2010

The Difference a Difference Can Make

W. Douglas Baker
Eastern Michigan University

Kia Jane Richmond
Northern Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm>

Recommended Citation

Baker, W. Douglas and Richmond, Kia Jane (2010) "The Difference a Difference Can Make," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 25: Iss. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1069>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

The Difference a Difference Can Make

W. Douglas Baker

Eastern Michigan University

Kia Jane Richmond

Northern Michigan University

Editors

In the Summer and Fall 1996 special issue of *Educational Psychologist* (v. 31.3/4), literacy scholar Judith Green and her research group raised a question: “What difference do differences make?” For their purposes, they worked with guest editor Hermine Marshall, who invited scholars from various research traditions linked to socio-cultural theories to write about particular theoretical frames and ways of conducting research. By examining the different discourses, assumptions and theories of the frameworks, Green et al. demonstrate how differences do make a difference (e.g., in researchers’ choice of site, topic, method, types of claims, etc.) and how an understanding of these can contribute to transformations within a field.

During the past school year, many Michigan educators engaged in an online discussion about the value and efficacy of teacher education programs, particularly in how these programs prepare teacher candidates for English language arts classrooms—and the potential effect these novice teachers might have on their students. In other words, the exchange among teacher educators across the state raised questions about addressing critics who question the value of earning and attaining certification through traditional university programs. That is, what difference does it make that (ELA) teacher candidates participate in, contribute to, and experience a certification program? This is an ongoing contentious discussion across the country, but for this issue, we urged writers to explore the theme of difference within their research, instruction, and professional lives.

In the opening article, **Lynn Chrenka** expresses concern that students may be limited by

particular ideologies that encourage sameness, and “the unwillingness or inability to confront and accommodate ideas that are different may dangerously impair learning and the continuing development of our democracy.” She describes a process of incorporating fiction in order “to create the possible and necessary space for students to learn to confront and accommodate difference and to interact with others different from them to promote productive dialogue.” Next, **Ann Burke** observed students in a school in Ireland and was impressed with their apparent knowledge and awareness of the world and wondered what difference it might make in those students’ capacity to contribute creative and innovative solutions demanded for current problems. Using Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat*, Burke discusses how teachers might guide students in classrooms to develop the eight skills Friedman claims are key for global participation.

In the final article of the opening section, **Lauren DiPaula** describes her research with twenty-one writers who live with various forms of bipolar disorder, and through the voices and experiences of representatives of this group, she clarifies the disorder and offers suggestions for how teachers can incorporate effective strategies to help student writers who have a mental illness. Her study reminds teachers that they should learn more about their students and make accommodations. As she states, “I am not suggesting we diagnose our students; rather, we should take...a ‘hard, honest look’ at what our students are facing” and make adjustments.

In the next section, **Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil** provides a brief historical perspective on the construct *best practice*, and she encourages teachers to reflect on what constitutes “best,” an adjective that “implies an ‘end-of-the-road’ approach to teaching, giving an air of finality instead of encouraging teachers to conduct classroom research and find *better* or alternative approaches beyond those suggested by the established best practice experts.”

Gregory Shafer describes a classroom approach to guiding students to recognize and engage in practices that demonstrate the social nature of writing events, and for students “to make significant investments in each other’s essays throughout the

term.” In the next article, **Nicole Williams** presents how she combined “constructivist, culturally responsive and critical literacy pedagogical approaches” to build a program that “empower[s] [marginalized and ‘at risk’] students to take ownership of their learning process,” particularly as readers.

Penny Thompson continues the topic of encouraging students as readers by describing how the “use of... Web 2.0 applications, which allow students to create content as well as consume it,” can support classroom literacy practices (e.g., linking book clubs with online social networking).

The final three articles explore professional development, particularly offering visions for teachers. **Christian Goering** and **Matt Copeland** discuss their journeys from participating and contributing to the “daily grind” in classrooms, which they thoroughly had enjoyed, to leaving the classroom to pursue other professional and educational opportunities. They provide glimpses of how teachers are detained and constrained in schools and how districts must address the professional tension described. In a related article, **Rachel Alexander** provides a description of her journey from earning certification to working with City Year, a non-profit AmeriCorp organization, to developing leadership skills that allow her to support and provide vision for “corps members,” who seek to collaboratively support classroom teachers and provide extracurricular programs for students. Finally, **Kia**

Jane Richmond and **Robert DeChambeau**, introduce the keynote speaker for the 2010 Fall Assembly, Pam Munoz Ryan, and give teachers suggestions for teaching the author’s newest book, *The Dreamer*.

Editors’ Note. This is our final issue as the editors of *LAJM*. For the past three years, we have enjoyed working to create space for new writers, as well as experienced teachers and educators, by encouraging manuscripts on a broad range of themes. Thank you to all of the writers who contributed to the journal, including those who were part of the Fall 2007 issue (“Digital Literacy”), which won an Affiliate Award from NCTE. We created a sustained double-blind review process, and we thank the reviewers for all of their work in helping to strengthen the process and the writing. We also thank all of the people at CMU Printing, particularly **Linda Ray** and **Chris Bradshaw**. Thank you to **Nikki Tharp**, our assistant in formatting and designing each issue—her knowledge, patience, and work ethic tremendously helped the journal and us. Finally, we thank the officers of MCTE and our other colleagues across the state—and at our home institutions—for their support and input. We welcome the new editors: **Nancy Patterson**, **Elizabeth Stolle**, and **Nancy DeFrance**. They are an energetic group and will continue to build *LAJM* into a journal that reflects the professionalism of teachers and teacher educators across the state of Michigan.

Michigan Council of Teachers of English
presents

Fall Conference: Autumn Assembly 2010

“Focusing the Kaleidoscope:

Re-imagining English Language Arts in Michigan”

October 29, 2010 at the Lansing Lexington Hotel

Call for Conference Proposals

“Focusing the Kaleidoscope: Re-imagining English Language Arts in Michigan”

All proposals should be submitted as a simple Word document to **Kia Jane Richmond** at
krichmon@nmu.edu

by midnight on Friday, July 31, 2010.