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# Letter from Leah

BY LEAH VAN BELLE

Dear Readers,

Education is a field of inquiry, a field in which we grow professional knowledge by raising questions, exploring possibilities, gathering information, analyzing what happens in classrooms everyday, and, perhaps most importantly, reflecting on our teaching practice. We need partners in this field of inquiry; we need each other. It is my hope that as the *Michigan Reading Journal* continues to grow and evolve as a professional journal, it will continue to support Michigan Reading Association members and educators (be they classroom teachers, literacy specialists, or administrators) as we all dig into the complexity of literacy teaching and learning. *MRJ* provides a context for educators to share ideas and engage in professional dialogue through the written word. I invite you to join in this dialogue by sharing your own teaching practice and inquiries into practice with other readers, and I thank the contributors who have done so in the past.

In this issue you will find contributions by educators who teach in colleges of education alongside contributions by K-12 teachers and reading specialists, some in the role of teacher-researcher for the first time, and some sharing stories and artifacts of practice that can inspire our own teaching. This balance of perspectives is essential to building an *MRJ* that addresses the needs and interests of the MRA community. Pieces in this issue will help you explore how to evaluate your school's reading program, create family literacy bags, and lead more effective writing conferences.

Tanya Christ and Ron Cramer share their research on designing assessment-based literacy instruction. You can learn more about how fluency in handwriting impacts student composition and how secondary social studies and English language arts can be integrated in rigorous units of instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards for content area literacy. Pat Gallant and Kathy Highfield continue to bring us reviews of outstanding professional texts, and Ed Spicer weaves such engaging analyses of young adult literature that you will want to go on a mad reading binge to read every single title that appears in his column. Sharing more about wonderful books with us, Lisa Suckow highlights winners of the Great Lakes Great Books award.

This issue also welcomes Anne Morris as the founding contributor to the journal's new standing



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column on digital literacy, and Julie Kayganich joins *MRJ* as the new editorial assistant, as well as a contributing reviewer to the *Of Cabbages and Kings* children's book reviews column. Welcome to the journal, Anne and Julie, and thank you for your fine work on this issue!

Thank you to all of our contributors, and I look forward to you, readers and MRA members, sharing your professional ideas with fellow *MRJ* readers. Whether that takes the form of research or sharing your own experiences and artifacts of effective literacy instruction, join the larger dialogue and our shared commitment to growing best practices in literacy instruction in collaboration with MRA.

Warm regards,

Leah

*Leah van Belle is an associate professor of education at Madonna University in Livonia, MI. Dr. van Belle teaches all of her university 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](mailto:MRJ@MichiganReading.org).*