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Educating for Equity: Editorial Remarks

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As 2018 draws to a close, we offer our latest issue of *Middle Grades Review*. Mindful of the many increasing disparities in access to quality education, we feel a heightened commitment to broadening the discourse of middle grades education. This issue presents a range of articles that invite readers to consider how schools can serve all students both equitably and well. The first three pieces investigate how issues of race, ethnicity and sexual identity play out in middle school contexts. The next considers how collaborative school change can be championed for the purposes of addressing content-specific curricular inequities. And the final piece presents insight into preparing teachers for this challenging yet crucial work.

We open this issue with “A Critical Exploratory Analysis of Black Girls’ Achievement in 8th Grade U.S. History.” In it, researchers Young, Foster and Druery employ a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine Black girls’ achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress from a strength-based and growth-focused perspective. Noting that between-group analyses can obstruct the identification of within-group content specific strengths and weaknesses, Young and colleagues demonstrate the utility of single-group analyses. The results of the study indicate that, while Black girls face challenges in middle grades social studies, they also demonstrate areas of strength that can be built upon powerfully. Noting parents, teachers, and the curriculum as the most explanatory social agency factors, Young and colleagues conclude their piece by identifying compelling actions that parents and educators alike can take to support Black girls’ achievement.

Martinez continues the focus on young adolescents of color as he investigates issues of masculinity and school engagement in “The Education of Escobar Cruz: Sports, Identity, and Masculinity in Middle School.” Through his 16-month ethnographic study, this researcher explored the experiences of a Chicano/Latino middle school male as he made his way through

the seventh and eighth grades. This research demonstrates how some students of color straddle boundaries, having to choose between listening to a (often White) teacher and following the lead of their peers and coaches. As he proposes implications for practice, Martinez calls on educators to “identify ways to support young men of color during this critical developmental stage,” including showing “students that their academic performance does not conflict with their culture” (p.11)

Next, in “Southern Disclosure: One Southern-and-Queer Middle School Teacher’s Narrative,” researchers Coker and Cain consider the role of teachers’ identities in cultivating school cultures that are receptive to LGBTQ+ adolescents. Employing narrative inquiry, Coker and Cain share the autoethnographical account of one queer-identified teacher’s journey of disclosure in the Southern United States. The piece makes the case that “the unique cultural space of the South sets the stage for both silence and empathy” (p.7) and powerfully depicts how school-based policies pertaining to queer personnel have the potential to damage not only an educator but also relationships between an educator and all students. The narratives illustrate how school cultures that support adults being “out” can enable middle school students who are LGBTQ+, or have loved ones who are LGBTQ+, also to find sources of support.

Creating school cultures that are healthy and supportive for all is far from easy. On the contrary, school change is complex and requires long-term collaboration, especially when equity is a goal. Cadieux Boulden and her colleagues describe this complexity in the fourth article of this issue, “Computational Thinking Integration into Middle Grades Science Classrooms.” They detail their learning as a university-based research team collaborating with middle school educators to embed computational thinking practices into science classrooms. Noting that “prior practice has been to offer these learning experiences outside of mainstream curricula where only a subset of students has access” (p.1), these authors remind readers that such practices

are essential for increasing equity for middle grades learners. This narrative of joint work reveals both the barriers they encountered and the insights they gained, offering lessons for others involved in collaborative innovations within formal school structures.

This issue of *Middle Grades Review* concludes with a practitioner perspective reminding us of how challenging it can be to become a middle grades teacher. Marlatt's "Walking the Talk: Promoting Middle School Philosophy by Embracing Student Voices" offers the tale of a preservice teacher in the midst of learning boundaries; grappling with the theory to practice nexus; and negotiating complex relationships with students and cooperating teachers. In his work as a teacher educator observing this candidate, Marlatt "implored her not to concede her own philosophies for the sake of compliance." These words seem both wise and apt for all of us as we wrap up 2018. On behalf of *Middle Grades Review's* editorial community, we wish you a healthy, happy and productive new year.