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Editors' Message

Nancy DeFrance
Grand Valley State University

Nancy Patterson
Grand Valley State University

Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle
Grand Valley State University

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Editors' Message

There's an ice cream sundae on the cover of a journal about the English language arts and you may find that a bit perplexing. But, as with most perplexities, there is a reason we chose this image for our inaugural issue.

Ice cream and literacy shared a sidewalk this summer in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

It was one of those steamy Michigan evenings when the temperature hovered in the 90's, and the humidity clung like a second, unwelcomed skin. And even on a busy urban corner, you could hear the cicadas thrum. It was Jason's birthday and his mother had given him three choices. He could go to a pizza place and play games. He could visit a neighborhood pool. Or, he could get ice cream and listen to the next installment of *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. Jason chose *Hatchet*. He was one of a half dozen upper elementary students who, along with as many as 300 other children ranging in age from 6 weeks to 12 years, showed up at the corner of Alger and Eastern in Grand Rapids to participate in Story Time at Sundaes. Through a grant from Grand Valley State University's (GVSU) College of Education, Barbara Lubic, a GVSU professor, helped neighborhood children connect to books. Every Tuesday evening throughout the summer Barb, along with student and faculty volunteers, handed out free books and ice cream to children in front of a neighborhood ice cream parlor. In partnership with Sundaes in the Heights, the volunteers offered children their choice of a book from a table laden with books and a coupon for any ice cream treat on the menu. Each week Barb brought hundreds of books purchased with grant money and, eventually, cash donations. Volunteers read aloud to the various age groups. One week a GVSU football player who is an elementary education major read to the 5-8 year olds. Perched on a small chair and towering over the children seated cross-legged around him, he voiced the characters in a picture book and held his audience's delighted attention. Twenty feet away Jason and the other 8-12 year olds lived Brian Robeson's summer in the Canadian wilderness, the sole survivor of an airplane crash, and wondered how they would survive with

just a hatchet. And behind the book table other football players helped children and their parents select books. Every Tuesday night the sound of traffic at the busy intersection mingled with the laughter and squeals of children delighting in their new books.

Story Time at Sundaes was a wonderful example of a simple truth. All you need is books. Frank Smith argues that we tend to over-complicate the teaching of reading in schools. Stephen Krashen urges teachers and policy makers to recognize that the most important component in helping children lead literate lives is access to books. Barb Lubic's simple concept of providing books and ice cream to any child accompanied by an adult was nothing short of genius. There were no quizzes, no fluency measures, no matching reading levels to books, no book report. It was just children, books, and ice cream. And it all came together every single week, even when the heat sapped everyone's energy. The lines of children and adults snaked down the street, but there were no cross words, no impatience. There were lots of children clutching books. And something else happened. A community of urban strangers discovered neighbors they didn't know. They greeted each other each week as they patiently stood in line to sign in or register. They chatted as they watched their children labor over the books trying to find just the right one. Cars idled at the intersection. Dogs on leashes lapped at ice cream cone casualties on the sidewalk. Everywhere there was the happy commotion of literacy.

Some of the multitude of children who attended each week began their literacy journey on this busy street corner. For others, the journey continued here in earnest.

And, so, we put an ice cream sundae on the cover of this, our inaugural issue as editors of *LAJM*, to celebrate the journeys of our literate lives. For us – Nancy Patterson, Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle, and Nancy DeFrance – the journey has led to an enviable opportunity to enrich the literate lives of MCTE members through our editorship of *LAJM*. We are all professors in the Literacy Studies Program at Grand Valley State University and we are looking forward to serving in our new roles.

At the heart (literally) of our issue are five literacy narratives. Four are written by pre-service teachers on the brink of their careers. Some of these narratives may evoke enjoyable memories of your own adventures with books and the loved ones with whom you shared those inspired times. However, two of these stories will probably not warm teachers' hearts. For these authors, school literacy events, many times at the middle and high school levels, were disconnected from their lives and involved odious and unsatisfying tasks. These soon-to-be teachers never felt successful. Their love of reading and writing died early, almost always because school literacy experiences strangled that love.

Fortunately, many of our other authors demonstrate a keen awareness of the ways in which school literacy events often determine the literacy fate of so many students. In their contributions they reflect upon their own growing awareness of the ways in which they can support and inspire their own students to lead literate lives. Erin Bentley may have had the authors of our unhappy literacy narratives in her high school English class. She reports that she realized with dismay that her students' discussions around ideas in books quickly deteriorated from animated to anemic as soon as she assigned the first analytical writing task. Bentley shares with us some examples of the creative thinking in response to books that her students produced when offered a multi-genre project as an alternative to the traditional analytical essay. Melissa Brooks-Yip and Jacqueline Koonce offer additional recommendations for practices that support struggling adolescent readers. And Nancy Joseph hones in on a particularly critical skill - metacognitive awareness, as demonstrated in the reflection on reading and thinking that enables students to resolve the difficulties they experience as learners.

Lisa Domke began her journey as a pre-service teacher by tutoring children of migrant workers. Subsequently, she taught Spanish-speaking English Language Learners, then native English speakers in a Spanish immersion program at the elementary level. Domke thoughtfully contrasts her experiences in teaching these two groups and then weaves her insights with current research to offer recommendations for supporting language and literacy in Spanish and English.

John Klein, principal of the Washington Writer's Academy in Kalamazoo, MI, wants to encourage teachers like Lisa Domke. In order to do so, Klein enrolled in the Third Coast Writing Project's Invitational Summer Institute at Western Michigan University. He found that he, too, had much to offer as a writer. Here he offers nine principles for principals who want to enable their teachers to teach writing well.

Markisha Webster-Smith works with a group of pre-service teachers who need to be convinced that literacy

plays a crucial role in their own lives - before they can see how they play a critical role in shaping the literate lives of their own students. She describes herself as a saleswoman; her job is to convince "math, science, art, PE, music, and industrial tech majors that literacy must be an important part of their lesson planning, teaching, and student outcomes." Teachers must assure that students can use appropriate literacy skills for both academic and social situations. If you are reading this journal, you probably do not need Webster-Brown's sales pitch, but we still think you will find her argument compelling.

Finally, Kia Richmond, president of MCTE, brings this issue of *LAJM* to a close with a call to action that resonates with our theme: leading literate lives. In her President's Message, Kia presents a variety of opportunities to enrich our own literate lives and those of our students by engaging in professional development through MCTE and NCTE. We look forward to seeing you at the MCTE and NCTE conferences this fall.

So, make yourself an ice cream sundae and relax and enjoy this issue of *LAJM*, which celebrates literate lives and offers suggestions on how we can help students joyously experience that journey.

Nancy DeFrance is an assistant professor in the Reading/Language Arts Program at Grand Valley State University. She is also a speech-language pathologist. Dr. DeFrance's research interests include facilitating struggling readers' interaction with text as well as teaching teachers to facilitate learners' comprehension of text.

Nancy Patterson is an Associate Professor in the Reading/Language Arts Program at Grand Valley State University. She was a high school and middle school English teacher for 29 years. She currently serves on NCTE's Executive Committee as Chair of the Middle Level Section.

Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle is an assistant professor of Reading/Language Arts Education at Grand Valley State University. As a former English Language Arts teacher in Illinois, she directly connects her research to student learning and teacher education, specifically focusing on teachers' use of new literacies in the classroom and critical literacy.