

Kiefer heads elementary council

By Peter Cogswell
Emerald Reporter

The National Council of Teachers of English elected Barbara Kiefer chairwomen of its elementary section. Kiefer is currently an assistant professor at the University's school of education.

The NCTE is a professional organization of english teachers with 66,000 members in the United States, Canada and other English speaking countries, said Diane Allen of the NCTE public information office.

"The goal of the NCTE is continuous professional growth for teachers throughout their professional careers," Allen said.

Kiefer served as a member of the NCTE elementary section steering committee, which has 11,000 members, before being elected as chairwoman of the elementary section.

She first became involved with the NCTE in 1980 while a graduate student at Ohio State University. She has been at the University since 1988.

"I became involved with the NCTE because it is the primary organization for those of us in the field of teaching language arts and literature," Kiefer said.

"Those at the University level need to be involved with a professional organization," she said. "It helps them stay current with the latest research and theory and is a place to meet colleagues."

Her duties as chairwoman will include planning the elementary section convention program, reviewing proposals for symposiums, initiating publications and formulating statements of policy regarding english teaching and related matters.

"There is a lot of time involved," Kiefer said. "It goes beyond professional duties related to teaching."

Originally, Kiefer wanted to teach art, but difficulties in finding a job eventually led her to be an elementary school instructor, she said.

"The two things that I like best are reading and art," Kiefer said. "When I was an elementary teacher reading was an absolutely primary concern."

"If kids can't read then nothing falls into place," Kiefer said. "I saw love of literature as a prime motivator of children to learn to read."

Kiefer said she decided to return to school at Ohio State to focus on language, literature and reading. Her research involved children's responses to picture books.

Kiefer said she has several concerns about current methods of teaching at the elementary school level that she hopes to address when she officially takes office at the 79th Annual NCTE Convention in Baltimore Nov. 17-22.

The first of these concerns is that children are not choosing to read, Kiefer said.

"Many children learn how to read, but they are not doing it," Kiefer said. "This is because of an influence by television on children and the fact that children are scheduled into other activities that take away from books."

Another area Kiefer said she has problems with is standardized testing, which Kiefer said has to be quantifiable.

"By being multiple choice, standardized tests lead away from developing children's ability to ask questions and consider possible answers and choices not just on a test, but in life," Kiefer said.

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