LEARN Announces 1997 Scholarship Winners

LEARN is proud to announce the winners of its 1997 annual scholarship awards to Kate Garretson, JoAnn Hoppe, Carolina Mancuso, and David Rodgers.

Kate Garretson, Coordinator of Professional Development, Adult and Continuing Education, the City University of New York, was awarded the Garth Boomer Conference Scholarship to attend the third annual Writing Across the Curriculum Conference in Charleston, South Carolina.

Also receiving the Garth Boomer award was JoAnn Hoppe, instructor of ESOL at Hostos Community College. The scholarship underwrote a posterboard presentation that she gave at the recent National TESOL conference in Orlando, Florida.

David Rodgers, teacher and team coordinator of the Newcomers High School in Queens, was the third applicant to be chosen for the Boomer scholarship.

Please turn to page 2

MAHER ON SHAUGHNESSY SEEING OUR BEST SELVES

by Maryann Downing

On February 19, LEARN member Jane Maher was featured as the James Hall Distinguished Speaker in the CUNY Series in Adult Learning at the CUNY Graduate School. She spoke on her new book Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work (NCTE, 1997). The audience included friends and colleagues of Shaughnessy, including actress Patricia Neal, as well as many basic writing teachers. Jane offered reflections on Mina Shaughnessy's work and on the three years of research and writing that shaped the biography. Her talk whetted my appetite both for Jane's book and for a return to Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations: A Guide for Teachers of Basic Writing (Oxford, 1977).

Jane's own ongoing experience teaching basic writing students and directing the Nassau Community College Writing Program, as well as her own higher educational start in a community college basic writers' course have helped shape her perspective and grasp of the world of under-prepared students. She recalled her research process for the book: the initial interview during which she faced how little she knew and what she saw as her temerity in presuming to undertake the task and the final interview which made clear that, having talked to everyone, read everything, in short become the expert insofar as that is possible, she now must complete the final product. The zest with which she pursued her research is evident in the satisfying depth of information she unearthed. Added to this is the intelligence and power of Jane's storytelling as she weaves and shapes her rich material into an absorbing inside look at the history that was made by an exceptional woman in the midst of the struggles and constraints that surrounded open admissions.

Jane has fashioned a gripping narrative that rescues a legacy and prolongs the impact of a great educator. Ever the educator herself, Jane reminds readers that, more than being inspired, "we can see our best selves in her: when we put our students' needs before all else: when we refuse to accept the opinion of others about our students' abilities and worth; when we help our students to recognize and employ the powers of language: when we acknowledge, as Mina did, "that we cannot isolate the phenomenon of disadvantage from the society that caused it.''

LEARN SPRING MEETING

Class in the Classroom: A Panel Discussion

Ira Shor, College of Staten Island
Frank Moretti, Dalton School
Gail Verdi, New York University
Althea Hall, Jersey City State College

May 16, 1997—5:00–7:00 p.m.
(Business Meeting 4:00–5:00 p.m.)
New York University
The Goddard Conference Center
W. 4th Street & Washington Square East (below The Violet restaurant)

Inside This Issue . . .
- Conference Reports 4, 6
- On the Bookshelf: Democratic Classrooms 5
- and more . . .
TEACHERS ON CLASS...

"Different levels of education feed workers into different levels within the occupational structure and, correspondingly, tend toward an internal organization comparable to levels in the hierarchical division of labor . . . the lowest levels in the hierarchy of an enterprise emphasize rule-following, middle levels, dependability, and the capacity to operate without direct and continuous supervision while the higher levels stress the internalization of the norms of the enterprise . . . . The paucity of financial support for the education of children from minority groups and low-income families leaves more resources to be devoted to the children of those with more commanding roles in the economy; it also forces upon the teachers and school administrators in the working-class schools a type of social relationships that fairly closely mirrors that of the factory."

—Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America

“Class is rarely talked about in the United States; nowhere is there a more intense silence about the reality of class differences than in educational settings. Significantly, class differences are particularly ignored in classrooms. From grade school on, we are all encouraged to cross the threshold of the classroom believing we are entering a democratic space — a free zone where the desire to study and learn makes us all equal. And even if we enter accepting the reality of class differences, most of us still believe knowledge will be meted out in fair and equal proportions."

—bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress

Scholarship Winners
Continued from page 1

FROM THE EDITORS...

Class in the Classroom:
The Hidden Curriculum

Teacher or student, we leave no part of our selves outside the classroom. Visible or invisible, all the aspects of our cultures enter with us. Socioeconomic class, long the hidden “ism” in U.S. society, is, by necessity, becoming more visible through funding cuts and assaults on welfare, food stamps, services for immigrants, rent control laws, shelters for the homeless, adequate health care and schools. Well-equipped and-maintained schools are becoming a privilege denied to working-class and poor neighborhoods. Libraries without books, computers without software, hallways without paint, cafeterias without nutritious food, desks set up in make-shift lavatory or closet classrooms, paper and supplies coming out-of-pocket from caring but underpaid teachers — these are the realities of urban schools. Thirty-four students and one teacher is the “acceptable” norm rather than the outrageous exception.

This multi-tiered approach to all human services is polarizing our society into “haves” and “have-nots.” Layoffs from downsizing and technologicalizing have created instability in the “middle class” and swollen the working class with people confronting realities they have previously only viewed from outside. Often they are shocked to find themselves barely able to cope.

In this atmosphere, our Spring meeting will present a much-needed examination of class issues that affect our schools and the neighborhoods and cities which surround them. We believe that circumstances such as these offer us a unique possibility for acknowledging other perspectives and exercising our social imaginations to strengthen the voices of change.

We hope you will join with us, in talk as well as action. We welcome, as always, your letters, articles, suggestions or reflections and would like to offer a special invitation to new teachers to share with us their efforts at reform in the schools.

— Carolina Mancuso & Sharon Shelton-Colangelo
IS NEW TECHNOLOGY WIDENING CLASS DIVISIONS IN EDUCATION?

by William Colangelo
Jersey City State College

In his 1986 book, *Teachers and Texts—A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (Routledge), Michael W. Apple painted a bleak picture of the increasing use of computer technology in schools. The chapter devoted to technology, entitled “A New Technology: Solution or Problem,” placed the introduction of computers into schools within the context of teacher layoffs, speedups, depowering and deskilling of teachers, and deepening class divisions among students. In Apple’s view, the pedagogy guiding the introduction of technology in educational settings stressed narrow technical logic over critical, political, and ethical understanding.

Apple painted this scene at a time when the capabilities of classroom computers were primitive by today’s standards and long before the World Wide Web had been invented. E-mail for students within a school was hardly existent then, while today worldwide e-mail capability for students is not uncommon. Are Apple’s views still relevant?

Britton Award Funds Writing-To-Learn Project

by Jocelyn Santana
1996 James Britton Scholarship Winner

“I am alone in a place without anything to do.” This is a line from a poem composed by Maria Sanchez in her science class after her teacher taught a lesson using a writing-to-learn approach. This poem was the result of staff development opportunities provided by the James Britton Scholarship funds.

As Teacher Administrator of a GED preparation program, I have been working with six teachers and sharing with them practical and theoretical knowledge to develop lessons incorporating writing tasks in the content areas. For some time, I had experimented with different approaches to make teachers aware of the benefits of writing across the curriculum. The research scholarship helped me put aside my supervisory role and reach out as a colleague, willing to learn and teach with real students.

Since one of the goals was to reflect on the learning process, I kept a log and encouraged the teachers to do the same. Two of the teachers often shared their thoughts with me. Mr. D. wrote, “After 20 years of teaching, I am now aware of my tendency to answer my own questions too quickly. Today I tried having the students write their answers to my questions and then read them back to me. It took longer, but they were obviously learning and paying attention to the lesson.”

