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Foreword by P. David Pearson

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We have recently extended a call for new editors. We’re amazed that this January issue marks the mid-point of our tenure as editors. Time has flown! At the same time, we’re excited to pass the baton to folks who can usher *Language Arts* as it changes to fit the demands of a digital era.

For anyone considering being an editor of *Language Arts*—or really anyone interested in the editorial process—we thought we’d share some considerations from our first few years.

**Consideration 1: Trailblazing**

At times, being an editor feels like trailblazing: we gain new ground, but we’re always at risk of burning. Although we make every effort to be thoughtful and careful with our responses to authors, we realize that sometimes a rejected manuscript can feel a bit scathing. We, too, submit manuscripts and get burned sometimes. So we empathize. At the same time, we hope that the articles we provide in *Language Arts* contribute to shaping the field of elementary language arts instruction to be child-centric, creative, practical, and theoretically sound. The trail is necessarily crooked, but we hope the journal has contributed to new pathways for thinking.

**Consideration 2: Keeping (and Setting) the Pace**

During the past three years, we have tried proactively to shape how our field thinks about language arts by promoting important topics such as innovative teaching (for example, see the November 2013 issue), the arts (see the upcoming November 2014 issue on “The Arts in Language Arts”), and biliteracy development (see the recently announced May 2016 issue). Concurrently, we have tried to respond to new policies and events with related calls for manuscripts. For example, we have included several calls to address the shift toward digital literacies (e.g., the “Beyond Power-Point” theme published in November 2011). Additionally, when the Common Core State Standards were being drafted, we created the call “Common Core or Rotten Core?” (to be published in March 2014 and again in March 2016) to provide a platform for disseminating educators’ and researchers’ responses to the Standards. As Race to the Top has shaped state policies on accountability and teacher evaluation, we have created calls to spur discussion about teacher performance assessments (to be published November 2015). We have also opened the journal to two annual “open calls” to invite new ways of thinking—we get the most submissions to these issues and are proud to offer *Language Arts* as a platform for new ideas. We appreciate the creative considerations, depth of analysis, and thought leadership that *Language Arts* authors provide as we consider these important topics.

**Consideration 3: Connecting**

*Language Arts* is unique in that it connects practice, theory, and research. If acceptance rates are any indication of quality (we are admittedly a bit dubious about this conventional means of indicating quality), then *Language Arts* claims a top spot with a highly competitive acceptance rate of about 10%. Additionally, in a recent informal poll of Literacy Research Association members’ perceptions of 38 literacy-related journals, *Language Arts* was ranked...
as “top tier” for both practitioners and researchers. We are proud that our authors write about big ideas in ways that are understandable and integrally relevant to classrooms and communities.

Consideration 4: Writing with Style

Language Arts articles have a certain style. We are sometimes asked if there is some formula for writing for Language Arts. The short answer is no. The long answer is that our authors have a way of telling stories about real kids and people important to them (especially their teachers); Language Arts authors weave research into reader-friendly narrative in ways that are theoretically sound and provide practical connections. It’s a writing style, not a formula, that best connects practice and research. A poll we conducted over the winter of 2012–2013 indicated that many of our readers are teacher educators, new teachers, experienced educators who work in and with schools, and education researchers. These readers want real narratives and practical advice, but they also crave the most recent research and theories. Readers’ most frequent comment was that they appreciated the reader-friendly style of the journal.

Consideration 5: Going Digital

“We’ve come a long way, baby!” When we assumed the editorship of Language Arts, we wanted to leverage some of the digital technologies available at the time. We added a Facebook page to increase our social media presence, we produced podcasts of Conversation Currents (available on iTunes U and on our website), and we utilized online surveys to get feedback. We have an online “green” version of the journal available in PDF format with live Web links and reference links. In hindsight, these digital additions seem more and more basic. Even just three years later, we see the digital landscape changing rapidly and transforming the way journals look, feel, sound, and connect. We have created this special digital issue and hope to grow this endeavor during our editorship—creating a product that combines the appeal of commercial digital magazines with the new media savvy of innovative literacy educators and researchers. If you could serve as editors who can carry on this movement into the digital age, please apply!

Our Current Issue

This month’s issue on “insights and inquiries” demonstrates the wide span of articles that Language Arts publishes. In “Returning to Reciprocity: Using Dialogue Journals to Teach and Learn from English Learners,” Jamy Stillman, Lauren Anderson, and Kathryn Struthers discuss how Jamy used dialogue journals to connect with her students, to learn about their “funds of knowledge,” and to ensure that they felt listened to. The authors provide many great examples of “real” kids’ writing. We hope other teachers can see themselves using dialogue journals to open up the classroom to kids’ lives and stories.

Sherry Sanden’s article “Out of the Shadow of SSR: Real Teachers’ Classroom Independent Reading Practices” reveals what really happens during all that “silence.” During this era when we have to protect time for kids’ independent reading, Sanden sheds light on the variety of practices that “real” teachers describe as “silent reading.”

We are pleased to publish guest author Tamara Spencer’s Policy and Research column titled, “The Danger of Canonizing Research within Early Childhood Literacy Policies.” Spencer argues that too often, policymakers refer to a few “canonical” studies when creating policy for early childhood education. In doing so, they lose children’s voices and perspectives. Spencer suggests that policymakers and policy advocates attend to the breadth of studies on early education, rather than just a few canonical studies.

In Professional Books, a team led by Beth Buckcholz explores books that describe learning from various perspectives. They review Shirley Brice Heath’s new book Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life; Jonathan Kozol’s latest, Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-five Years among the Poorest Children in America; Jennifer Rowsell’s forward-thinking book, Working with Multimodality: Rethinking Literacy in a Digital Age; and finally, Leading for Powerful Learning;
A Guide for Instructional Leaders, by authors Angela Breidenstein, Kevin Fahey, Carl Glickman, and Frances Hensley. You will find yourself ordering new books and extending your reading list before you know it! And while you’re ordering, don’t forget the children’s books. Celebrating the 45th anniversary of the Coretta Scott King Award for children’s literature, Jonda McNair and colleagues use the Children’s Literature column to highlight a few of their favorite children’s books written by African American authors.

Finally, we invited Dr. John Barker, Chief Accountability Officer for Chicago Public Schools, and Dr. Mark Conley, Professor at the University of Memphis, to discuss teacher evaluation systems. Their conversation highlights new ways of thinking about teacher performance assessment—what’s helpful and what’s hurtful in these new observational protocols. We print an edited transcript of their conversation here, and hope you will also enjoy the free Conversation Currents podcast available on iTunes U and our journal Website.

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Kate and Paul Farmer Awards

The Kate and Paul Farmer Awards are given to authors of the best articles published in English Journal during the previous volume year. Eligible entrants must be high school teachers. Winners of 2013 awards are Michael Thier, for “Cultural Awareness Logs: A Method for Increasing International-Mindedness among High School and Middle School Students” (July 2013, Vol. 102.6), and Chris Gilbert, for “Changing the Lens: The Necessity of Visual Literacy in the ELA Classroom,” (March 2013, Vol. 102.4).

Honorable Mentions were awarded to Steffany Comfort Maher for “Using To Kill a Mockingbird as a Conduit for Teaching about the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” (March 2013, Vol. 102.4) and Jim Burke for “Generating Minds,” (July 2013, Vol. 102.6).

Awards will be presented at the NCTE Annual Convention in November during the Secondary Section Luncheon on Saturday, November 23, 2013. No Hopkins award will be given in 2013.