Our Reflections on Writing for Publication

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Members of the Language Arts *editorial team reflect on their insights about writing a manuscript for submission to a journal.*

My heart is pounding. I am excited, yet dread opening the much-anticipated letter from the editors. It's been six months since the manuscript went out for review and, while I am eager to know the reviewers' comments, it's easy to remain hopeful until the envelope appears in the mail. I don't want anyone to know the letter has arrived before I know what it says. I make myself a cup of tea, gently slide my finger under the flap, and pull out the letter.

Although this scene has played out multiple times in our lives as writers, our mixed feelings of excitement and dread at the sight of a letter from an editor never lessen. Finding ourselves in the role of editors who write such letters brought a sense of responsibility—we knew that the authors of the manuscripts under our review felt the same way about the letters we were now writing. We also remembered those initial feelings of frustration (and, we admit, of anger) at reading the advice of editors asking for revisions that were going to take a lot of work or that didn't fit our vision for the piece. No matter how sound the advice, we always found it took several days or weeks to get to the point of processing the comments and valuing the opportunity to strengthen the manuscript. It was *not* comforting to know that the authors who received our letters would experience similar feelings.

Writing hundreds of editorial letters over the past five years has given us a different perspective on manuscript reviews and editorial suggestions, both the ones we receive and the ones we write. We found ourselves repeatedly requesting that authors consider particular revisions. As we discussed these revisions, we gained a deeper understanding of our own considerations when evaluating a submission to *Language Arts*. We decided to analyze our editorial letters and reviewer comments to more specifically identify these patterns. We attended to the revision suggestions and the reasons for either accepting or rejecting a manuscript within these letters. Each of us reviewed a set of editorial letters and then combined our notes to determine patterns reflected in the recommendations that received repeated focus across manuscripts.

This issue of the journal focuses on children's voices about language and literacy, and so it seemed appropriate for us to share what we have learned about facilitating the voices of educators who submit manuscripts for publication. The voices of children and teachers become available to the broader field through the efforts of educators who write about their teaching, learning, and research. By writing articles that more effectively communicate to others, educators strengthen their own voices and influence the field. Their first decision, of course, is whether to write and submit an article to a particular journal, but once that decision has been made, there are a range of decisions to consider related to planning and writing a draft and then revisiting and reshaping that draft before submitting it to a journal for review. This article is organized around those decisions, using examples from the articles we published during our editorship.

DECIDING TO WRITE AN ARTICLE

Although we don't know how authors made the decision to submit to us, we do know how we came to write articles that were published in *Language Arts* under the previous editorship. For example, Sandy faced the decision of whether to write about her work with literature within an inquiry study on astronomy. She knew that many articles had been published about theme studies and that one more was not likely to be of much interest. However, the positive responses when she presented this work at local conferences caused her to reconsider. She went back into the professional literature and realized that science theme studies incorporating the use of literature primarily focused on its use for report writing. Her use of literature to think about scientific principles offered a different perspective. When she saw the *Language Arts* call for submissions on Cross-Curricular Connections, she decided to submit a manuscript reflecting on the ways in which literature was woven into her classroom inquiry study (Kaser, 2001).

Kathy submitted a manuscript coauthored with Sandy and Gloria along with two other teachers (Short, Kauffman, Kaser, Kahn, & Crawford, 1999) in response to a *Language Arts* call for the theme of Talking Texts. We became interested in writing about the role of the teacher in literature discussions after presenting our research at both national research conferences and local teacher conferences. Although a lot had been published on talk within literature groups, that work focused primarily on children's talk. We debated about whether to submit our work to a research journal, but decided on

Language Arts because we wanted to reach a broader audience of educators, particularly the teachers who are engaged in literature discussions, rather than the more limited group of scholars who read a research journal. This decision had a major effect on how we wrote the article in terms of format, style, and content. Instead of writing a formal research report, we wrote a reflective piece in which we shared the findings of most interest to classroom teachers and used many

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classroom examples to make those points come alive to readers. We decided to submit to *Language Arts* rather than to another broad literacy journal because there was a relevant themed call and because we believed that this journal had the audience of teachers who were already engaged in literature discussion and so would be most interested in our work.