I met with each teacher informally and devised activities and lessons incorporating writing-across-the-curriculum principles. They warned me more than once that they did not want to teach writing. I kept repeating, “We are using writing to learn.”

The science teacher had tremendous success with one of his classes. On April 21, 1996, he wrote me the following letter:

Dear Jocelyn, thank you for acquiring a LEARN grant for our school geared to improve writing. Here is a writing lesson I gave recently as an adjunct to the unit on the nervous system:

Soon after you learn that you have won the NYS Lottery for $20,000,000, your doctor informs you that you will completely lose the use of one of your senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch) within six months. Choose a sense you will lose. In a composition of 150-200 words, describe your thoughts and feelings. What will help you remember for the rest of your life what the sense was like?

Please turn to page 7
A Tale About a Teacher and a Conference Workshop-Presentation

by David Rodgers
Newcomers High School
1997 Garth Boomer Conference Scholarship Winner

At the Conference on English Education luncheon that preceded our presentation at the Spring Conference of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Jane Tompkins, the featured speaker, gave a talk which was based in part upon her latest book, A Life in School, which describes how the creative and emotional lives of both students and teachers are harmed by the pressure to perform. Emphasizing the need to move from a model of knowledge and performance to a people-centered model, she began her remarks by stating that she was not going to be speaking from a prepared text, but would instead be making the "12-inch journey from head to heart," and speak from there.

I and my colleagues were still under the influence of fatigue from a 12-hour journey on Amtrak that arrived in Charlotte, N.C., at 3:25 a.m. — just about twelve hours before our group was scheduled to give a workshop presentation entitled "Tales about Teachers: What is the Matter in Popular Culture's Stories of School?" We were slated to present a half-hour after the luncheon and my mind fluctuated between worry about our workshop and fascination with what Jane was saying about the changes she has gone through in her sense of herself as a teacher. My focus zoomed in and out until a sense of realization that Jane's remarks were showing us the way to embrace our own impending work at the conference. We — 1 — needed to speak from the heart. Trust the head and the gut to provide the knowledge and experience upon which to base the words grounded in the moment and the group of people present to take part in it.

Our workshop, while examining cultural representations of teachers and learners, was also very much about changes in our views of ourselves as teachers and learners. About 25 teachers — some with years of experience and some very new to the field — began the workshop by writing their own metaphors of students, teachers and schools. We asked them to break into small groups to brainstorm examples of school stories in popular culture, e.g., film, television, theater, cartoon, song, then to choose one and write about its images of teachers, students and schools. Sharing those stories, we examined how those images point to some of the scripts we use in our daily lives and how they affect the ways we and our students live and work in the classroom environment. We discussed the characters and stories, teasing out the attitudes toward education which surround us — in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, communities and nation, and the assumptions underlying them. Then we came up with metaphors to express some of the cultural views of teachers, learners and schools. Posting both sets of metaphors, our own and those arising out of popular culture, we discussed as a whole group the complex picture of teaching and learning they suggested.

Following are some of the positive and negative metaphors that emerged from the small group discussions:

- Students as: seeds that carry potential; lumps of imperfect clay difficult to work with; craftspeople; citizens: empty vessels; delinquents; the weather; chemicals; confusion; reflecting pools; apprentices; construction workers; partners; and jesters.
- Teacher as: performer; a sun unfolding a flower with warmth and light; jailer; savior; hero; authority; witch; facilitator; scaffold; gardener; procurer; provider, learner; and enabler of change.
- School as: department store; the soil surrounding the flower providing a base and nutrients in which to grow; labyrinth with many doors; jail; sinking ship; holding pen; container; caution-crime scene; building under construction; agribusiness that produces most efficient crop for least amount of money and time; and the rock that Sisyphus pushed.

