

February 2021

## From the Editors...

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### Recommended Citation

Block, Meghan; Borsheim-Black, Carlin; and Hicks, Troy (2021) "From the Editors...," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 53: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol53/iss2/3>

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# From the Editors...

by Meghan Block, Carlin Borsheim-Black, and Troy Hicks

At the time of publication of this issue, Michigan teachers have spent the past several months managing the unique circumstances of teaching in a pandemic. For some, this has meant beginning – and continuing – the year in a fully remote setting. For others, this has meant toggling back and forth, at home and at school, while balancing the needs of their own families. And, sadly, for still others, it has meant the loss of family members and colleagues to the devastation of COVID-19.



**Meghan Block**



**Carlin  
Borsheim-Black**



**Troy Hicks**

For the three of us and our families – as well as for you, our readers – we know that these circumstances have meant teaching and learning via screens in our home offices, or in classrooms that look much different than usual. It has also meant fewer opportunities to connect with friends and colleagues at conferences or even in the hallways and breakrooms at school. While we know that it is not a replacement for these impromptu conversations, we hope these articles offer our readers some energy, inspiration, and community in a school year when many of us may be feeling less connected to our colleagues and communities than we usually do.

To begin, our *Bridging Research to Practice* section looks at several strategies that have been established through teacher research and program evaluation. In the first article of this section, Heidi Gibbons, a teacher from Geneva Community Unit School District 304, describes how she employs Beers and Probst’s “book, head, heart” framework to help her students build empathy through their responses to literature. Then, Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson, Nazila Eisazadeh, and Andrea Liendo from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto describe their early literacy assessment tool that allows educators to evaluate the oral language and nonverbal communication skills young children use in their personal narratives.

Finally, describing a year-long professional learning program centered on the National Writing Project’s College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP), Mark Dziedzic, Bryn Orum, and Linda Denstaedt describe how they supported both English and social studies educators to introduce their students to a more complex, nuanced form of argument writing. In doing so, they moved these middle and high schoolers toward what the C3 Social Studies Framework describes as “taking informed action” and making a difference in their communities.

In our *Voices from the Region* section, we are pleased to share examples of projects that educators have implemented, working to support students in new ways in their local communities. Heather Rottermond and Laura Gabrion, consultants at Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency, examine the importance of feedback in building student- teacher relationships and ultimately supporting students’ engagement and

achievement. The authors consider the unique ways in which feedback can be delivered in remote settings and provide readers with resources and recommendations.

Then, Jennie Baumann, a doctoral student at Michigan State University, shares a lesson she and her colleagues learned about planning family literacy nights: less is more! She shares the details of a Pizza and Pages event that was popular among students and families at the charter schools where she worked as a literacy coach. In the final article of this section, “We Can Do This at Our School!” Place-based Education, Literacy, and Learning,” Erica R. Hamilton (Grand Valley State University), Janet Staal (Westside Christian School), and Jessica Vander Ark (Grand Valley State University) describe the joy that teachers partnering with the Groundswell program experience with their students in creating a school garden, a meadow for monarchs, and more. We are again pleased to bring the voice of Jenelle Williams, this time with her colleague Megan Kortlandt, both literacy coaches with Oakland Schools, who share a wealth of resources—including insight about securing grant funding—they collected as they built classroom libraries for secondary classrooms in their district. They have provided a number of links, too, mentioned in the article and available <[bit.ly/Book-Access-COVID19](https://bit.ly/Book-Access-COVID19)>.

As we move into our *Critical Issues* section, Jenelle Williams also offers an update on the work she and her team are doing with the Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in Secondary Classrooms, including an invitation to their "Deeper Dive Institute" that is continuing through the 2020-21 academic year.

In our *Must Reads* section, we bring a number of voices, including our regular contributor Lynette Suckow (Peter White Public Library, Marquette). Here, she shares reviews of Alexander and Nelson’s *The Undefeated*, Craft’s *New Kid*, Reynolds’ *Look Both Ways*, Tamaki’s *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me*, and Ribay’s *Patron Saints of Nothing*. From there, we also invite the returning voice of Annie Spear (COOR ISD) who reviews Erin Brown and Susan L’Allier’s new book, *No More Random Acts of Literacy Coaching*, a resource to support effective professional collaboration. We again welcome Dr. Raven Jones Stanbrough who reviews Bettina Love’s book *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching in the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, which merges narrative, research, history, and resources to inspire activism toward racial justice. Finally, we hear from Lisa Nienkark (Lansing Community College), who provides an impassioned review of Yamile Saied Méndez’s 2020 novel, *Furia*, a young adult novel about a Camila, an Argentinian high school student, who – throughout her story, “remains true to herself and to the warrior spirit of her female ancestors who burn inside of her.”

As a reminder, all of our current articles – and more and more of our archives – are now available on our website: <[scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj)>.

Finding ways to do the work that we have always done – and to do so in a time of remote learning – we know remains a challenge. We look forward to gathering, virtually, with many of you during MRA’s annual conference, March 12-14, 2021, with the theme of “The Power of Story” and keynote speakers Jacqueline Woodson, Lester Laminack, and Lucy Calkins. We will also have a “meet the editors” session, and we look forward to having a conversation with you, as a teacher writer, so you might also become an MRJ author and we are grateful for the work that you all do with and for your students, families, and communities, and that you have shared your voices here in MRJ.

Sincerely,

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