The first decision authors make, therefore, is whether or not they have something to say that will provide new insights to others in the field. We have many experiences as educators that are exciting to us professionally and influence our beliefs and practices, but that may not be new to others in the field and so have little likelihood of being published. The decision to write a manuscript and where to submit it involves asking:

- **Do I have something to say to other educators that offers new practices/theories or new insights into an existing practice/theory?** Presenting the work at local and national conferences and reviewing both seminal and current work in the field are strategies for making this decision. You also need to be passionately committed to staying with the work over the long period of time needed to write and revise for publication.

- **What type of audience do I want to reach? What type of journal reaches out to that audience?** You can write about your work for multiple audiences, but each audience involves a different type of journal, writing style, and organizational format as well as a change in what you focus on and share from your work.

- **What types of articles are published by the journal to which I am submitting? Who is the audience of this journal?** After choosing a journal, research that journal by reading articles across a number of issues so you have a strong sense of the range of topics, writing styles, and organizational structures for articles in that journal. Make sure you get a sense of the audience and check the journal's submission guidelines. *Language Arts,* for example, has an audience of well-informed and politically active educators, so we rejected manuscripts that stayed too general on topics about which our audience already had a great deal of knowledge.

PLANNING AND WRITING A MANUSCRIPT

Once you make the decision to write a manuscript to submit to a journal like *Language Arts* that reaches out to a broad audience of teachers and teacher educators, there are a number of specific issues to consider. Based on our review of editorial letters, we found that our most frequent comments were recommendations for authors to develop a strong central

focus, write an engaging introduction, weave the theoretical framework throughout the manuscript, succinctly describe the relevant context, develop the argument through explicit points and supportive examples, and provide a conclusion that reflected on broader implications.

Develop a Clear and Explicit Central Focus

One of the most common revision suggestions was asking an author to decide on a central focus and to organize the entire piece around it. The problem for authors is that

there are always multiple aspects to any classroom experience or research study, all of which are important. Trying to address all of those aspects, however, deprives readers of the depth of writing that leads to new understandings. In fact, the major reason that reviewers gave for rejecting a manuscript was that an author tried to write about multiple aspects, making the focus too broad and difficult to follow. Reviewers often commented that the author appeared to have something to say but didn't quite recognize what that something was, dancing around the topic without ever homing in on the important points. Over and over, our letters advised authors to concentrate on one of several themes present in a draft and use it to frame the introduction and conclusion, to highlight relevant professional literature, and to develop key points and examples. We asked authors to either briefly discuss the other

themes in relation to that central focus or to eliminate these themes and use them to frame a different manuscript.

Accordingly, our first piece of advice is to decide what is most significant to write about *in this manuscript,* instead of trying to share everything of significance from that work. In choosing this central focus, the tension/issue related to that focus needs to be determined. A journal article is not a report or description of a project or classroom engagement, as a book chapter might be, but rather it is a reflection on a project or engagement

focused around a tension that led to or grew out of that work, such as why conferences with struggling writers are not productive or how history continues to negatively influence the books available for children. It is this tension that engages readers and distinguishes journal articles from other types of writing.

Invite the Reader through an Engaging Introduction

Journal readers take only a minute or two to decide whether an article is worth their time. As a result, an introduction needs to immediately invite the reader into the article through engaging writing and a clear sense of the central focus. We found that many authors began by discussing the scholarly literature on their topic to indicate where their work fits within this broader picture. It was often written in a distant, academic voice, even when the rest of the article was based in a

classroom context and written in a warm, conversational tone. The problem was that the initial academic tone did not accurately reflect the article content, thus discouraging readers before they got to that content. Other times, authors used the introduction to establish the broader political or educational context as well as the local context within which their work took place, moving to their specific focus only after several pages. For instance, if a teacher's implementation of literature circles was addressed only after a lengthy discussion of the obstacle presented by the school's focus on testing and prompts, readers would initially assume that the article is about testing rather than about literature circles.

In looking across our letters and the accepted manuscripts, we found several types of introductions that were effective in engaging readers and introducing the central tension.

- **A vignette from the classroom or school.** A narrative story is often effective in engaging the reader. Bisplinghoff (2002) brings the reader into the teachers' meeting at the first day of school, an event which set up the tension leading to her research, and Laman (2006) tells the story of the literature discussion in which children asked the question that led to their inquiry.

