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## Letter from the Editors

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

# “Teaching to Transgress:” Amplifying Voices, Lesson Plans, and (Classroom) Communities as Spaces for Healing and Justice

“The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom”  
(bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*).

**O**n Thursday, September 25, 1952, Gloria Jean Watkins illuminated this world with her Blackness and foreseeable excellence. Better known by her pen name, “bell hooks,” her alluring legacy still beautifully vibrates through rough drafts, essays, artwork, edited volumes, spoken word, dissertations, and diversified mediums that center literacy and creativity. And we love that for her! Furthermore, we salute hooks’ parents, Rosa Bell Watkins and Veodis Watkins, for shepherding her early years to be inclusive of identity-affirming authors, books, and scholarship that celebrated her culture and lived experiences. Like us, bell hooks was inspired by thinkers. Educators. Poets. Scholars. And other writers, like Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, and Toni Morrison. Committed to exploring issues of race, class, gender, and intersectionality, hooks was also a champion of children and youth. Her passion for education and teaching led to the culmination of dozens of published books, public lectures, and features in documentaries and films. When coming together to compose the call for proposals for this issue, “Teaching to Transgress:” Amplifying Voices, Lesson Plans, and (Classroom) Communities as Spaces for Healing and Justice,” we sought to honor hooks, our beloved ancestor, for her activism and brilliance through the cognition of artists, students, teachers, educators, and community activists.

The reimagining of how to create more socially just classrooms for students is in this *Language Arts Journal of Michigan (LAJM)* issue. Examples of linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020) are in this issue. Acts of LOVE and JOY are in this issue. Our promise and possibility of forging a space for knowledge sharing and action (Jones, Upthegrove Gregory, & Sánchez, 2023) is in this issue. The speaking out of antiracist practices committed against marginalized people and communities are in this issue. The affirming of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color identities is in this issue. Specifically, we invited manuscripts that addressed the following questions:

- How do educators represent and amplify diverse voices across disciplines and differences, including those from marginalized communities, and systems of inequality, inclusive of ethnicity, race, language, class, gender, sexuality status, and other categories of difference?
- Describe how educators can partner with local stakeholders (i.e., organizations, community colleges, post-secondary institutions, etc.) to advance community-wide literacy and ELA collaborations? How can these collaborations deepen literacy instruction, learning, and partnering with joy?
- How are students, parents, and teachers engaging with mental health and wellness resources? How might traumatic events (i.e., COVID-19 loss, mass school shootings, family displacement, etc.) impact teaching and learning? Why is this important to unpack?

- What considerations and resources should administrators, superintendents, and other educators seek to support teachers from experiencing burn-out and leaving the profession? What tensions exist that highlight this decision-making?
- In what ways are teachers and other educators using literacy to center racial equity and social justice frameworks in their classrooms? Schools? Professional development trainings?

Through this LAJM issue and with the ongoing support of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, (MCTE), we continue to uphold the journal’s rich legacy of centering scholarship and research inclusive of English language arts methods, literacy, classroom research, K-12 practice, literary criticism, teacher narrative, critical pedagogy, reviews of professional or young adult literature, fiction, essays, memoir, and community engagement at all instructional levels. Likewise, best believe our co-editorship will continue to make room for voices and communities that have been historically underrepresented. Silenced. And cast aside. The pages to follow would not be possible without the inspiration and talents of every contributing artist, practitioner, reviewer, author, and community advocate. THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! We see you and we stand with you! We invite everyone to lean all the way into this issue, beginning with the revolutionary artwork by Saginaw native, and 3rd year College for Creative Studies student, Neo, whose creative mind is simply a gift to this world! His abstract genius and piece, “SPOTLIGHT,” literally brought us to tears, and reminded us that we, ourselves, are brave performers, humans, and cousins of the culture, seeking to make our ancestors proud. In keeping with hook’s liberatory vision, in her article, “hook’d on Ebonics and Black Texts: Enacting an Engaged Pedagogy in an 11th Grade ELA Classroom,” Teaira McMurtry passionately chronicles ways to authentically amplify reading instruction through engaged pedagogy that prepare students for skill-based standardized tests and beyond. Following McMurtry, Eddie Thigpen III, our educator spotlight, shares how he fosters literacy in the classroom and in the greater Saginaw community as a recording artist and producer. Next, Kim Stein, centers community literacy, debate education, and collaborative success with the Youth First Program, in “Engaging Students and Teaching Life Skills through Community Collaboration.”

