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Reflecting on Writing Instruction

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About Language Arts Journal of Michigan

The *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* is published twice a year (Fall and Spring) by the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, a nonprofit state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English, and is a member of the NCTE Affiliate Information Exchange Agreement. The *LAJM* publishes articles that discuss issues, theory, theory-based practice, and research in the teaching and learning of the language arts at all levels, kindergarten through college. It publishes articles, interviews, annotated bibliographies, reviews, research, poetry and classroom practices. The *LAJM* invites teachers at all levels—elementary, secondary, college—to submit manuscripts for consideration. Articles from many perspectives on the themes are welcome.

Guidelines for Submitting Manuscripts. Manuscripts should be 4-12 pages in length, double-spaced, and use the new MLA style for parenthetical documentation and the NCTE Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language. Send one original and one copy. We request that manuscripts not have been published elsewhere. Manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. If the manuscript is accepted, a copy on a 3.5 disk will be requested (IBM PC or compatible, Microsoft Word 6.0). The deadline for the Fall 1999 issue is June 15, 1999. See the Call for Manuscripts near the end of this issue for further information.

Submit Manuscripts to:

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In her keynote speech for a recent conference on writing across the curriculum, Anne Ruggles Gere reminded her readers "that both writing and learning are varied and highly complex activities" Gere's reflections on how she has changed in her viewpoints on writing across the curriculum over the past fourteen years open this issue, which examines and contemplates the "complex activity" of writing.

Linda Denstaedt, Elizabeth Gifford, and Phyllis Ness collaborate to describe their search for "a better way to teach writing." They took this journey with their high school and elementary students, sharing experiences as they progressed. Similarly, Elizabeth Blackburn Brockman and Frances B. Oleson describe their discoveries of ways to improve the writing process for their students. Brockman describes her changing attitudes about the writing process while working with high school writers, while Oleson relates her students' reactions to the introduction of writer's notebooks.

Revision is the step of the writing process often dreaded or ignored by students, and the authors of several articles confirm this as they describe their struggles to help students embrace revision. Amy Enzi described how she trained her students to find their own errors, and Gerald R. Oglan and Amy Donnelley also relate the steps they took to help fourth graders take ownership of revision. Gloria D. Nixon-John demonstrates how she works through successive drafts of poetry.

Assessment is often the most difficult task that teachers of writing face. Lois Rosen describes her portfolio-based classroom and its contribution to both revision and reflection, concluding that "we create writers through portfolios." Describing how his students share writing portfolios with teacher candidates at a nearby university, James Kuiper concludes that the new audience has fostered a heightened awareness among his students of the quality of their writing.

While student teaching in Australia, Jim Woehrle realized that he had to reflect on his own work in order to improve and, in the process, helped his students to learn the value of reflection as well. Jason Kane describes how he learned the value of "reflexive inquiry," a term he borrows from Donna Qualley, while guiding his students to an understanding of voice.

The struggles and triumphs of learning disabled students as they experience the writing process is the focus of Lucy Fife's article. She shares her method of helping her students write poetry. Carol Kountz examines a problem that many writers face in her article on procrastination.

While both schools and colleges are involved in the teaching of writing, Jacob Blumner purports that a dichotomy in the conditions of the jobs and even the words used to talk about writing may impact the collaboration between the two groups of teachers (or faculty?).

The issue concludes as Edward Darling and Marcy Taylor praise the usefulness of two important books. Darling describes his classroom use of Ken Macrorie's *Writing to be Read*, now in its third edition, while Taylor reviews the recently published second edition of Nancie Atwell's very popular *In the Middle*.

The writing process from first thought through revision to reflection has provided the subject matter for the authors included in this issue of *LAJM*. Their articles provide insight into the process and confirm the viewpoint with which Gere begins, writing is a complex activity.

Susan Steffel

Jill VanAntwerp