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Connecting Students with the World Beyond the
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FOCUS: TEARING DOWN THE WALLS.
CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH THE WORLD BEYOND THE CLASSROOM.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Walls. A primary means of architectural separation. A metaphor for intellectual division. We need them; we often hate them. They provide privacy, yet limit access. When we speak of change, we often talk of tearing down the walls. Without walls around a classroom, we discover access to sources not traditionally associated with learning. By taking our students out of the classroom we take considerable risks, and with such risks come rewards.

Many of us who teach would say that our classrooms are very different from the ones we attended as students. If we were educated in the 40s, 50s, 60s and even 70s, it's likely that our notion of what a classroom is has changed dramatically. Gone are neat, straight rows of students with their hands raised in the air, waiting patiently to be called upon by the teacher. American educators are now trying to break down the "walls" that exist in the classroom, the psychological barriers, the conventions, the traditions, which have in so many ways proven ineffective, inefficient, and wasteful of the human potential of our children. Thus, in this issue our contributors explore this new frontier that lies beyond the conventional classroom.

Janet Swenson begins our journey with a description of classrooms that blur the boundaries between traditional teacher-directed classroom activities and community-based education.

Next, Eileen Sauer tells about bringing the past into the classroom in ways with which no history book can compete.

Marcia Arend follows in a similar vein and tells us of her students' experiences confronting generational changes in the flesh.

Diana Smith describes her attempts to make the community the center of study rather than a territory to be negotiated on the way to school.

Katy Eck also involves her students in the community in ways that benefit the students as well as the adults who work with them.

James Pence offers a different type of exploration in a poem that is both intriguing and mysterious.

Laura Schiller's article takes us inside a classroom that makes few distinctions between student and teacher; by having parents share with their sons and daughters, she creates a true community of learners.

Susan Sobota and Amy Voigt reach beyond the walls of their classroom, and even the confines of their community, to create a bridge between students from different cities. The results are both encouraging and exciting.

Janis Flint-Ferguson and Jan Youga offer a variation on the value of letter writing by creating an opportunity for their middle school and college students to correspond with each other.

Joyce Benvenuto chips away at the walls that usually exist between teacher and student to touch the lives of the alienated students in her alternative education classes.

Finally, we introduce Jennifer Ochoa, an avowed bookaholic, who tells us how she came to be connected not only with her profession, teaching English, but with herself through her journey to literacy. Jennifer will be a regular contributor to LAJM.

Fred Barton

Diana Mitchell

John Smolens