Sorting through these inspiring and disheartening images, we shared ideas for helping students uncover their own assumptions by bringing this workshop into our classrooms. As experienced and new teachers listened to each other's hopes and fears about schooling, a recurring theme emerged: that we must all seek out and encourage other teachers in our schools to engage in regular conversation and collaboration.
ON THE BOOKSHELF

Creating and Sustaining Democratic Classrooms: Pradl’s Literature for Democracy

by Kathleen F. Malu
School of Education, Westchester
Pace University

Gordon Pradl, a founding LEARN member and professor at New York University, has written a personally reflective text that challenges teachers to use the study of literature as a vehicle for bringing democratic encounters into our classrooms. In addition, Pradl identifies several practical approaches to working with literature that promote democratic conversations.

The true value of this book for me, however, is its potential to speak self-reflection and change in teaching philosophy and practice. Pradl identifies one of the many possible struggles and challenges teachers face who try to construct democratic classrooms: “How might we learn to recognize and respect the perspectives of others without betraying our own interests?” After suggesting reasons why teachers might want to consider a democratic teaching approach, Pradl describes experiences and student interactions from his many years of teaching that he uses to chronicle and reflect on his own search for bringing democracy into his classroom. It is through these descriptions and Pradl’s framing of democracy within Rosenblatt’s theory of reader response that educators may begin to reflect on their own philosophy and classroom practice.

In preparing this review I happened to borrow a copy of the book from someone who had begun to read it. As I paged through the text, I was struck by the places that the reader starred. Here are two: “...open acts of reading, which involve readers staying with texts no matter where they might lead, help induce teachers and students to work in concert with each other” (28). “This is the lesson learned by too many students, that acting intelligently and being a ‘good’ student usually represent divergent paths. Thus they work hard at playing the game of school, instead of being fearless seekers of learning and knowledge” (56). “Playing the game is not the way I want to work with my students! I want them to be ‘fearless seekers of learning and knowledge.’ This is difficult work. How do I proceed? Pradl offers several practical classroom teaching approaches that address this question and others like it.

There were many pieces of text I found helpful but the following was particularly memorable: “If we want to appreciate the contrary responses and perspectives that students inevitably bring to our classrooms, it will be helpful to draw on our own lessons of discrepancy. This involves recalling those moments in our educational past when our thinking was out of line, when our point of view was not officially sanctioned. Then we might pay close attention to ourselves feeling what the outsider feels. In this way, we sympathetically begin to imagine the difficult work that democratic conversations require if all voices are to be welcomed” (38).

Pradl continues with a story from his own past when his “thinking was out of line.” It was while reading his story that I wrote in my journal, “Pradl’s personal stories are invitations. Can I invite him into my classroom? He has certainly let me enter his... I think I am striving towards a democratic classroom — but am I, really?” It’s a delicate, complex proposal Pradl is making: Give up our authority as teachers for a democratic approach that values fairness and trust. Listen to our students. Let our work begin with and focus on them.

Pradl’s weaving of personal reflections and stories with the philosophical stance of promoting democracy in the classroom through the reading of literature makes this a text that is well worth reading and reflecting on for quite a while to come.

An Interview with the Author

Malu: Was there any event that triggered your decision to write Literature for Democracy?

Pradl: I saw this as an opportunity to correct our understanding of Louise Rosenblatt’s theory. I also want to return to my dissertation in which I had looked at the idea of democracy and studying English in an ethnical context.

Malu: When you feel yourself getting stuck in your teaching, do you say anything to yourself or try to remember to do or say something to get you and your students back on track?

Pradl: First of all, there are no right answers here. These are ongoing dilemmas. But the principle is that once you get the “garbage out of the way,” you want to try to learn from what your students are doing and saying by trying to listen to them.

Malu: Your book suggests powerful ways to change our teaching. But what of the students and administrators who resist this or don’t know how to interpret it? How can we help them navigate through and appreciate this work of democracy?

