
January 1994

A Writer Speaks To MRA Members About Writing

Ken Krause

Robert L. Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation

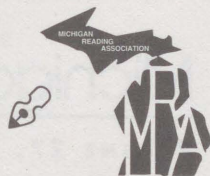
Krause, Ken and Smith, Robert L. (1994) "A Writer Speaks To MRA Members About Writing," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol27/iss2/2>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

A Writer Speaks To MRA Members About Writing

BY **KEN KRAUSE** WITH **ROBERT L. SMITH**



Ken Krause (pictured below) recently moved from his secondary English classroom in Howell, Michigan, to a principal's office in Jonesville, Michigan. Though many aspects of Ken's daily life changed, one thing that remained constant was his interest in writing. In recent years, Ken has been one of the Michigan Reading Journal's most published practitioners. Some of his recent articles are listed in Figure One.

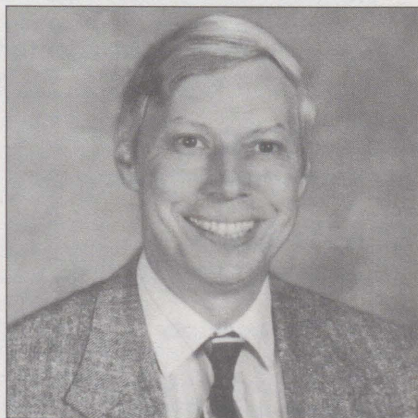
Ken's writing receives high regard. On more than one occasion, Ken's MRJ writing has been reprinted by a second journal. When Ken spoke about profes-

sional writing to teachers at last year's MRA conference, it was clear that the audience admired his work. The International Reading Association has called upon Ken to review articles submitted for publication. Ken has been an editor for MRA as well, preparing a themed issue of the journal, publishing an anthology of pieces about secondary reading, and coordinating the authoring of MRA position statements. In the following invited monologue, Ken discussed a few aspects of his writing experience.

RLS

Several different reasons cause me to write for the *Michigan Reading Journal*. Primarily, it's when I discover some things, especially with kids, that I think work particularly well, which I'd like to share with some other people. The writing can expand some of my knowledge and skill and at the same time make the staff development opportunity available to some other people who would be interested in reading about it.

As I'm preparing to teach a lesson and while working with students during the lesson, inspiration often hits me. When it does, I want to get the idea down. Sometimes, an idea hits late at night, so I'll literally get up, and I'll write it down. I need to get a draft done on the word processor before it slips out of mind. I remember I was trying A, B, or Incomplete grading in my classroom; the semester was partway through, and the system was working. I said to myself, "You know, I want to write something on



this now, before it might slip away. Maybe the system won't work, and then I won't want to do anything with it." So that was really the motivation to write the first of my two articles on A, B, I grading. When it did work out so well at the end of the year, I wrote that second follow-up piece because I felt that that brought closure and let people who read the first article know that the grading

method could be used successfully. If I had known how it was going to work, if I had the foresight, or foreknowledge, I probably would have written one article and just combined everything. It would make more sense probably to have the research go right along with the approach that I took, but I think it also worked well as two pieces in that it called A, B, I grading to readers' attention twice.

I always have my audience in mind. When I wrote the initial A, B, I article, I was thinking about classroom teachers and how they could adapt the idea; that's why I included a letter the teacher could copy or adapt and then simply send home. I thought of the format that I used and gave to students and their parents to explain what the class was about and concisely described the system. If teachers read and like an idea, they're more likely to implement an idea that they can simply change a bit rather than reinvent the wheel. I wrote an article for administrators, a couple of years ago, and I had in mind what my principal looked like as she came in to do observations and as we conferenced afterwards. When I wanted to address the ideas I thought principals know about reading programs, I had her in mind, and I actually thought about things that she didn't do that I thought she should do to make her input to my professional development more meaningful. So, I do try to have, if

not a group of people, a particular person in mind as I compose.

