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From the Editors...

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From the Editors...

by **Laura Gabrion, Rui Niu-Cooper, Leah van Belle, and Jenelle Williams**

Dear Readers,

We are experiencing an historical moment when educators are under a microscope—hyper-analyzed and criticized from so many directions for the content we are teaching, books we are using, and instructional approaches we are leveraging. A national debate wages about what constitutes “appropriate” curriculum and reading lists. The resulting public dialogue can feel like it seeks to disempower educators; however, the Michigan Reading Association was established *by* literacy educators as an organization *for* literacy educators. Key to MRA’s mission is supporting the empowerment of literacy educators through a strong community.

The goal of the *MRJ* is to capture the literacy expertise from diverse perspectives to support and empower educators in Michigan and beyond. The editorial team has named four themes of empowerment to carry across all issues of the 2023-24 academic year: literacy as community, agency, liberation, and joy.

Literacy as Community: In what ways are you building community in your literacy context? What approaches have been successful at bringing students and educators together despite the challenges of the past several years? What new fields of research elevate the need for community as part of literacy education?

Literacy as Agency: Agency implies a sense of direction and control over one’s life and actions. In what ways are educators intentionally building upon students’ sense of agency in literacy classrooms and settings? What barriers might exist in developing educator agency, and how are we working to address those barriers?

Literacy as Liberation: We lift critical literacy as central to the work of education for equity and liberation in a diverse, democratic society. In what ways can we use literacy to dismantle oppression? How are you amplifying students’ and literacy educators’ voices despite outside pressures?

Literacy as Joy: “Joy is an act of resistance,” Michigan poet and educator Toi Dericotte reminds us. In what ways are you prioritizing joy in your school settings? For yourself as an educator? How can a commitment to joy sustain us during contentious times?

In this issue, we showcase a variety of different authors, and we encourage you to consider connections to literacy as community, agency, liberation, and joy as you read.



Dr. Laura Gabrion



**Dr. Rui
Niu-Cooper**



Dr. Leah van Belle



**Jenelle Williams,
Ed.S.**

Bridging Research to Practice

In “Modern vs. Traditional: Comparing Reading-Level and Strategy-Based Small Groups in Primary Grades,” Jenna Andriakos and Abigail Tosch detail their recent study designed to determine which Tier 2 instructional method was more beneficial for students’ comprehension growth. Aaron M. Johnson, in “Toward an Integrated Theoretical Approach of Literacy for Black Boys,” compels educators to consider the complex identities of Black boys as they design instruction. Derrick A. Nero and Kathleen Everts Danielson’s “Exploring Science and Engineering Practices in Children’s Picture Books” features an annotated bibliography of children’s books that illustrate engineering concepts tied to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Science and Engineering Practice. In “Case Study of an SEL Coach and Instructional Specialist: Understanding a New Role,” Rachele S. Savitz and Jacy Ippolito, using a literacy coaching framework, illustrate the myriad roles of an SEL instructional specialist/coaching and provide implications for future research, policies, and practices.

Voices from the Region

In “Leveraging Student Voice and Technology within an 8th-Grade Literacy Community,” Shavonne (Shevy) Jacobson shares reflections from educators and students piloting the Michigan Middle School Reading and Writing Informational unit which aims to center deep learning through student voice, choice, and inquiry to create a robust community of practice.

Critical Issues

Deniz Gokcora and Raymond Oenbring offer “Restructuring a Developmental ESL Course at an Urban Community College: Asking the Right Questions,” which describes the revision of an ESL developmental writing course to include an explicit focus on critical race pedagogy and social justice topics. In “‘The Reading Wars’ Are Back: What Are the Implications for Adolescent Literacy?” Jenelle Williams unpacks the current political and educational debates around the Science of Reading, Simple View of Reading, and Active View of Reading, with considerations for adolescent literacy teaching and learning.

#BookJoy

Books reviewed in this issue center community—one of the journal’s four year-long themes. As we begin a new school year, welcome students into classrooms, connect with families, and welcome new teachers to the profession, building community is at the heart of creating inclusive, agentic, joyful spaces to learn and grow. Our team of book reviewers brings their diverse perspectives and #BookJoy to share outstanding books that speak to “community” for children, young adults, and educators engaged in professional learning. We also share reviews of books for educator’s own #BookJoy because reading is a powerful act of self-care.

One of our goals as an editorial team is to continue growing the diversity of voices and experiences in the journal, and we hope to increase representation across the regions of our state and beyond. As such, we are committed to supporting literacy educators as writers through constructive, focused feedback and creating opportunities for first-time and seasoned authors alike.

In this first year as an editorial board, we are grateful to our authors and to the many people who work behind the scenes, especially Susan Harring, Jackie Rander, and Kelly Kunaniec. We are so fortunate that through these efforts, *MRJ* continues to be an open and accessible journal available to a global audience on Scholarworks at scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj.

Sincerely,

Laura Gabrion, Rui Niu-Cooper, Leah van Belle, and Jenelle Williams

Co-Editors, *Michigan Reading Journal*

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