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Moving Toward Best Practice

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About the *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 a member of the NCTE Affiliate Information Exchange Agreement. The *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* publishes articles which 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, review-essays, research, poetry, and classroom practices. The *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* invites language arts 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. If you wish your original returned, include a self-addressed envelope with first-class postage. The deadline for the Spring 1999 issue is December 15, 1998. See the Call for Manuscripts near the end of this issue for further information.

Submit Manuscripts to:

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

"Best Practice" is a term that comes from teachers working in ways that are best for students and that foster their learning. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde in their book *Best Practice* (Heinemann, 1993) tell us that the characteristics of best practice classrooms include being: child-centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, social, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging. All of the articles in this issue describe teaching situations that include many elements of best practice.

In the first articles, Ochoa and Mitchell look closely at their classrooms to see how they can incorporate more elements of best practice into them, while Dekker reflects on what she does that could be considered best practice.

Curry's article exemplifies the *democratic* classroom where student input is respected and used. Forman creates a *social* context for her *constructivist* approach to learning about different cultures since her students are not just being handed content to know, but are participants in creating the content for themselves. Smith shows *collaboration* in action as she taps the social power of learning in her cross-curricular approach.

Experiential learning, that hands-on engagement in concrete activities, is shown in Otto's article when her students create pamphlets. Morris and Cassidy ask their students to be *reflective* when they look back at their writing to revise or to understand what they have learned. Zuidema's description of teaching her students to learn about style is an example of a *holistic* learning situation in which whole, real ideas are studied, not sub-parts isolated from actual use. Sheedlo *challenges* his students with "real-world" writing which includes students' choice and responsibility for their own learning.

Child-centeredness, the building of learning around the interests of the students, is at the center of Brines' and Van Antwerp's articles. Many of these articles also demonstrate *cognitive* learning because they work on developing a true understanding of concepts; all of them take into account the *developmental* stages of children as they plan their lessons, and they all focus on *authentic* learning in which rich, complex ideas and materials are used.

We begin the column section of this issue with a scenario from the future in which Shafer encourages us to look at the political issues surrounding school funding. Next, Frens shares her reading of professional books that have enriched her thinking and teaching and Waterbury shows us how she fosters her students' growth as writers and teachers of writing.

We close this issue with Mitchell's reviews of twenty-four books for young readers.

Mary Dekker

Diana Mitchell