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# Michigan Reading Journal

*A Journal of the  
Michigan Reading Association*

Spring 2021  
Volume 53, No. 3

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- Teaching Students to Comprehend Cause and Effect Text Structure
- Policies, Practices, People, and Places: How Elementary Preservice Teachers Learned Literacy Teaching



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- Virtual Coaching: Throughout and Beyond a Pandemic
- Grey Clouds and Silver Linings: Professional Learning for Secondary Educators during COVID-19
- Carrying the Stories of Las Mariposas: Literacy as Collective and Transformative
- MRA 2021 Conference Reflections
- To Shed Love and Light on Blackness: An Interview with Dr. Lamar Johnson



# Michigan Reading Journal

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The *Michigan Reading Journal (MRJ)*, ISSN 0047-7125, is published by the Michigan Reading Association (MRA), an intermediate council of the International Literacy Association. The *MRJ*, dedicated to the dissemination of information to improve the teaching of reading, presents articles on a wide spectrum of topics and issues in reading, language arts, and literature, pre-school through adult levels. The *MRJ* incorporates articles that address both theory and practice.

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# From the Editors...

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

As we look across the articles in this spring issue, we are struck by teachers' remarkable capacity to persevere. Educators, even in the year of pandemic teaching, continue to reflect on and improve their practice, despite the personal and professional challenges. As teachers manage the ever-changing landscape of virtual teaching, social distancing, and school openings and closings, they are continuing



**Meghan Block**



**Carlin  
Borsheim-Black**



**Troy Hicks**

to collaborate, conduct classroom research, attend virtual professional development, and read and review both young adult literature and teaching resources. Several articles feature teachers and literacy coaches who have innovated in ways that not only met challenges of the pandemic but also improved on pre-pandemic practice.

In *Bridging Research to Practice* section, we offer four articles that demonstrate this resilience in practice. First, in her article, "Connecting the Dots between Academic and Social-Emotional Learning with Literacy," Allison Phillippe (Michigan State University) offers ELA teachers possibilities for weaving social-emotional learning into everyday literacy practices, including interactive read-alouds, small group instruction, and whole class instruction. Then, in "Teaching Students to Comprehend Text Structure," Dr. Jennifer Knight (Northern Arizona University) and Dr. Angela Child (Dixie State University) share research-supported methods to effectively support children's comprehension development by teaching text structure to elementary students. From there, Dr. Chad Waldron (University of Michigan-Flint) offers insights into the experiences and contexts that support preservice teachers' knowledge of literacy instruction in his article, "Policies, Practices, People, and Places: How Elementary Preservice Teacher Learned Literacy Teaching." Finally, this section closes with Dr. Amber Meyer (Salisbury University) and Dr. Vince Genareo (Salisbury University) fill a gap in the field by sharing their findings from a content analysis of representations of upper limb differences (ULDs) in children's literature, offering recommendations teachers can use as they search for texts for their classrooms.

As we move into the *Voices from the Region* section, we begin with Kimberly Blumke's (Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque Isle Educational Service District) article, "Virtual Coaching: Throughout and Beyond a Pandemic," in which she describes how her ISD now uses virtual literacy coaching to overcome obstacles of face-to-face coaching and support teachers in using the *K-3 Literacy Essential Instruction Practices in Early Literacy*. We also learn more about the work that Jenelle Williams has led with the Disciplinary Literacy Task Force, considering lessons learned from the online professional learning that they have offered in 2020-21, and a look ahead to more efforts in 2021-22. And, celebrating her site of the NEA Big Read and Little Read Lakeshore in west Michigan, Hope College professor Dr. Deborah Vriend Van Duinen offers us a look at

her community's response to two texts – Julia Alvarez's (1994) historical fiction novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (for older readers) and Carmen Agra Deedy's (2017) children's picture book, *The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet* for younger readers – and the power of community-wide reading experiences. Finally, we close the voices section of this issue with some reflections on the 65th MRA Annual Conference, offered this past March in a fully online format, in "We Are All Lifelong Learners, No Matter What the Platform."

In the *Critical Issues* section, we feature an interview that Dr. Carlin Borsheim-Black conducted with Dr. Lamar Johnson (Michigan State University) exploring Critical Race English Education (CREE) as a framework for teaching English Language Arts for racial justice.

