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Spring 1989

Focus:

THE TEACHER - RESEARCHER

Volume 5

Number 1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title/Author	Page
TEACHER-OWNED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ACTION RESEARCH MODEL1 Kay Harley	1
SIMPLE LISTING OR DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES: A TEACHER'S LOOK AT THE "ALL ABOUT" BOOK6 Hilary Ferguson	6
CONFERRING WITH SECOND GRADE WRITERS13 Judy Zak	13
ROCK HOUND WRITERS18 Mary Mercereau-Kempf and Kay Harley	18
STUDENT GENERATED AWARDS AND INTEGRATED ENGLISH24 Diana Mitchell	24
LANDSCAPING CHOICES: A LOOK AT CLASSROOM ECOLOGY31 Martha J. Briggs	31
GOING GRADELESS: EVALUATION OVER TIME HELPS STUDENTS LEARN TO WRITE42 Jan Loveless	42
WINNING THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH: A YEARBOOK ADVISOR JOINS THE TEAM55 Nancy Renko	55
LAJM RESOURCES: ACTION RESEARCH62 Kay Harley	62

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The theme of this *LJM* issue is "The Teacher-Researcher," a title given by Nancy Martin and others to teachers who in effect turn their own classrooms into small but instructive "fields of research" as they search in a systematic way for solutions to classroom problems. As Diana Mitchell suggests in her article for this issue, good teachers are often informal "teacher-researchers" whether they are aware of it or not, simply because they continually ask "What if?" questions about their classroom practices—and then seek answers by going to work and trying things out. Teacher-researchers, official or otherwise, are braver than some other researchers, because they not only test out their theories in action, but do so in their own classrooms, where the consequences cannot be escaped. Hence "action research," as it is often called, requires some risk-taking on the teacher's part—making changes, trying new strategies, dodging criticism from others. One of these risks, although a minor one, involves another aspect of the teacher-researchers' task—to report their findings to their colleagues. This issue of *LJM* provides such findings, compiled by classroom teachers from all levels.

Kay Harley opens and closes the issue with useful information, guidance, and resources about the concepts and practices of action research. Our teacher-researchers at the elementary level—Hilary Ferguson, Judy Zak, and Mary Mercereau-Kempf—describe successful classroom experiments done as part of action research projects. Ferguson shows the value to developing writers of the simple-seeming "all about" genre, while Zak describes a successful experiment engaging her second-graders in writing activities typically reserved for older students. Mercereau-Kempf's article, co-written with Kay Harley, details how she escaped the burden of curricular fragmentation by smoothly blending science and the language arts in her elementary classroom. Our next writers show the valuable results of action research at the high school level. Diana Mitchell explains how she increased her tenth-grade students' involvement with the literature by using student-generated awards, while Martha Briggs reports her equally successful attempt to create a student-centered—and to some degree student-generated—writing environment for her young high school school writers. Next, Jan Loveless documents how she successfully handled her students' subversive grade-consciousness by engaging them in a "going gradeless" experiment. Nancy Renko follows with an article that not only will be helpful to teachers who face the challenge of being yearbook advisors, but will also provide teaching strategies for general English classes as well.

We hope the insight and usefulness of these articles will demonstrate the value of action research and encourage our readers to consider becoming teacher-researchers themselves.

The Editors