- **A transcript or quotation/writing sample from a child.** This type of introduction can sometimes be problematic if the transcript or quotations are difficult to understand without more explanation or classroom context. Nickel (2001) begins with a transcript of a problematic writing conference, the focus of her article, while Jennings with O'Keefe (2002) provide a written conversation between a parent and a child and Monohan (2003) uses entries from students' logs.

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- **A reflection on personal struggles or passions.** Some authors reflect on tensions or interests in their lives that led to the focus of their article. Foss (2002) begins with her passion for teaching middle school kids and the spaces of powerful possibility that their transitions into adolescence provide. Bomer (2005) immediately takes readers into the personal struggle that led to her decision to resign from teaching.

- **A reflection on tensions provided by broader societal/political issues.** Sometimes, authors introduce their work as a response to tensions growing out of societal issues or political policies. Blair and Sanford (2004) raise the issue of boys' literacy as a societal issue to frame their research, while Shelton and Fu (2004) discuss the context of high-stakes testing to introduce their focus on the differences in children's responses to writing prompts and writing workshop.

- **A statement of purpose and how that purpose emerged.** This type of introduction often places the study within the broader scope of the author's work and/or of the field. Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2003) discuss children's need for play and how their interest in dramatic play and literacy led them to develop toy stories as a strategy within writers workshop.

- **A metaphor that frames the focus.** We found that the metaphors used to organize a manuscript often seemed trite and forced, leading to "cute" introductions that were not effective in focusing on the central tension. In addition, plant, seed, weaving, and journey metaphors were overused and often seemed more like a crutch for someone who wasn't sure how to start an article. When metaphors did work, it was because they clarified the theoretical focus and were integrated throughout the manuscript. Foss (2002) uses the metaphor of "peeling an onion" to provide insights into the way she and her students read

critically to peel away layers of meaning in books.

- **A quotation from a scholarly or literary source.** Quotations were overused but worked when they were short and easy to understand as a stand-alone and when the author immediately used that quotation to frame the central tension of the article, as in Baskwill (2006) and Cadiero-Kaplan (2002).

One key issue related to all of these introductions is that the particular vignette or reflection needs to lead the reader to the tension that is the central frame of the manuscript. Some manuscripts began with a classroom story that was engaging but that did not relate to the central focus and so was misleading and confusing.

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Theoretically Ground the Manuscript in the Professional Literature

Many authors make the mistake of including a lengthy literature review immediately after the introduction, as is typically found in course papers and research reports. These syntheses are not particularly engaging and hinder the reader from getting to the heart of the manuscript. We found that it was more effective to provide a short, focused theoretical frame at the beginning of the manuscript and then weave the rest of the theory

into relevant sections and concluding reflections, such as in Nickel (2001), Jennings with O'Keefe (2002), and Laman (2006). Not only did this increase the readability of a manuscript, but it also increased the likelihood that readers would engage with the theory. It's easy as a reader to skip a whole section of literature review, but when the professional literature is integrated into discussions of the data and classroom experiences, the theory gets more attention and provides for deeper insights into the data.

The suggestions we most commonly made related to the professional literature included:

- **Use a short initial theoretical frame and interweave the rest of the theory.** Start with the broad theoretical base and define key terms, but integrate the other theoretical points within reflections on the data.

- **Use the professional literature to discuss the data** and provide deeper insights into interpreting the data, instead of just listing it as citations.

- **Select the theory and professional literature that is most significant** to the central focus of the manuscript; don't incude everything that framed the study.

- **Select one or two key references** rather than comprehensively citing many people on a point. Multiple references interrupt the reader's flow and can be seen as pretentious.

- **Include seminal references and current work.** Connect your work to seminal theoretical references and to current research to show that you have taken relevant work in the field into account.

One final comment: consider possible alternative sources for theoretical support in discussing data. Bisplinghoff (2002) uses literary references and the reflections of authors of adult literature to support the discus-

sion of her self-study as a teacher. Edelsky (2004) uses references outside of education from political science to develop her discussion of democracy.

Establish the Classroom and Curricular Context

Readers need to have some sense of the school and classroom context before moving into a reflective analysis of the examples from that setting. The major goal is to provide the reader with enough description of the context and curricular engagements to adequately understand the examples without taking over the space needed to expand on those examples. The context comes before the main body of the article, so an unnecessarily detailed description of the context delays the reader's grasp of the actual focus. Keep in mind that the writer has lived in that context for a long time, so must carefully select the information essential to clarifying the specific points of the article.