Finally, in our *Must Reads* section, we hear from our regular contributors, Lynette Suckow and Annie Spear, as they share their insights on children's and young adult literature as well as professional texts worthy of attention. Suckow offers a thematic look at stories of friendship that have been published in a year physical distance has required us to be even more mindful of social presence. Then, Spear shares her insights on Dr. Tanya S. Wright's recent Heinemann title, *A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day*, which is especially useful for K-3 teachers and learners.

With the first year of our editorship coming to a close, we are pleased to again remind readers that all articles are also available on our website, housed at Grand Valley University's Scholarworks site <[scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj)>. Our partnership with Jacklyn Rander and the entire Scholarworks team has been incredibly fruitful, and we are grateful for their efforts to post back issues of MRJ going back to Volume 31, Issue 1, from the fall of 1998. These three issues in Volume 53 have provided us with a unique glimpse into a year unlike any other, and we thank the GVSU Library team for making these articles available to a wider audience than ever before.

Sincerely,

Meghan Block, Carlin Borsheim-Black, and Troy Hicks  
Co-Editors, *Michigan Reading Journal*  
[mrj@cmich.edu](mailto:mrj@cmich.edu)



# President's Message...

by Colby Sharp, MRA President 2020-2021

Dear MRA Members,

The other day, I was having a particularly difficult day at school. I couldn't put my finger on why the day was so challenging. None of my students were sick or in quarantine, and everyone was being nice to each other. My lessons seemed to go over pretty well, and I was feeling proud of the growth I was seeing in my fifth graders.

I think that the 2020-2021 school year is just heavy. Educators have so much on their plates in a normal year, and now we add things like masks, quarantine, social distancing, wiping down desks, virtual learners, and so much more to the mix. I wasn't having a bad day because something went wrong that day; I was having a bad day because my plate was as full as it had ever been, and I felt a little lost about what I could do.

When I am feeling overwhelmed I often pick up a book and read, so that is what I did. We put aside the next lesson and started a new read aloud, *Halfway to Harmony* by Barbara O'Connor. We met Walter and Posey, and our classroom was transported from Parma, Michigan to Harmony, Georgia. The kids were captivated, and they begged for more. So I kept reading.

Taking the time to lose ourselves in a story seemed to turn around the day. I felt better about things, and the kids couldn't stop talking about the book. During a time where we have so much on our plates, I hope that you will join me in turning to story. I know that the power of story brought so many of us to this profession, and I believe that it will help us get through this very difficult time.

- Colby Sharp



**Colby Sharp**

# Connecting the Dots between Academic and Social-Emotional Learning with Literacy

by Allison Phillippe

One year in my fourth-grade class, I had a student named Eric (pseudonym). Eric's previous teachers would say things like: "Just wait till you have Eric," and "When Eric gets to fourth grade...good luck." Eric was behind academically and needed additional support from school interventionists in reading. Eric had also previously lost his dad to suicide, and his mom was working hard to make ends meet. Eric would often get frustrated with learning and resort to anger and acting out in class. When Eric walked into school on his first day of fourth grade, he assumed I had already given up on him. I will not argue that Eric wasn't challenging to teach; he definitely was. Because of these challenges, I knew he needed me the most.



**Allison Phillippe**

In this article, I discuss how social-emotional learning (SEL) can be incorporated into commonly-used literacy instructional practices to help meet the needs of all students, especially those like Eric, who have had "adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as abuse, neglect, the death of a parent, or witnessing community violence" (Price & Ellis, 2018, p. 18). A report from the National Survey on Children's Health found that 47% of all children in the US have had at least one ACE, which increases a student's need for trauma-informed instructional practices that support the child's overall success (Price & Ellis, 2018). Today, these numbers are likely to be higher as our nation copes with a global pandemic, racial unrest, and overall political turmoil (Shafer, 2020). Price and Ellis (2018) also explain that the greater number of ACEs children experience, the greater the probability that they will "struggle academically and disengage from school" (p. 18). Supporting SEL is one trauma-informed approach

that provides students with safe strategies for managing their feelings to cope with emotional stress, be mentally prepared to learn, and become active and engaged citizens (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Gulbrandson, 2018; Shafer, 2020). Supporting students' SEL teaches students to express their feelings in a healthy way and to learn safe strategies for managing their feelings (Gulbrandson, 2018).