Pradl: Once again, there are no easy answers. One concern is not to demonize the students or administrators. Avoid an “us versus them.” When we get into arguments, we can talk till we’re blue in

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IFTE Website!
The IFTE (International Federation of Teachers of English) Conference proceedings in New York City in July, 1995, are now posted on the Internet (address: www.nyu.edu/education/teachlearn/itte). Gordon Pradl invites us to access the site and send in any information we can that will fill in the missing gaps and update the postings!
Democratic Classrooms  
Continued from page 5

the face but what we need to look for are the open parts. Two things I think we can count on are people’s good will and their concrete experiential behavior as long as we can continuing working, say, for example, with students. If they can actually continue to engage in class activities that promote democracy then those experiences may add up to a critical mass and we can have change even without the rhetoric.

Malu: Have you a postscript to add — any particular responses to your work?

Pradl: My sister, who is outside of academ, read the book and gave a copy to a friend. John Mayhew is very kindly using it in a course on linguistics and literature. He is having students keep journals and respond to it. A number of women have responded very positively to the pieces on gender, and I have had a number of people express their enjoyment with the written conversations. Readers seem to hear me say that we don’t have the answers but keeping conversations open to possibility instead of certainty is important.

Literature for Democracy: Reading as a Social Act, Gordon M. Pradl, Heinemann Boyton/Cook, 1996. ☐

Educational Change: Focus of NYC Conference

by Sharon Sheleton-Colangelo

Jersey City State College

“Can education change society?” This was the focus of a conference on “critical teaching, popular and folk education, and social change,” sponsored by the Learning Alliance, a non-profit educational and social action organization in New York City on Feb. 15.

The opening session, “How Can Critical Teachers and Educational Activists Change Society,” was moderated by Ira Shor and included panelists Maxine Greene, the Center for Social Imagination; Norman Fruchter, the Institute for Education and Social Policy; Galen Kirkland, Advocates for Children; and Emma Gonzales and Tom Roderick, Educators for Social Responsibility.

A later session brought together panelists Alan Farth, the Audubon Expedition Institute; Chris Spier and Judy Lucan, Folk Education Association of America; Rudy Paiva, St. Paul’s Community Development Corp.; Shulamith Koenig; Chris Cavanaugh, North American Alliance for Popular and Adult Education; and Jose La Luz, AFSME.

Maxine Greene stressed that, in the current climate of political centristm, it is important for teachers to enable students to envision what is possible and to counter the tendency to “accede to forces you can’t name.” Greene’s address sparked an in-depth discussion on the role of imagination in contesting habitual boundaries and bringing progressive changes in both society and the arts. Both panelists and participants concluded that not only can education change, but it must change society in a progressive direction.

Subsequent workshops focused on bringing about educational change through collective organizing. The group vowed to continue to working together through groups such as Teachers Talking on Teaching, a discussion/action group that is being organized to meet one weekend a month at the Learning Alliance. For more information or to be put on the mailing list, contact Cindy Petries by e-mail at petriess@morgan.com or by phone at (718) 601-0076 or (212) 762-2659. ☐

Raising Consciousness  
Continued from page 4

in each of the circles. The remaining panelists greeted participants as they entered and invited them to join a circle. As the two large circles filled, a third circle was formed. Groups began informal conversations as I monitored the time and size of the circles. Five minutes into the start of the session, I interrupted the groups to introduce the panel members and set the direction for the session. We asked participants and panelists to share stories about assessment experiences from the perspectives of teachers, students, administrators, and parents. Our goal was to raise consciousness about assessment issues.

After my brief introduction, each circle’s participants and panelists proceeded to share stories and raise questions about assessment across all levels of education. The panelists experienced many memorable moments, but two will remain with us for quite some time to come. First, we were all delighted to hear Daniel’s voice as he actively participated, sharing stories and his own assessment artifacts, commenting thoughtfully on his teacher’s feedback. Second, we watched one participant with fascination. She entered the room and sat outside one of the circles, emphatically insisting, “I just want to listen.” We noticed, however, that she gradually changed her body position, sitting up quite straight, easing forward to the edge of her seat, leaning an arm on the back of a chair in the circle. Eventually she joined the group, telling a story and interacting in a way that suggested she “couldn’t keep quiet any longer!”

