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A Study of the Journals Sponsored by State Reading Councils



EDITORIAL BY **ROBERT L. SMITH**

This study's purpose is to compare the *Michigan Reading Journal (MRJ)* with the journals published by the other state reading councils in the USA. Information was drawn exclusively from the 1993 *Contributor's Guide to Periodicals in Reading* published by the International Reading Association (IRA). Twenty-three states submitted reports about their journals to IRA in 1993. This does not represent all of the regionally supported journals, though: for instance, the 1993 IRA publication did not include information about the MRA journal. (The information about *MRJ* which has been collected for this comparison has also been submitted for publication by IRA in 1994.)

My study looked at the number of issues each state publishes per year, the number of pages they report printing each issue, the circulation of the journal, and whether the review process includes anonymous peer review. I also calculated the number of pages that each journal disseminates each year.

The *MRJ*'s anonymous peer review follows the trend reported by the regional journals. All 23 states that were included in the IRA report use some sort of peer review method for selecting articles to be published. Four of those states do not make the reviews an anonymous process, however, as we do.

In the period of 1992-94, *MRJ* published four journals per year. The national average, reported in 1993, was 2.6 journals per year. Six other states reported printing four issues per year, five printed three a year, seven produced two a year, and six distributed only one.

While *MRJ* surpassed the national average by nearly a journal and a half, the length of the journals needs to be taken into consideration.

The *MRJ* averaged about 44 pages per issue over the past year, an annual output of 176 pages. The 24 states (including Michigan) averaged 47.2 pages per issue. The largest journal at 100 pages is produced by Kansas whose output is limited to one issue a year. Texas takes a similar approach printing two large (90 pages) journals each year. Wisconsin, which prints four eighty-page issues, for 320 pages a year, disseminates by far the highest number of articles. Florida, also prolific, prints four 55-page journals for 220 total pages a year while California prints four 50-page issues each year for 200 total pages. The national average for annual output in 1993 was only 115.7 pages per year, a number that Michigan exceeded by 60 pages; another way to think of this is that the fourth issue of *MRJ* each year is a bonus beyond what other state councils provide, whether one thinks of the number of issues in the mail box or the total pages in the issues.

These indicators do not measure journals qualitatively, and it must be remembered that these journals are likely edited by volunteers who change office frequently, thus making the quality of the publications inconsistent. However, this study suggests that quantitatively recent issues of *MRJ* stack up very well in relation to other states' publications. This may be partly due to Michigan's healthy membership: *MRJ* is sent to roughly 6,000 members, whereas other states average a circulation of 4,758. Effective

associating allows Michigan members to pool resources so as to share ideas more frequently and at greater length. Unlike MRA, most other state councils rely on advertisements to help pay for journal costs as opposed to relying solely on membership fees.

The *MRJ* budget has not been rising with the cost of living and may not allow us to increase the quantity of pages this year. Fortunately, it is not necessary to equal the bulkier state journals in order to provide members with ideas and examples related to our evolving practices; four issues of 34-50 pages will add up to at least an extra journal in comparison to the national average.

Furthermore, whereas most other state journals fill several pages with advertisements, our pages are reserved for articles, with the exceptions of space for MRA and IRA membership forms and ads for MRA publications.

Mailing four smaller issues costs

more for postage than sending one or two thicker issues (a la Kansas or Texas), but the cost of four issues is justified by the opportunity to contact members multiple times. Informal communication with members indicates that many of them prefer journals which are easy to slip in a purse and to read during a short interlude.

The MRA Board should remember that some MRA members do not subscribe to any other professional journals: the *MRJ* and MRA's *News and Views* are responsible for covering in a timely fashion (more than once or twice a year) the key new ideas that reading specialists and teachers ought to be considering. Finally, *MRJ* represents a place to publish regional ideas — a friendly forum for regularly encouraging members, who might find it hard to publish in national journals, to write about their practices in the unique state of Michigan.

MICHIGAN READING ASSOCIATION

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____

Mailing Address _____ County _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

School District _____

Position _____ Grade Level _____

IRA Member? ☐ yes ☐ no MRA Region _____

Local Council Member? ☐ Yes ☐ No Name _____

Membership will be accepted at any time for twelve months.

Please check one:

Check one:

- | | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (1 year) | \$25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent | \$7.50 (available to non-educators only) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$8.00 (full-time undergraduates only) | | |

College attending _____ Check No. _____

Faculty Signature _____ Date _____

Please return this form along with your remittance to:

Membership, Michigan Reading Association
5241 Plainfield N.E., Suite I, Box 10, Grand Rapids, MI 49505.