The context can be short, as in Goodman (2005) where in one paragraph, she quickly establishes the school context, describes her role in the school, and introduces the children. She puts more focus on the theoretical context and the beliefs that guided her work. In contrast, Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2003) provide a lengthy description of the engagement of Toy Stories and how it emerged over time before going into an analysis of the data from that engagement. They briefly describe the school and writers workshop, since this classroom structure is familiar to readers, but the Toy Stories engagement is unfamiliar and represents a key part of their work, so it needs more extensive discussion.

An additional aspect of the context for studies is a description of the research methodology. In general, we encouraged writers to keep this description brief—a paragraph or two—because our readers' main focus is the authors' reflections about their findings, not a research report typical of a research journal. Jennings with O'Keefe (2002) indicates in one paragraph what data was gathered and how it was analyzed because the methods are familiar ones. Laman (2006), in contrast, has a whole section on using cultural models for analysis, a less familiar form of analysis that frames her classroom data and discussion.

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Develop Key Points and Arguments through Rich Examples

The heart of the article—and the reason the reader has persevered through the earlier sections—is the discussion of the key points related to the central tension established in the introduction. These points develop the arguments that the author wants to make in discussing and providing new insights related to this tension. A major writing decision is which key points to make within an article. Including too many points leads to none of them being developed in enough depth; too few points can result in not revealing the complexity of the issues around the central focus. Many of our letters asked authors to selectively choose which key points to include related to the central focus and to exclude other points that were interesting, but not directly part of that argument.

Once those key points have been selected, providing examples to develop and support those points makes the difference between an article that seems to be based on personal opinion or that asks readers to just accept what the author is arguing and an article that comes alive and effectively carries the reader into the argument. We found ourselves continually offering these suggestions:

- **Be selective in choosing several examples** and present them in depth. Make sure they provide different perspectives on the same point, not the same view. The range of examples should demonstrate the complexity of the issues.

- **Discuss each example;** don't just present it and move on. Since authors know the children and context in much greater depth than readers, readers need the author's interpretation to understand the points. Reflecting on those interpretations through insights from professional literature can deepen that discussion.

- **Mention alternative interpretations.** When appropriate, we asked authors to note other possible interpretations of particular data, instead of only presenting their perspective.

- **Be careful about over-interpreting the data.** Authors have strong beliefs that grow out of their broader work in the field, and it's tempting to bring those beliefs into a manuscript, even when the data do not directly support that belief. Other times, authors feel that they need to make big claims about their findings to establish their worth. Over-interpreting endangers credibility.

- **Keep transcripts short.** While there are times when long transcript excerpts are essential, we found that readers often skip long transcripts and have difficulty knowing what to focus on within that excerpt. Transcripts are more effective when the author uses a narrative summary of the discussion along with short focused excerpts.

- **Use real examples.** This may seem self-evident, but we have received manuscripts in which authors developed a theory and then made up examples of how that theory might play out in a classroom. Reviewers rejected those manuscripts and either asked the author to write a theoretical essay or, more commonly, to implement that theory in a classroom and then write an article using actual examples of how the theory played out.

- **Include the struggles and tensions.** By the time an author writes about a particular engagement, the initial struggles and tensions have been worked out. Also, the author is intent on "selling" the power of that engagement and so focuses on the successful responses of students. Including the struggles and tensions increases the credibility of a manuscript and the possibility of readers trying out that engagement because it seems more within their reach and not just a "superteacher" story.

Authors developed their key points and examples in various ways across manuscripts, but all found a clear way to organize the article's focal ideas. One common mistake was using a chronology to structure a manuscript, essentially creating an adult version of children's bed-to-bed personal narratives in the form of "first we did this, then we did that." Foss (2002) successfully organized her manuscript in a chronology by choosing critical moments along that pathway instead of relating each step, thus inviting readers to see how critical literacy unfolded in her classroom. Each section reflected a major tension that emerged within the broader frame of critical literacy and privilege, allowing her to reflect on the kids' responses to the instructional engagements within that frame. She provided examples of their responses, always connect-

ing them to that broader frame, and allowing readers to follow her decision making as a teacher. The examples within a particular critical moment established the tension, which then allowed her to indicate how she and the students responded to that tension.