The session ended all too quickly but not before we handed out information about LEARN and FAIRTEST. I also received an invitation to present at another conference. So, LEARN members, start packing your bags again!

Note: Any LEARN members interested in participating on another conference panel should contact Kathleen F. Malu, co-chair of the publications and research work party ASAP at 75 Park Terrace East, D-84, New York, NY 10034, phone (212)567-3798. ☐

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME!

Membership includes notices of semi-annual conferences and business meetings, notices of monthly dinners, admission and voting participation at meetings and a year’s subscription to the newsletter.

Dues are $10, $25 or $100. The middle fee represents our approximate costs. The lower fee has a scholarship built in. The higher fee helps us supports others. Contributions to the LEARN scholarships are also welcome. We ask members to pay as much as they can.

Checks are payable to: LEARN, Inc., P.O. Box 8103, FDR Station, NY, NY 10150-1917.
New Technology
Continued from page 3

is often taken in inner-city and poorer schools that tend to be under-funded and overcrowded. Their approach originates from the distribution of equipment that is inadequate to begin with, both in terms of numbers and quality. The equipment rarely is provided as part of any plan and usually is not supported by trained staff. The overworked teachers, accustomed to coping in such schools, often are resistant to the new technology, viewing it cynically as added work and disruption without offering any teaching paybacks. In these schools, the underlying assumption is often that technology will be used to deliver pre-packaged curriculum, in the form of commercial educational software.

Inadequate funds, numbers of computers with staff to support them and to familiarize teachers with the technology, and so on, are the obvious sources of inequality for working-class and inner-city schools with regard to technology. However, Apple notes that even when equipment is available, it is used in ways which perpetuate class divisions. In more privileged schools, "programming skills, generalizability, a sense of the multitudinous things one can do with a computer" are stressed, while in working-class schools, computers are used for "rote, mechanistic and relatively low-level" activities that stress drill, practice and "vocational application."

The class difference in the way technology was used in the schools that Apple observed in the mid-1980s has become sharpened and institutionalized today in my view. In more privileged schools, a computer network is put into place that can empower teachers and students to pursue open-ended inquiries. They can create their own on-going collaborative projects and access resources within the schools and out on the Internet as the need arises from within the classroom.

By contrast, I found in working-class schools that software vendors and other corporate interests are able to set up an environment that predetermines everything that can be accessed by the computer by controlling what software can be installed, by setting up security programs such as AtEase or Windows95 shell scripts, and blocking or censoring Internet access. From a broad social perspective, the delivery of pre-packaged curriculum is seen as the goal for working class schools, and the use of the computer network to foster, preserve and present student or teacher writing or multimedia presentations is reserved for those charged with decision-making in the society. Often even saving files or printing is discouraged, leaving both teachers and students with the impression that they're unwanted visitors in their own school's computer lab.

Although the highly controlled use of technology in poorer schools originates from poorer resources, the unequal ways these schools are mandated to use the available technology reflects on the policy level in a regressive, classist policy which can be changed. The technology itself is only a tool and our job as educators is to decide what task we want this tool to undertake. Rather than resist the use of new technology, educators who believe in constructivist learning should take the lead in using it as a tool for collaborative open-ended learning for all students. School networks are sprouting up all over. Do we want these new wires to carry an active learning dialogue or will we let it be used by corporations to pipe their canned curriculum to our students?

Writing-to-Learn Project
Continued from page 3

This was a successful in-class writing assignment. Most students were able to address the question and stick to the topic. Many students wrote moving compositions, describing their love for family and friends and the meaninglessness of money without the physical ability to enjoy it.

