Professional development and resources offered to assist those with diverse identities, either teacher or student, builds a community of learners that can support each other in their efforts towards social justice and equity.

The Solution

The NJCTE leadership needs to become more diverse. A diverse professional organization encourages perceptions of inclusion among and between the leadership and the membership. Inclusion of representatives of marginalized identities keeps biases in check through the questioning of assumption. Diverse teams tend to focus more on facts and then are more deliberate in processing those facts. Finally, diverse groups where individuals are valued and heard tend to be more innovative (Rock & Grant, 2016). Clearly, if incorporating a greater diversity into the NJCTE leads to a more inclusive environment, then the organization, the members, and the students whom the members serve will all benefit.

To increase the inclusiveness of the NJCTE, I have applied to the board of NJCTE, citing my desire to increase diversity and offer a different perspective (see Appendix A). My appointment to the board brings the percentage of people of color up to 17%. Two months after I was accepted, I was appointed recording secretary of the board (see Appendix B). As an executive member with a voice, my participation in this organization guarantees Latinx representation.

To provide resources for teachers with Latinx students, I am attending the NCTE conference in Baltimore, MD, on November 21 and 22. I will focus my efforts on communicating with Latinx YA authors. One session I will attend is sponsored by *Latinx in Publishing* and led by Members of Latinx MG & YA author collective LAS MUSAS. The session will explore in recent Latinx middle grade and young adult literature and the value of intersectionality represented therein. This session will provide the opportunity to connect with a group of authors that spans the country. Additionally, there are many other opportunities to meet and connect with others in the publishing and Latinx communities.

The resources I compile, including information on guest authors, modern Latinx literature, and pedagogical strategies, will appear as both a destination on the NJCTE website and as a post on the NJCTE blog: <https://njcte.wordpress.com/>.

References

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Appendix A
NCTE Application Excerpt

Mailing address *

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E-mail address *

suesuarez@gmail.com

Twitter handle

@sue_tweet

What would you like to offer NJCTE? *

When I first started my teaching career, I was in a large urban gifted and talented school, Now I am lead English teacher in a small urban, Title 1 charter high school. I bring a unique perspective spanning the needs of urban educators of gifted and at-risk students, and their pupils. Additionally, as a first generation Latinx I can offer leadership that represents teachers and students of color.

Why are you interested in becoming a member of the NJCTE Board? *

There are several reasons why I am interested in becoming an NJCTE Board member. To begin, I am encouraged by NJCTE's drive towards diversity and hope to bring additional insights as a person of color. I know and work with several board members, Susan Chenelle, Audrey Fisch, and Katie Nieves, and find the work that they - and NJCTE - do exciting and wonderful. This year alone NJCTE won two affiliate awards! Perhaps the most significant reason is that I believe teacher-leaders of all backgrounds need a forum to share knowledge and express ideas for educational growth. NJCTE provides the opportunity for personal and professional growth for the teachers of New Jersey.

Appendix B
Minutes Excerpt Showing Appointment to Recording Secretary

NJCTE Minutes Board Meeting

Date: October 27, 2019

Location: Virtual—via conference call

In Attendance:

Jennifer Ansbach
Beth Ann Bates
Susan Chenelle
Audrey Fisch
Lynn Love Kelly
Sarah Mulhern Gross (came in mid-meeting?)
Katie Nieves
Joe Pizzo
Susan Reese
Susan Suarez
Denise Weintraut (came in mid-meeting?)

Audrey called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

The # 1 item on the agenda was to approve the agenda and ask if there were any additions. The agenda was approved with no additions.

Item #2 was the approval of the minutes from the September 8, 2019 meeting. The minutes have not been reviewed yet. Beth Ann will receive any correction to the minutes, revise them and circulate them for review at the next meeting.

#3 Announcements: An issue was raised about granting emeritus status for board members leaving after ten years of service. Several board members remember a previous discussion of this issue, but we were unsure of the outcome. Susan Reese and Beth Ann will look for their notes on this.

Item #4 on the agenda was the updated plans for the fall 2019 conference. Nicole and Denise were not on the call, so this item was tabled.

Item #5 on the agenda was a monthly budget update by treasurer Katie Nieves. She reported that she had just finished the breakdown of the fall conference figures. We made about \$1,020 in ticket sales, but we lost about \$440 after expenses were subtracted. However, we have received about \$200 in new memberships purchased. New membership money is coming in via the website. Overall, we have a balance of approximately \$12,000 adding all our accounts. There

Item #15 was new business. Audrey reported that Beth Ann and Lynn were working on the writing contest since Michele's resignation. Beth Ann has asked to step down from the role of recording secretary in light of the stress of her new job and the other responsibilities. Sue Suarez is filling to take up the job of recording secretary, beginning with the next meeting. Jen moved to accept this change. Joe seconded. Beth Ann abstained. All in favor, motion carried. Everyone thanked Beth Ann for her work as recording secretary.

Audrey ended the meeting at 8:03.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Ann Bates