A common way to organize key points is by categories that emerged from the data, especially if the manuscript is drawn from a study. Nickel (2001) analyzed her data to develop categories related to the reasons why certain writing conferences faltered with particular children. Each section was labeled with a category (e.g., When the Child Needs More Time). Within that section, she first defined the category, provided a range of examples, and discussed her interpretations of those examples to develop an understanding of that

key point. This use of categories can also organize findings from a case study of an individual child, such as Long (2004), who structured her piece around the ways in which her daughter responded to reading decodable text in a new language (e.g., She Was Embarrassed), or to organize the findings of different case studies around the same set of categories (Yau & Jimenez, 2003).

Some of the other structures we published include organizing around arguments and counterarguments (Ford, 2001), moving continuously between a transcript as it unfolds and reflections on each transcript segment (Ballenger, 2004), and pre-

senting individual voices/stories within the same article (Donnelly, Morgan, DeFord, Files, Long, Mills, Stevens, & Styslinger, 2005; Henson & Gilles, 2003).

Conclude by Connecting Readers to a Broader Frame

The weakest part of most manuscripts was the conclusion. Often a manuscript just suddenly ended or the author provided a quick summary restating the main points in several general statements. We know that when authors are trying to make submission deadlines, they sometimes run out of steam and dash off a few concluding lines before sending off a manuscript. Conclusions force authors to step out of the actual experience and say "So what? This was a great experience but, besides entertaining the readers with an engaging story, what does this story offer to readers in

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terms of theoretical or practical insights? What are the implications for me and for other educators beyond this experience?" This kind of thinking is difficult and often requires time away from the draft.

The conclusion is not a summary, but a reflection in which authors remove themselves from the experience and think about the implications for theory and practice, both for themselves and others. Although many conclusions were too short and just restated the main points, another common pitfall was to discuss all of the possible implications of the work. Classroom-based work is always complex, offering

multiple possibilities for discussion, so the key to an effective conclusion is being selective about which implications to discuss. This decision is most effective when it's based on a connection to the central focus that was established in the introduction. Ask yourself, too, which implications are most likely to challenge readers and offer new insights.

Within these broader issues, there are many possible ways to handle the conclusion:

- **Reflect on the implications for your own teaching.** Nickel (2001) concludes by stating, "Here is what I learned that now guides my writing conferences with kids."

- **Reflect on the connections to current issues in the field.** Long (2004) concludes her case study by indicating that her study and findings are not new, but are worth sharing because they inform the current political context that is affecting many teachers.

- **Reflect on the larger theoretical frame.** Many articles conclude by taking the reader back to the larger theoretical frame established in the introduction and indicating how the findings inform that frame. Jennings with O'Keefe (2004) returns to Freire and his notion of a humanizing pedagogy while Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2003) return to their frame of children's literacy learning processes and the role of imagination, writing, and reflection.

- **Raise further questions that need to be addressed.** Inquiry often raises many more questions than it answers, so some articles end with reflections on the tensions and the new questions that have arisen, such as when Damico (2005) wonders about girls' perspectives on poetry in his article about two boys who changed their view of poetry as "sappy."

- **Reflect on changes in students and in the classroom.** Some authors used the conclusion to reflect on what later occurred in students' thinking and in the classroom as a result of the experience discussed in the article. Laman (2006) and Frank, Arroyo, and Land (2004) reflect on the continuing journeys of the teacher and students as they built on the specific literacy events discussed in the articles.

- **Reflect on patterns across cases.** Particularly when an article has involved presenting different voices (Novinger & Compton-Lilly, 2005) or different case studies (Yau & Jimenez, 2003), the conclusion involves a reflection on the patterns and themes that cut across the voices and case studies.

Structure an Article around an Alternative Format

We regularly published articles in the journal that contradict much of the advice that we just provided; in those cases, the authors had developed an alternative format to

selected, the author had to remain true to the voice of that format. For instance, once Dressel (2004) chose to write a letter to her young granddaughter about her wishes for her future experiences as a writer in school, she had to remain true to addressing her granddaughter and not an academic audience.