The exercise gave me an opportunity to apply what the students learned in biology to the real life effects of nervous system disorders. In the area of writing skills, I taught logical organization of a composition, the proper way to initiate an essay in response to a specific assignment, and the correct spelling of common errors.

Currently, the classes are studying the circulatory system. I welcome ideas you might have to reinforce the science content and enhance the students' writing ability.

This teacher managed to emphasize some writing skills, but the primary outcome was that students used writing to reinforce their learning of the science content.

In Writing to Learn/Learning to Write, we read that central to the idea of writing to learn is the understanding that learning is promoted this way only if the writing is perceived as purposeful by the writer. When his teacher questioned Israel Ortiz about writing in his math class, he answered, "Doing math about my life is fun. I learned to divide by taking the amount my mother gets on welfare every month and dividing it between the bills she has. She is short $152 a month."

As the program continues, teachers are moving from planning an activity that includes a learning objective, writing task, and criteria for evaluation to sharing, revising, editing, and publishing.

As the "Teacher Administrator," the most rewarding aspect has been to witness how my colleagues have begun to view students as resources with stories to tell. Students are texts full of meaning. The teachers, at some level, have recognized that students have knowledge to share.

We all learned more about the "others" we teach. The gaps created by age, race, gender, class, and culture were narrowed by activities that showed the connection between school subjects and life.

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CALENDAR

July 9
LEARN Dinner Meeting, 6:00 p.m., La Spaghettieria, 178 2nd Ave. (11th and 12th Sts.), New York City.

September 4
LEARN Dinner Meeting, 6:00 p.m., La Spaghettieria, 178 2nd Ave. (11th and 12th Sts.), New York City.

November 20-25
NCTE Annual Convention, Detroit, Michigan.

May 1997
What is L. E. A. R. N.?
Our Organizational Principles . . .

1. LEARN is a network without a hierarchy in which collective leadership and decision-making are enacted in so far as possible;
2. LEARN meetings try to enact new models of conferences with limited time for talking-at and listening-to and extended time for talking, writing, and sharing with each other;
3. All participants in LEARN continue to be encouraged to take part in the planning and decision-making processes;
4. No LEARN meeting ever ends without setting up a time and organizational processes for the next meeting, including designating the next group of conveners. Every effort should be made to include both new people as well as some of those involved in the prior meeting;
5. LEARN reaches out to all professionals concerned with language education regardless of level, specialization, or experience. While there will undoubtedly be special issues of concern primarily to teachers of freshman composition, English educators, elementary teachers, or ESL teachers, the overall purpose of LEARN is to explore commonalities among our concerns and to welcome all who would like to share our discussions of these; and
6. LEARN is an organization which is ready to act wherever we collectively feel we could have an impact on the processes of educational reform. It’s time we put our expertise as readers, writers, speakers and listeners to work on behalf of the causes we believe.

MEMBERSHIP FORM
Complete the following, detach and mail with check payable to LEARN.

Name: ____________________________________________
Home Address: ________________________________________________
Telephone Number: __________________________
Institution/Business Name: ___________________________________
Address: ________________________________________________
Telephone Number: __________________________
New Member: ☐ Renewal: ☐ Date: ☐
Where would you prefer to receive LEARN correspondence: home ☐ business ☐

A Brief History
L.E.A.R.N. (Language Educators Applying Reflection Now) is a network of language educators and administrators from all educational levels. L.E.A.R.N., a New York State Not-for-Profit Corporation, held its first annual meeting in May, 1990. L.E.A.R.N. is concerned with language education in its more comprehensive sense. At conferences and in small group meetings, members collectively address language education problems and L.E.A.R.N. publishes a newsletter and position papers on issues related to language education.
ON THE BOOKSHELF

