

June 1997

Intellectual Freedom

Michigan Reading Journal

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

Recommended Citation

Journal, Michigan Reading (1997) "Intellectual Freedom," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 30: Iss. 3, Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol30/iss3/7>

This work 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.

Intellectual Freedom



MICHIGAN READING ASSOCIATION POSITION PAPER

The world we live in is rich in diversity. It is appropriate that our classrooms reflect such diversity as they mirror the social presence.

For most of us there is beauty in diversity. We savor human difference and value opportunities to express our own individuality. As educators we tend to thrive in the midst of different opinions, views, perspectives or preferences. We recognize that the human spirit is empowered when evolving thoughts are shared. And, when personal experience is recorded for the vicarious satisfaction of others, we are better able to confront the human condition. We survey our own humanity and come to know more about the human experience in the midst of such events.

There have always been some who have presumed to define and constrain the liberty of thought, speech and inquiry. When such constraints are imposed upon educators, they block that individual's constitutional rights.

Because there have been assaults aimed at the education community's freedom to explore the world's diversity, the Michigan Reading Association (MRA) has clarified its position regarding academic and intellectual freedoms.

The following has been adopted as MRA's official position statement regarding academic and intellectual freedoms. Hopefully it will inspire all who read this statement to uncompromisingly defend the right of individuals to permit students to learn about diversity in our world.

The Michigan Reading Association supports freedom of speech, thought and inquiry as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Likewise, MRA supports literacy for all students and adults, as well as access to instructional and supplemental materials that will allow students to learn about diversity in the world. MRA supports a free, uncensored exchange of ideas, opinions, beliefs and facts.

It is the right of each student to learn about various cultures, customs, beliefs and lifestyles. MRA supports a professional obligation to provide a broad spectrum of materials that reflect a diverse world. Inherent within this obligation is the need to remain sensitive to the many voices and perspectives found

within the context of time, circumstances and literary style.

In the spirit of freedom, MRA is committed to developing literacy and critical thinking through various media. This requires an educational environment where intellectual and academic freedoms exist for both teachers and students. This environment should support:

1. Freedom to choose from a rich variety of print and non-print resources;
2. Freedom to discuss issues identified by such materials in order to provide insight on a variety of ideas and experiences;
3. Freedom to defend positions

against challenges from those with different points of view, recognizing that the development of personal values stems from multiple influences, including home, community, cultural and religious affiliations.

The selection of instructional materials and supplements must remain the responsibility of trained and knowledgeable educators in order to ensure a variety of instructional materials. MRA recommends that each school district:

1. Prepare and publish a written policy for the selection of instructional materials. This policy should be designed to:
 - support teachers as they exercise their professional discretion;
 - allow for the exploration of diverse points of view;
 - encourage input from the teachers, students, community and school board to ensure a representation of broad perspectives.
2. Prepare and publish guidelines for accepting challenges to those selections, providing a mechanism for substantive and open review.
3. Provide a system for open communication between educational, civic, political, religious and other voices within the community.
4. Provide systematic methods for

distributing the information about intellectual and academic freedoms.

In supporting the First Amendment freedom of speech, thought and inquiry, MRA recognizes that the selection and application of materials for instructional purposes does not imply endorsement or promotion of particular values or beliefs.

MRA encourages districts to stand firm in support of intellectual and academic freedoms.

Acknowledgements: *This position statement was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Michigan Reading Association in 1993, and revised in 1996 under the direction of president Ann Laurimore, and in 1997 under the direction of president JoAnn Boepple; Literacy and Intellectual Freedoms committee chair Verna Burdo; and members Jeanine Koessel, Don Potteroff, and Joseph Rivard.*

The Michigan Reading Association's Literacy and Intellectual Freedoms Committee would like to express gratitude to those who contribute to this process. We especially thank the California and Wisconsin State Reading Associations, whose ideas were helpful in the creation of this document.

©1997

These statements are the expressed opinions of the MRA Board of Directors. Single copies of this mission statement are available free upon request or may be copied without permission from MRA.

Michigan Reading Association Mission Statement

The Michigan Reading Association is a dynamic organization whose mission is to promote literacy by enabling varied communities of learners to become knowledgeable decision-makers and by providing opportunities to share common and diverse interests and beliefs.