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Looking Back, Looking Forward: Celebrating Two Decades of the *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*

Jonathan Bush
Editor

The Language Arts Journal of Michigan ... grew out of a need to publish a number of outstanding articles ... to complement the *Michigan English Teacher* ... the desire to print articles by Michigan educators involved in English language arts ... and to strengthen the relationship between different levels of English and Language Arts instruction: elementary, middle school, junior high, secondary, and college.

“Breaking Into Print: LAJM”

Language Arts Journal of Michigan (1:1, 1985).

In the twenty-some years since founding editor John Beard and his co-editors, Bob Root, Linda Dinan, and Jill VanAntwerp, wrote this introduction and published the first-ever *LAJM*, the journal, like MCTE itself, has grown, expanded, and improved. Print styles have changes and articles have come and gone; physically, the journal has become smaller in size and then large again. Editors have rotated through, each putting their own unique spin on the direction of the journal. Issues of diversity, teacher-research, language, writing, history, professional development, literature, and assessment have been addressed, among many others. Topics of ‘best practice’ have always been present, explicitly, in terms of special issues, and implicitly within teacher narratives describing and explaining teaching practices.

The *LAJM* has remained committed to its original vision: to provide a forum for the best ideas, theories, and practices of teaching English language arts. Along the way, the journal has acquired a national reputation for serving Michigan and publishing articles of interest to all teachers of English language arts, no matter their geographical location. *LAJM* articles have been republished in numerous NCTE journals and publications. The journal has won numerous national awards, and one issue (“Professional Development” Spring/Summer 2004) has been advertised and distributed nationally by NCTE.

Many *LAJM* authors have later gone on to write national-level articles and books, using their experiences in

our journal as a jumping-off point for their writing. Most importantly, innumerable teachers, both in Michigan and throughout the United States, have been able to apply ideas from the *LAJM* to their own classrooms and make their own versions of ‘best practice’ a reality.

It is a great honor to write the introduction to this issue of the *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*. Not only is it exciting to be able to honor the growth, development, and history of the *LAJM*, and some of the legendary editors and authors who made it what it is today, it is also an honor to be able to recognize the outstanding work of the team directly responsible for this landmark issue, including guest co-editors Elizabeth Brockman, John Dinan, Sue Steffel, and Laura Renzi-Keener, and editorial associate Denise Abbey -- all from Central Michigan University. We are all indebted to them for their their commitment to this project, and their skills as authors, editors, and archivists.

Each of the guest co-editors took on a huge task: to review all the past issues of *LAJM*, pick out their favorite articles from each editorial era, and write a review article for each era. John reviewed the early years of the *LAJM* (1985-1989), while Sue (1990-1994), Elizabeth (1995-1999), and Laura (2000-2004), all reviewed later eras. The result is exciting and extremely interesting. Not only do they create a detailed snapshot of each era of the *LAJM* -- they also provide a history of the issues of English language arts and teaching during the past twenty years.

Through their reviews and the articles we reprint, in this issue, readers can see how our profession has evolved -- and how the *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* has remained true to its guiding principle -- to serve the teachers of Michigan by providing an outlet and a forum for the best that the teachers of Michigan have to offer. In this issue, we also honor the indefatigable Ray Lawson, a teacher whose influence on MCTE and the profession of teaching English language arts in Michigan is nearly immeasurable.

We can only imagine what will be in the “Celebrating Fifty Years of *LAJM*” issue. That one will come out around 2036 or so. Be sure to mark your calendars.

And finally, as my last act as editor, I want to congratulate our new co-editors: Kia Jane Richmond and Doug Baker. I can’t think of no one better to guide the *LAJM* into a new era. Readers will see a new energy and excitement from the ideas and voices of two of the best teachers and scholars around. We are privileged to have such a tremendous team at the helm of *our* journal.