Creating and Sustaining Democratic Classrooms

By Kathleen F. Malu
School of Education, Westchester
Pace University

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The true value of this book for me, however, is its potential to spark self reflection and change in teaching philosophy and practice. Pradl identifies one of the many possible struggles and challenges teachers face who try to construct democratic classrooms: “How might we learn to recognize and respect the perspectives of others without betraying our own interests?” After suggesting reasons why teachers might want to consider a democratic teaching approach, Pradl describes experiences and student interactions from his many years of teaching that he uses to chronicle and reflect on his own search for bringing democracy into his classroom. It is through these descriptions and Pradl’s framing of democracy within Rosenblatt’s theory of reader response that educators may begin to reflect on their own philosophy and classroom practice. Helpful, too, are the practical suggestions Pradl weaves into his stories of activities he uses to encourage himself and his students to view their responses to literature
democratically.

In preparing this review I happened to borrow a copy of the book from someone who had begun to read it. As I paged through the text, I was struck by the places that the reader starred. Here are two: "...open acts of reading, which involve readers staying with texts no matter where they might lead, help induce teachers and students to work in concert with each other" (p. 28). "This is the lesson learned by too many students, that acting intelligently and being a "good" student usually represent divergent paths. Thus they work hard at playing the game of school, instead of being fearless seekers of learning and knowledge" (p. 56). "Playing the game" is not the way I want to work with my students! I want them to be "fearless seekers of learning and knowledge." This is difficult work. How do I proceed? Pradl offers several practical classroom teaching approaches that address this question and others like it.

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Pradl continues with a story from his own past when his "thinking was out
of line.” His diverse ethnic heritage gives him reason to “think out of line” as he is “schooled” in the American revolution. It was while reading his story that I wrote in my journal, “Pradl’s personal stories are invitations. Can I invite him into my classroom? He has certainly let me enter his … I think I am striving towards a democratic classroom— but am I, really?” It’s a delicate, complex proposal Pradl is making: Give up our authority as teachers for a democratic approach that values fairness and trust. Listen to our students. Let our work begin with an dfocus on them.

Pradl’s weaving of personal reflections and stories with the philosophical stance of promoting democracy in the classroom through the reading of literature makes this a text that is well worth reading and reflecting on for quite a while to come.

An Interview with the author: Gordon Pradl

1. Was there any event that triggered your decision to write “Literature for Democracy”?

I saw this as an opportunity to correct our understanding of Louise Rosenblatt’s theory. I also wanted to return to my dissertation in which I had looked at the idea of democracy and studying English in an ethical context.

2. When you feel yourself getting stuck in your teaching, do you say anything to yourself or try to remember to do or say something to get you and your students back on track?
First of all, there are no right answers here. These are ongoing dilemmas. But the principle is that once you get the "garbage out of the way," you want to try to learn from what your students are doing and saying by trying to listen to them.

3. Your book suggests powerful ways to change our teaching. But what of the students and administrators who resist this or don’t know how to interpret it? How can we help them navigate through and appreciate this work of democracy? Once again, there are no easy answers. One concern is not to demonize the students or administrators. Avoid an us versus them. When we get into arguments, we can talk till we’re blue in the face but what we need to look for are the open parts. Two things I think we can count on are people’s good will and their concrete experiential behavior so as long as we can continue working, say for example with students. If they can actually continue to engage in class activities that promote democracy then those experiences may add up to a critical mass and we can have change even without the rhetoric.

4. Have you a postscript to add--any particularly interesting responses to your work?

My sister, who is outside of academe, read the book and gave a copy to a friend. John Mayher is very kindly using it in a course on linguistics and literature. He is having students keep journals and respond to it. A number of women have responded very positively to the pieces on gender and I have had a number of people express their enjoyment with the written conversations. Readers seem to
hear me say that we don’t have the answers but keeping conversations open to possibility instead of certainty is important.

Of Special Note

The IFTE New York Conference proceedings are now posted on the Internet. Please access the site and send in any information you can that will fill in the missing gaps and update the postings!

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