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## Possibilities and Challenges of Perspective(s)

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# Possibilities and Challenges of Perspective(s)

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## Editors

In the fable *The Seven Blind Mice* (adapted from the classic tale “The Blind Men and the Elephant” and elegantly illustrated by Ed Young), each mouse searches for an answer to the “strange Something” the group has discovered, and offers a perspective based on evidence limited by the experience of each. Only the seventh mouse, after listening to viewpoints of the others and gathering its own data, demonstrates how “wisdom comes from seeing the whole” and determines that the Something is an elephant. As students, teachers, and researchers, each of us strives to understand how students should be educated, under what conditions, for what purposes and desired outcomes. However, along with a host of other stakeholders, each of us brings only perspectives, or angles of vision, on the challenges and opportunities of teaching and preparing all students. Through discussion and contrastive analysis of perspectives, we might discover that next idea or practice, or the Something that makes a difference.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the root of *perspective* (perspect) derives from classical Latin, “the past participial stem of *perspicere*,” meaning “to see through, look closely into, discern, perceive.” In the Middle Ages the word linked to the “science of refraction, science of optics, or art of making mirrors;” in the Renaissance period it expanded to include concepts of art and the appearance of objects viewed from particular angles and light; by the late eighteenth century the term includes the “way in which an individual, ideology, or institution conceives or interprets the

course of events.” This brief etymological history demonstrates layers of meaning for a word that more recently points to a mental image of a part of a whole or an idea perceived from a particular point of view, or theoretical or experiential stance.

In this issue of *LAJM*, many of the writers present perspectives through contrasting views on topics. Although readers will not come away with a definitive definition of *perspective*, they will observe how experiences provide insights into dilemmas, including contextual and political factors that influence how we perceive a pedagogical idea or event that we embrace. For example, in the opening article, **Patricia Lambert Stock** describes how a key document on writing pedagogy that informs policymakers, among others, grew from collaborative experiences and perspectives among “an intentional mix of educators at all levels of instruction.” As she states, “Our work and our students’ learning opportunities benefit when we teachers sit down with others.” One of the challenges is (re)examining personal experiences and beliefs in juxtaposition with “collective experience,” theory and practice.

**Nicole Guinot Varty** describes the dilemma teachers face as they negotiate personal beliefs or views with pedagogical ones, and she explores this tension through examples in her own teaching. The next three articles present reflections of teachers as they negotiated theoretical principles and practical perspectives. **Ray Lawson** provides an historical account at the role of *choice* has played in his teaching, and through the process he demonstrates an experienced teacher who continues to learn and inspire others. **Lindsay Ellis** describes “The Democracy Project” and how she incorporates principles of democracy into her methods courses, particularly through daily interactions and the syllabus. **Susan Steffel** and **Laura Renzi-Keener** discuss what they frame as “the last taboo”: classroom discussions and texts that address “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues,” which, appropriately framed and presented, can help create “a *safe environment in their classroom for ALL students.*” To conclude this initial section,

**Robert Rozema** raises questions and offers suggestions about how teachers can experiment with and incorporate social networking (e.g., Facebook) in their classrooms.

In the “Linking Ideas for the Classroom” section, **Jennifer Haberling** and **Brian White** describe how they used “student-generated case studies” in order to guide students to juxtapose and critically examine apparent discrepancies between how students viewed actions in a literary text and those within their own community. **Melissa Fleming** provides an account of how she teamed with a local artist to guide students towards creating performance-based projects, which engaged students who were typically “bored” with school. In the next two articles, **Dan Schneider** and **Erinn Bentley** each provide views on how creativity and poetry can enhance students’ learning across subjects and cultures. As Schneider points out, “let’s show our students how creativity and higher-order thinking can be fused within the writing process to create quality writing.” And, as Bentley suggests, through

these opportunities students might change our perspectives. **William Vande Kopple** urges teachers to offer “some language exploration and play” to engage students and enrich their linguistic and geographic awareness through toponyms. Finally, **Michael Willett** presents a new teacher’s perspective on gaining the professional trust of students through well-constructed assignments.

This issue concludes with an implicit challenge to all of us by **Allen Webb**: mentor new teachers and consider advanced degrees as we strive to develop as professionals. Embedded in his article are the multiple types of people and their perspectives that make mentoring and our profession rewarding.

#### **Works Cited**

- Oxford English Dictionary. Perspective. N.: etymology. Retrieved 27 April 2009, <<http://dictionary.oed.com>>.
- Young, Ed. *Seven Blind Mice*. Philomel Books. 1992.

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