The range of formats and genres that could be used is endless, but the ones we worked with include:

- a letter to a specific audience of children, parents, etc. (Dressel, 2004; Hunter, 2006)

- a photo essay (Bowden, 2005)

- short stories and fables (Traw, 2002; Power, 2003)

- reflective memoir (Bomer, 2005)

- personal narrative (Lacznyski, 2006)

- a symposium with speakers and sessions (Albers & Cowan, 2006)

- poetry (Johnson, 2003)

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organize their manuscript and communicate their ideas. We welcomed alternative formats because we felt that a greater variety of articles would increase reader interest in the journal, but we also struggled with knowing how to respond to these formats. The first lesson we learned was that we needed to determine whether or not the format actually had a point. In other words, did the format fit the meaning of the piece or was the author just trying to be unique? The other major lesson was that once a format has been

REVISITING AND RESHAPING THE MANUSCRIPT

We know from our own writing that our first concern is figuring out what we have to say and finding a structure for organizing those ideas. Once we have a strong draft, our attention turns to issues of convention and editing before submitting the manuscript. As editors, we sometimes received manuscripts rife with wordiness and copyediting problems where it was clear that the author had not taken the time to revisit and

reshape. Although reviewers tried to focus primarily on the ideas within the manuscript, these copyediting issues did influence their responses; after all, the presentation seemed to signal carelessness on the part of the author and a lack of respect for the time of editors and reviewers. We have become highly cognizant of how much time editors and reviewers volunteer to review manuscripts as part of their professional commitment to the field, especially in light of their busy lives. We understand their resentment of authors who don't take the extra time to carefully edit before submission.

Given our experiences as editors and authors, we suggest that authors ask several people—preferably people who are familiar with the journal and represent its audience—for a response as to whether the central focus and key points in their draft make sense. Once the meaning is clear, an author needs to concentrate revision efforts on editing. Our letters indicate that these editing issues typically involve wording, transitions, format, conventions, tone, and title. Attending to these editing issues requires having a draft of the manuscript prepared a week or more before the deadline.

Carefully Check for Problematic Wording

- Use language accessible to the journal audience. Overly academic language can create distance or a feeling of exclusion from an insider group.

- Define terms that are central to the article and may be unfamiliar to the audience (e.g., positioning) or that have multiple definitions (e.g., inquiry).

- Avoid terminology that has negative connotations and that may infer a deficit perspective (e.g., at risk, inner city, language–deprived).

- Avoid overuse of superlatives (fantastic, incredible, wonderful, powerful). Use more specific descriptive language.

- An active voice is more energizing for readers than a passive voice. Check for the use of "to be" verbs (have, was) and hedging words (seem, could, maybe).

- Avoid using language that comes across as a lecture telling teachers what they "should" or "need" to do.

- Cut out "dead" words (also, really, very) that do not add to the meaning.

- Look for places where the flow of the text is interrupted for readers. For example, put citations at the end of the sentence instead of in the middle, and use hyphens and commas instead of parentheses when possible.

Tighten the Manuscript to Reduce Length

- Eliminate repetition of information or particular phrases.

- Avoid long, complex sentences with many qualifying phrases that will cause readers to stop and struggle with constructing meaning.

- Eliminate unnecessary words. For example, select one key adjective instead of using multiple ones, use strong verbs instead of adverbs, eliminate introductory phrases (in spite of, at this moment), and select one or two key references for a citation.

- Avoid long blocked quotations because readers tend to skip these. Paraphrase the quotation and only directly cite the most essential phrase or sentence.

Shape Transitions and Subheadings

- Provide the reader with some type of indication/overview of how you are organizing the article and developing your line of thinking.

- Check to see whether the reader can follow your line of thinking and whether you have maintained the flow of the article.

- Avoid awkward transitions (e.g., Now I will give three reasons for . . .).

- Subheadings should provide readers with a context for that section and how it fits in the flow of the article.

- Avoid subheadings that are a one–word label. Look for descriptive phrases that are parallel across the article and that will engage the reader.

Edit for Typos, Conventions, and Format

- Verb tenses tend to be an issue. The major rule is to be consistent about when present and past tenses are used throughout a manuscript. There is no one right rule for tense.

- Check the journal to see what style format is used (e.g., *Language Arts* uses an APA format). You can consult a writing manual, but it's easier to look at actual articles in the journal to see how they handle formatting of citations, references, headings, etc.

- Check whether or not the journal uses footnotes, author notes, etc.

