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Multiliteracies and Writing

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Editors

This issue of *LAJM*, an open thematic one, demonstrates a continued interest of teachers and researchers in multiliteracies and in writing instruction. A *multiliteracies* approach to teaching English language arts acknowledges that we are in the midst of a shift from single to multiple textual representations. Jeffrey Grabill and Troy Hicks point to the New London Group, “whose conception of literacy as a linguistically, technologically, and socially-situated practice calls for us...to rethink traditional literacy practices. This suggests that teaching English has become a field that relies on the socially-constituted nature of literacy itself, which in turn entails new understandings of ‘texts,’ reading, and writing” (302).

Visual literacy scholar **Peggy Albers** opens this issue by proposing that English language arts teachers become more familiar with how to thoughtfully and systematically read visual texts drawn or constructed by students, and she provides a poignant example of a student representing understanding of a classic novel. She defines and describes visual discourse analysis, a theory and method that contribute to “reading visual texts with an informed eye.” As she points out, students are “flooded with images,” which they must “learn to read...more critically” in order to better to understand how to read and communicate in their world. (Note: Alber’s article can be viewed at MCTE’s ning, <http://mienglishteacher.ning.com/>.)

Susan Piazza provides background and an example of how teachers might explore and create

a third space in their classrooms. This space features opportunities for students and teachers to “negotiate new understandings about the world we live in.” In the research she recounts, Piazza shows how a second grade teacher in a rural school and her students interacted with, and negotiated, texts towards broadening and transforming their views of historical concepts and events.

In the next article, **Fenobia Dallas** describes how she uses a “multiliteracies approach to help students navigate complex media and ideas by challenging students to think about the future.” She provides an overview of how her students write an “analysis paper of a particular futuristic perspective, beginning with the historical aspect,” by examining and comparing the origins of NASA, a science fiction television show, and a novel written by Octavia Butler. They then “create their visual perspective of the future” by creating a short movie.

Kristine Gritter concludes this section by providing five “lessons” on literacy instruction that research has demonstrated. She ties suggested literacy practices gathered from the literature review to the potential of using them with a young adult novel (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie).

The first three articles in the next section describe collective writing instructional strategies and events at the district, school and classroom level. **Mary Cooper**, **Connie Dye**, **Marianne Malarkey**, and **Jenifer Michos** describe their energetic efforts (with the support of district administrators) in working to improve students’ writing at one school and beyond. Beginning in Dye’s fourth-grade classroom and with the support of the principal (Michos) and the district’s literacy specialist (Cooper), they explain how their journey led to changes across the district in writing instruction and the consequential improvements in students’ writing.

Nicole Ziegler describes how she built at her high school, through community support, a

Writing Center designed with the principles of the one she experienced during her collegiate education, including paid peer consultants. Fourth-grade teacher **Michele Kirkwood** (now a district reading specialist) recounts the process she and her colleagues (grades 3-5) engaged in to build their research base for writing instruction and to implement writer's notebook in their classrooms, and she discusses specific strategies for its use.

The next three articles continue with forms of teacher research and how teachers raised questions and inquired with their students to find answers. **Kristin Gedeon** discusses how she began to question the types of responses she offered students on their writing. She learned about teacher research and asked volunteer students to participate in a study that led to a (re)examination of her approach to response and writing assessment. Through further study of literature in the field and classroom research, Gedeon describes how she developed a principled approach to response, including "both teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher communication."

Nicole Guinot Varty takes us through the process that led her "pre-freshmen" (college) students in a summer bridge program to learn a new genre of writing (zines),

write for "real audiences," and develop their writing voice. At the middle school level, **Jill Fyke** presents how she guided students through poetry and—by taking risks as a teacher and writer—helped them develop confidence in their writing voices and a capacity to hear different perspectives through listening to the voices of a text.

Finally, **George Ella Lyon**, one of the keynote speakers at the Autumn Assembly (October 30), urges us, and our students, to find our stories. As Lyon says, "To be good [at writing or any discipline], you have to spend a lot of time practicing, learning the moves, gaining strength and agility." But someday during a moment of opportunity and exhilaration, "you'll be glad" you did the work.

Works Cited

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The Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Autumn Assembly 2009

Friday, October 30, 2009 at the Lansing Sheraton Hotel

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Autumn Assembly
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"Many Voices,
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