
October 2013

Letter from Leah: Diverse Perspectives and Voices

Leah van Belle

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

Recommended Citation

van Belle, Leah (2013) "Letter from Leah: Diverse Perspectives and Voices," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 46 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol46/iss1/2>

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.

Letter from Leah: Diverse Perspectives and Voices

by Leah van Belle



Evergreen trees for miles, the night sky shockingly clear and sparkling without the interference of city lights, and waters so deep they stayed icy cold even in the hottest days of August. These are a few memories that stand out from the idyllic summer I spent several years ago in the Keweenaw Peninsula. It was secluded and beautiful, and the people there were among the friendliest I've met. I worked on research and writing that summer, but when the summer ended and fall's crispness returned to the air, it was time to drive back to Ann Arbor. I told a non-Michiganian friend that the drive home took over eleven hours, and she was incredulous, "How could it take *eleven* hours to drive through Michigan?! It's not even that big!" What my friend forgot is that the Great Lakes state is not just a mitten, but is a mitten and a jumping rabbit (or a sideways upper mitten, depending on how you look at it)—and it *is* a large state. Ours is a state of great diversity in natural beauty, communities, citizens, and perspectives.

I have been thinking about this in regards to the *Michigan Reading Journal*. My goal is for the journal to share voices and perspectives from across the state because the Michigan Reading Association serves *all* of Michigan and readers beyond the borders of our state. In revisiting previous issues of the journal, I noticed that over the years *MRJ* has, albeit unintentionally, tended to privilege the voices of those in southeastern and southwestern Michigan, often in suburban school contexts. These are important voices to hear, but there are many others that are just as important. In order to expand the perspectives represented in *MRJ*, I encourage you to share your professional work with the journal. The call for manuscripts and cover photos appears at the end of each issue; there are many ways to make your voice heard, and we want to hear from you. Additionally, I have been working to ensure that the journal's editorial review board represents diverse geographic areas, educational contexts, and professional experiences. If you are interested in serving on the board, please read the call for editorial review board members, which appears in each issue. Writing reviews of books for children and young adults is another area in which you can contribute to the journal. If you would like to share your teaching practice with *MRJ*, but prefer to do so in images rather than words, I invite you to submit photos for the journal's cover; see the call for manuscripts and cover photos for details. You could also consider submitting an editorial to the journal, as Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon does in her thought-provoking piece, *It's Time to Declare War on the Reading Crisis in the State of Michigan*. The more varied the perspectives within the pages of *MRJ*, the richer the journal will be and the more we can learn from one another.

This issue presents readers with the opportunity to learn more about read alouds that move beyond story time to become contexts for helping children connect reading and writing. In another article, four classroom teachers collaboratively explore what the RTI framework means for supporting students' success, as well as questions and challenges it raises. Latisha Thomas joins the journal as the author of a new standing column on instructional coaching; in this issue she addresses the role of a coach and supporting teachers in understanding the I/We/You model for teaching reading skills and strategies. Another article in this issue shares how a classroom teacher and university professor collaborated to create developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood literacy instruction. And further examining early literacy is

a description of the impact of explicit vocabulary instruction for children in a Head Start program. Pat Gallant and Kathy Highfield bring us more insightful reviews of professional books, one of them written by Dorsey Hammond, whose ties to and contributions to literacy education in Michigan are deep and enduring. Books for children and young adults are reviewed by classroom teachers and literacy specialists. Katie Rener presents a highlight on the publishing house Barefoot Books. This issue also welcomes Laurie Kaufman as the journal's new copy editor.

Enjoy the issue and exploring new ideas and perspectives. Consider contributing your own to future issues!

Warm regards,

Leah

Leah van Belle is the Director of Graduate Programs in Literacy Education and associate professor of education at Madonna University in Livonia, MI. Dr. van Belle teaches all of her courses as field-based classes in Detroit schools. Her work as an urban education consultant and instructional coach allows her to collaborate with amazing teachers in working to close the academic opportunity and achievement gap. She earned her doctorate in education from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Email her at MRJ@MichiganReading.org and find her online at www.RethinkingTeaching.org.

Laurie Kaufman worked at Madonna University for the past 16 years as a professor of literacy, where she taught undergraduate and graduate courses in reading and writing methods, as well as courses in diagnosis and corrections of reading difficulties. For the last five years, she served as Director of Graduate Studies in Literacy Education. She has recently retired from that position and currently teaches part time at Madonna.

About the Cover Fall 2013

Top: Sandra Valentine and a young author sit down for a writing conference

Bottom, clockwise from left: Using an iPad to research for nonfiction writing at University Preparatory Academy (UPA), Detroit, Michigan; getting lost in a book in Rachelle Torres' classroom in Farmington Public Schools; an after-school writing club with undergraduate teacher education candidates from Madonna University and students from UPA.