Add More Visual Variety

- Most manuscripts look visually dense and imposing to readers. Add bulleted points or a table or figure to take the place of some of the text.

- Provide photographs and student artifacts to help readers understand the experiences referenced within the text.

Check Your Tone

- Avoid an overly formal tone and instead use a more conversational and inviting tone without being too casual.

- Watch out for a tone that is too strident. Instead of being judgmental and turning readers away, challenge readers by raising points of tension.

Create an Effective Title

- Avoid cute titles that do not tell the reader what the article is about or would indicate to the reader that the content is not serious.

- Watch the length of the title. Many titles we received were overly lengthy and would look visually dense and unappealing in the journal. Subtitles tend to be overused and increase length.

- Make sure the title reflects the content and invites interest in that content.

ETHICAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Because many of the articles we published were classroom-based research and practice, we struggled with two major ethical issues. The first, authorship, becomes an issue when it is clear that the ideas were collaboratively developed by classroom teachers and university educators even though the article was written by one person, usually the university educator. We believe that the distinction between the authorship of ideas and the authorship of a manuscript requires more than an acknowledgment in an author's note. One strategy is to list the authorship using "with" to indicate the ideas were coauthored, even though the article was not co-written. Sometimes this type of authorship was not possible because political situations within a school would have put a teacher at risk based on the content of the article.

The second major issue has been the occasional instance of teacher bashing, which is particularly problematic when only the outside researcher's perspective on classroom events is presented. Some authors have avoided this by describing teacher's behaviors without comment, allowing readers to develop their own interpretations. This can be accomplished by focusing on

the behaviors as a struggle or tension for the teacher, instead of presenting these actions as a deficit in that person. Another strategy is to clearly establish the political and classroom context so that the teacher's actions are more understandable within that context. It also helps if the authors talk about their own struggles related to these same issues so that they do not come across as holding themselves superior in some way. In addition, authors can share the draft with the teacher and other participants before submitting it to the journal so that

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their alternative interpretations and comments can be integrated into the manuscript.

One other form of teacher bashing is directed at the audience that reads the journal. Some authors make comments that are generalizations about the practices of teachers in the field. Since *Language Arts* readers tend to be well-informed classroom teachers who are fighting many of the current mandates and continuing to use innovative teaching practices in their classrooms, lumping them into national trends is defeating and turns them away as readers. The key lesson is to know the readership of a journal.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Writing an article that provides advice on how to write an article was intimidating for us and a reminder that it's easier to give advice than to act on it. With each piece of advice, we had to worry

about whether our introduction was engaging, our subtitles descriptive, our arguments clearly developed with examples. We have no doubt that we failed to follow some of our own advice within this article. We also were aware that we had previously published articles in the journal that didn't follow that advice but were still effective in communicating their ideas to our audience.

In fact, we made the decision *not* to frame this article around the professional literature on writing for publication—a decision we debated at some length. In this case, we saw this article as personal reflection on what we learned from our experiences as editors. We recognize that other scholars have offered different perspectives on writing for journals and for other academic purposes (Dahl, 1992; Jalongo, 2002; Richards & Miller, 2005; Wilcox, 2002), and that even the advice about writing for *Language Arts* under other editorships will vary to some degree (Teale, 1997). In our proposal for the editorship, we stated that we saw the review process as pedagogical—as a process that teaches about the act of writing for publication and of conceptualizing reviews as an instance of teaching other writers, not just passing judgment on a manuscript. Our intent in writing this article was a personal reflection on the kind of teaching we had engaged in through our editorial letters.

We believe that advice for writing an article is like suggestions for teaching. We value the expert suggestions and ideas of others, but the actual shaping of our teaching is a professional decision-making process that creatively varies by content, purpose, and context. Following our advice too rigidly could potentially stifle the intellectual and creative processes of authors and lead to boring formulaic articles.

While we don't believe that all authors need to follow this advice exactly, we do believe that the voices of educators make a difference in the field. We also believe that a lot of significant work in classrooms is not being shared with the field because the process of writing and submitting for publication can intimidate novice authors. The current political context has been a difficult one because of the devaluing and silencing of the voices of classroom teachers, teacher educators, and children. Writing about our work in ways that effectively support and challenge our own thinking as well as that of other educators is one possibility for taking action as professionals and for changing that context.

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