**Moreover, we dedicate this issue to children all around the world! The ones we get to hug and celebrate each day. The ones who advocate for more time at recess. The ones who are navigating their multiple identities. The ones we have lost to violence and war. The ones who will not get to walk across stages at graduation. The ones who are already community organizers.**

With desires to become a farmer and an animal rescue sanctuary owner, you will smile as you learn from our student spotlight for this issue, 4th grade scholar, Madelyn (MJ). Additionally, in “Factors for Success: Supporting Black Doctoral Students,” Shondra L. Marshall, Clyde Barnett III, Quentrese Hinton, and Courtney Morris, offer a literature review that delineate various factors and challenges that impact Black doctoral students as they navigate socialization, mentoring, financial wellness, and belonging in graduate programs. Continuing with insights on why representation and Blackness matters, Zuri Hudson Stanbrough, a native Detroiter and 3rd grade student, captures the joy she experiences with washing and wearing her afro, in her short essay, “From Fear to FroTastic.” Furthering the need to create and sustain spaces for book lovers to convene and spread joy, our community spotlight recognizes Brandi Ely-Ayres, founder of “On The Same Page Book Club” for her (family) literacy advocacy in Detroit. Afterwards, Alyssa Jewell’s, “New Possibilities for ESL Classroom: Toward an Appreciation of Creative Writing,” addresses the gap between ESL and creative writing in college-level ESL writing courses and provides a model for practical implementation using approaches energized by scholar, Gloria E. Anzaldúa and educator, Felicia Rose Chavez.

Our remaining educator spotlight features Jaime Valente, an art teacher for the past 23 years, who advances equity and diversity in her teaching, and espouses the look of awe and wonder on her students’ faces when they trust their process(es) and create beautiful works of art. Promoting methods that allow secondary students to reflect on social justice issues, professors, Lindsey I. Carman Williams and Ashley S. Boyd demonstrate how in-class activities and paired texts can work together in their article, “Teaching Social Justice through Gothic Young Adult Literature.” We are also excited for our reviewer spotlight, Ayah Issa, a Ph.D. student, studying Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education, and the language practices and policies surrounding Arabic-speaking

students in U.S. public schooling. Issa’s interview captures why she enjoys reviewing for LAJM. Lastly, Carrie Mattern, Flint educator and MCTE President, reminds us in, “Wakanda: Opening the High School Classroom to Afrofuturism,” that, like the Mother of Afrofuturism, Octavia E. Butler, the lives of Black students, poets, artists, curators, and others matter when journeying through time, space, and place.

As you turn the pages of this issue, or scroll along on your iPhones, Androids, and laptops, you will also witness several artistic expressions of love from 4th grade students: Gabriel, Beatriz, Francesca, Walker, Da’Moni, Ari, Blessing, Charles, Greyson, Gabe, and MJ. We believe in love. We believe in its power to heal and comfort. We believe in love as a way of “teaching to transgress.” Moreover, we dedicate this issue to children all around the world! The ones we get to hug and celebrate each day. The ones who advocate for more time at recess. The ones who are navigating their multiple identities. The ones we have lost to violence and war. The ones who will not get to walk across stages at graduation. The ones who are already community organizers. Through each LAJM issue, we will invite you to reflect on your own humanity, and love on somebody! Because tomorrow is certainly not promised. “Look at our neighbor right now, and say, ‘Neighbor, I love you, and there’s nothing you can do about it!’” We want to thank all of you and bell hooks for the encouragement with bringing this issue to life. “It’s givin’” what it needs to give! One sentence at a time.

We love y’all,

Raven L. Jones, Tanya Upthegrove Gregory, & Alexandra M. Sánchez  
Co-Editors, Language Arts Journal of Michigan



A Detroit native and resident, Dr. Raven L. Jones is committed to teaching and empowering children and youth to speak truth to power. As an associate professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, her teaching and work examine culture, equity and the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) in schools and communities. Dr. Jones loves Scrabble, tacos, and traveling with her daughter, Zuri Hudson Stanbrough.



Born and raised in Inkster, Tanya Upthegrove Gregory is passionate about supporting communities where residents can live, learn, and thrive. She is a learning officer at the Ruth Mott Foundation in Flint and a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Education at Michigan State University. Her research focuses on Historically Black Colleges & Universities and community engagement. Tanya lives in Saginaw with her husband Kevin, and enjoys collecting stamps (postage & passport) and the golden era of Hip Hop.



Originally from Seattle, Washington, Alexandra M. Sánchez has been a Michigander since she was ten years old. Raised by grandparents who instilled a passion for social justice, Alexandra entered education to make school more liberating for children. She currently teaches third grade at East Lansing Public Schools and is in the Doctor of Educational Leadership program at Michigan State University. Alexandra lives with her husband Eric Schultz, their dog Breslin, and twin daughters, Daphne and Penelope.