

# Language Arts Journal of Michigan

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Volume 13

Issue 1 *Reaching the Hard to Reach*

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## Front Matter

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Spring 1997

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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 Fall 1997 issue is May 15, 1997. See the Call for Manuscripts near the end of this issue for further information.

#### **Submit Manuscripts to:**

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# Language Arts Journal of Michigan

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In the lead essay Kevin La Plante wonders “if we can ever give students too many chances.” This sentiment embodies the theme of this issue about reaching the hard to reach. In La Plante’s article and all of those to follow we read about teachers who refuse to give up on their students. About teachers who believe in the potential of every person to learn. About teachers who are willing to go past a student’s hard exterior be it violent or passive, unmotivated, or disengaged. About teachers who reflect on their practice and share their stories of inner-city teens, affluent high school students, and rural elementary students.

This issue is also about what works. As John Dinan reminds us of the power of play, he nudges us to incorporate activities that are fun into our daily routines. Other articles explain techniques that make the writing process more accessible to “at-risk students,” practices that help ESL students, ideas about how to engage middle school students, and how to teach elementary students to “think big.”

Sometimes omission is as important as content. In this issue what the articles don’t talk about is worth mentioning. They’re not about placing blame on students, teachers, parents, or others for a student’s lack of motivation or lack of performance. They’re not a nostalgic look at the way kids used to be. They’re not about quick fixes or “miraculous transformations.” As these authors tell us again and again, there are no easy answers—the most likely path to a workable solution for any student is going to be messy and full of starts and stops.

We begin the column section of this issue with book reviews that are related to the issue of reaching the hard to reach. In *From the Stacks* Peter Butts introduces readers to short but engaging pieces that will appeal to many middle and high school students. Diana Mitchell reviews two professional books on the topic of engaging readers. And Sue Steffel reviews Alfie Kohn’s new book, citing its easy application to a student-centered classroom.

In this issue we continue our ongoing professional conversation about the Writing Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and the High School Writing Proficiency Test with Krag Sanford’s article about student perceptions and Greg Shafer’s article which points out many shortcomings of the HSPT.

We round out this issue with a column about integrating theory and practice in teacher education, along with Mitchell’s LAJM Resources, an annotated bibliography of 90 new young adult books.

Mary Dekker

Diana Mitchell