I do a number of different things, depending on when I write the article. For those that I've written during the school year, after I write a draft, I ask colleagues to read it. When I taught in Howell, two people were particularly good peer reviewers: one was an English teacher that I was good friends with, and the other was a media specialist. I would always ask them to react to the articles and to comment, of course, on the content and to check for stylistic or grammatical errors. They always gave me meaningful feedback. I would usually implement their suggestions; but it's my article not the reviewers' so I make the decisions about what I really want to include.

When I wrote the article on the future of secondary level reading, I was teaching an American literature class. I gave a draft of it to the students in the class. I asked them to think about what they thought the future of education is going to be in another 20 or 30 years. What changes did they think were going to happen? I had predicted some things in my article: Did they think that these predictions were reasonable changes to expect? I actually asked a class to take my draft home and read it. In about a week, I collected it back and got some thoughtful feedback. Two girls who really poured through the whole draft had

Figure One
MRJ Articles of Ken Krause

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Title</i>
Fall 1988	Illiteracy in Michigan: Will an Employability Skills Assessment Help Reduce It?
Winter 1991	The Future of Secondary Level Reading
Fall/Winter 1992	Using A, B, I Grading to Improve Student Achievement
Winter 1993	A, B, I Grading: A Success Story
Fall 1993	Creating Meaningful Exams

some suggestions that I incorporated. When I got that feedback, the students looked at it; I let them know that they had really served a valuable role in my process of composing the article. And then when it eventually was printed, I distributed copies to the students, and said, "See, you actually had a part in the writing process!" I talked about the similarity between the way I used the writing process and how we use it in class. I wanted them to know that people in my profession use it. I think it brought home the lesson to the students and also helped me to write a better article.

If I solicited articles, as I did for one MRA publication, I'd look for clarity of expression to make sure that it would make sense to the average journal reader. If there's a need for support in terms of research, I'd want that kind of documentation and a bibliography. I'd look for the kind of development such as some activities or examples, so it becomes not only something that explains but presents the teacher with some ideas for application. I'd look for a sense of completeness. Given what we know at the time about the subject, from my removed position as an editor, I'd look for anything else that needed to be addressed as a part of the article. Those would be some of the major areas that I would look for, and depending on what the publication is, stylistically I might encourage the person to change a few things so it's compatible with the other pieces that are in a document.

There's a certain personal pride that I take in the pieces that I publish. I enjoy seeing my ideas in print. I know when my articles come out that I read through them, and it's interesting because I think about the kind of things I might change if I wrote the same article a second time. Many times when I read my articles, I say, "Yeah, that's something that I'm really glad I shared." When I get phone calls and letters from people who say, "I

read your article, and had a couple of questions about how you would handle a particular situation," I feel honored that they're going to call on me to share some more ideas.

I've had contacts from educators in school districts who are interested in having me talk to their staff as a result of an article. For example, after writing on A, B, and I grading, I was at a basketball game at a high school north of my district. As I was talking to the school's principal, he said, "You know, I just read your article. Would you be willing to come out and talk to my staff about grading?" I felt pleased by the fact that somebody was reading what I wrote. Also, I felt good later about sharing the strategy, the work, and hopefully helping the teachers to help their students to improve their learning.

With the second A, B, and I article, I received my journal through the mail, the same day as a Board of Education meeting in Jonesville. I wanted to give a few copies to the superintendent at the meeting, so I had duplicated those. By coincidence, one of the parents raised a question about whether the school district was going to establish a policy that would require teachers to use A, B, I grading. She wondered whether the teachers were knowledgeable enough about it. Her raising that concern at the board meeting got the board members talking. I told them I hadn't planned to do this; but since it came up, I just happened to have some extra copies of this article; and I passed them around! Professional writing can build support even with a board of education.

As I encourage students and other people to write, I point out that they have a lot of reasons for writing, and part of it is personal. There's a part of you that needs to get an idea out—to express yourself. When you feel the need, it is time to start writing!