Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 19
Issue 1 *Relevance*

Article 3

2003

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Recommended Citation
VanAntwerp, Jill and Steffel, Susan (2003) "Passing it Forward," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1273

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Passing it Forward

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Since its first issue, *LAJM* has focused on classroom teaching and the application of theory rather than focusing on the theory itself. The founders hoped that this emphasis on classroom practice would appeal to the many K-12 readers, and that it would also entice those readers to become contributors along with their university colleagues. One of the ironies in this profession is that as classroom teachers, many of us are intimidated by writing and are hesitant to submit. Some, overwhelmed with the other duties, never find the time. "Someday, I'm going to write that up." How many times have we heard that? Still others incorrectly assume that they're not doing anything worthy of publication. Because they've read about it somewhere else, they assume their experiences would be redundant. In other words, we downplay our own classrooms, often don't recognize our own research, and then remain isolated in our struggles and successes because "it's all a part of the job," believing "There's nothing I can add to the discussion." We're conditioned not to draw attention to ourselves and criticized for "tooting our own horns." Knowing that many of our potential writers might have these attitudes, we set out to encourage them to overcome their qualms about submitting.

Despite this goal, the majority of unsolicited articles we received during our time as editors at LAJM were from educators in colleges and universities. While this did not surprise us, since submission to journals is encouraged and supported in higher education, like the many editors before us, we were determined to draw articles from our K-12 colleagues. We always appreciated the many perspectives our university contributors brought to the journal; nonetheless, K-12 educators have important perspectives to share as well, and we wanted their views reflected in the journal.

Sometimes this took only a phone call to someone we worked with at MCTE or in other capacities. Other times we approached conference presenters or teachers whom others recommended. Whenever we heard of a great project being done in a school, we tried to get an article about it. We promised and gave editorial help to those who were unsure of their writing ability. Our journals are evidence of our success in recruiting, encouraging, and supporting writers in elementary and secondary education. Each journal had a good balance. In fact, one issue was dedicated to the K-12 setting, and the articles were overwhelmingly from secondary and elementary teachers. The Spring 2001 issue carried the theme, "What's Cool in Your School," aimed at the K-12 educators, and they responded so well that the journal printed a dozen articles highlighting great teaching ideas from elementary, middle, and secondary teachers. As former high school teachers, we are both proud of how that issue turned out.

In the last few years, we've noticed what may be a welcome trend—the various levels are working together. In some cases, a university mentor encourages students to write and submit, and then works closely with them throughout the writing process. Other articles have been co-authored by a professor and one of his or her students. Still other collaborations have been between a university teacher and a K-12 teacher who have worked together on classroom research, a project, or a conference presentation that results in an article for the journal. We hope to encourage more publication collaborations. By encouraging students and young teachers, we may ensure that they will continue submitting articles for publication throughout their professional lives.

The Language Arts Journal of Michigan has a diverse audience. The members of MCTE who receive the journal range from teachers of Kindergarten to College. It was important to us that no matter how specific some articles might be, that all readers of *LAJM* would find the articles interesting, and that each reader would find an article

that spoke to his or her needs in the classroom. One way to achieve reader interest is to choose themes that are current and reflective of today's classrooms.

We feel that themed issues give a focus to the journal that readers find especially inviting. One themed issued, the Fall 1999 issue on "Reflecting on Writing Instruction," drew a large number of contributions. The result was a balanced issue that was popular with teachers of writing. Multiple copies of that issue were provided to several professors working with pre-service teachers for use in their classrooms. Likewise, the Fall 2001 issue, "Listening and Speaking," was widely used for support as teachers gave new focus to listening because of the recent change in the MEAP test. The Spring 2002 themed issue, "Diversity" garnered attention nationally for promoting multicultural issues in the state. That issue was one of several MCTE initiatives that prompted the NCTE to award the Michigan Council of Teachers of English the 2002 Affiliate Multicultural Program Award.

While themes were chosen a year or more in advance of an issue, we still tried to keep the themes timely. "Listening and Speaking" came out a year in advance of the revised MEAP featuring a listening component. "Using Words to Heal," published a year after the fall of the World Trade Center, offered a chance for educators to describe how they and their students responded to that tragedy and the aftermath of war and confusion.

Sometimes we thought we knew what our contributors would be sending us, for while our calls for manuscripts were broad, we never thought of them as being too broad. The issue on writing contained articles on both teaching and using writing as we had anticipated. Based on past reaction to our themes, we assumed that the articles we received for our issue on research would be fairly consistent, describing how educators worked with research projects. Instead we received not only the expected but, in addition, articles about teachers' in-class research, articles on problems researching on-line, and ways that teachers solved problems in their classrooms by researching by observation. That *LAJM* issue was a tribute to the ability of writers to make a topic their own.

Sometimes our theme was a topic we personally wanted to pursue. Our issue on "Place in Writing" came from a visit Jill had with Judith Guest, author of *Ordinary People*. The Guest family has summered in Jill's hometown for decades, and Jill found it fascinating to hear Guest's viewpoints on the meaning that small town had for her and the explorations she was doing on the role of place in writing. That conversation led to the themed issue in which an interview with Guest was the focal point.

Eight issues in four years. It doesn't seem like much, yet the total of those issues represents a treasure of best practice from educators K-college. We applaud those who had the vision to begin a journal for MCTE in 1985 and the editors who have successfully worked on it and passed it on. Although reality sometimes forced us to focus on matters of technology and formatting, out real joy involved our work with contributors, our discussions of content, and achieving our goals for the journal. Our contribution has been a pleasure, and we are proud to turn it over to the capable hands of Jonathan Bush and Allen Webb.