Implementing trauma-informed practices, such as SEL, and working to build a positive relationship with Eric, are what guided him towards success. At the same time, it can be challenging to find time within the school day to implement trauma-informed practice to support a student's SEL. One option is integrating SEL into literacy instruction with interactive read-alouds, small group instruction, and class discussions (Britt et al., 2016). While supporting SEL with literacy instruction *alone* is insufficient to meet *all* the needs of students who have endured many ACEs, it offers possibilities to support students like Eric during a typical school day.

Did Eric continue to struggle with academics and behavior? Yes. However, by supporting his SEL through literacy, he grew in his willingness to participate, his overall motivation in class, and his self-confidence. He allowed himself to trust that as his teacher I was not going to give up on him. He also made academic and behavioral growth throughout fourth grade. The purpose of this



article is to provide teachers with suggestions to support SEL through literacy instruction to help students apply social-emotional themes from text to their own lives.

### **What is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?**

SEL is defined as “the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors” (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017, p. 220). SEL is an important part of a child’s education because it goes beyond teaching students the skills they need to be successful in the classroom. SEL helps teach students the skills they need to be successful in life (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). SEL is also an important component of trauma-informed practice, but there is limited understanding of how literacy can directly impact the development of students’ social-emotional skills (Britt et al., 2016; Gulbrandson, 2018).

### **Connection between Social-Emotional and Academic Learning**

SEL and literacy instruction can work together to benefit students’ academic and social-emotional well-being (Britt et al., 2016). However, Britt et al. (2016) also explain that while a curriculum specifically designed with SEL in mind is beneficial, it can be expensive or require training, which makes it difficult for teachers to implement. Instead, I am suggesting that one way teachers can support SEL is with their current literacy instruction. Teachers are regularly using important practices that can build literacy skills while simultaneously building social-emotional skills as well.

Additionally, supporting SEL with literacy instruction aligns to the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). For example, in the second-grade standard, RL.2.3, students are expected to “describe how characters change in a story and respond to major events and challenges,” which can be enhanced when students understand how a character’s emotions and abilities to handle conflict relate to their own (McTigue et al., 2015, p. 93). In order for SEL and literacy instruction to work together

to benefit students’ overall well-being, I will explain which literacy instructional practices can support SEL and how teachers can easily include these components in their everyday teaching.

### **Supporting SEL with Literacy Instruction**

To support SEL with literacy instruction, I suggest providing students access to texts that contain social-emotional content that they can apply to their own lives through interactive read-alouds, small group instruction, and class discussion focused on character analysis. These suggestions are also aligned with the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3* and *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades 4 and 5* (2016a), which researchers created to focus instruction on a set of evidence-based practices to improve children’s literacy in Michigan. In fact, some of the essential literacy practices that are already in place can be used to support SEL. Incorporating SEL into these areas of literacy instruction can benefit the academic and emotional success of the whole child.

### **Access to Text with Social-Emotional Content**

The *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3* (2016a) recommend incorporating books that reflect children’s backgrounds and cultural experiences (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Education Leadership Network [MAISA] Early Literacy Task Force, 2016a). Similarly, it is important to give students access to texts with social-emotional content that they can connect to the experiences and challenges in their own lives (Britt et al., 2016). However, it can be difficult for teachers to find time to locate texts and plan how to successfully fit them into their instruction. Britt et al. (2016) identified texts with social-emotional content that address common classroom behaviors. Their recommendations are based on experiences in kindergarten, first, and third grade classrooms. (See Figure 1). Teachers can use these texts with students based on their social-emotional needs within the following instructional practices: interactive read-alouds, small group instruction and classroom discussion focused on character analysis. The books included in Figure 1 will also be included as examples throughout this section.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>When to use</b>	<b>In Context</b>
<i>Calm Down Time</i> By: Elizabeth Verdick	Explores calm down strategies such as deep breathing and asking for help from others.	When teachers notice students becoming frustrated, teachers can prompt students to use one of the strategies described in the book.	Kindergarten students identified and discussed things they could do to calm themselves down: find a quiet space, tell the teacher you're upset, think of things that make you happy.
<i>The Energy Bus</i> By: Jon Gordon	Provides strategies for focusing on the positive, and how to deal with challenging situations in a kind and positive way.	When teachers notice students struggling with a challenge, teachers can prompt students to adopt a positive mindset towards themselves and others.	Third grade students emphasized the importance of not being a bully and demonstrated that a positive mindset will allow you to act kindly towards others.
<i>How Full is your Bucket?</i> By: Tom Rath	Outlines the importance of treating others in a positive way and helps students understand ways they can demonstrate care and acts of kindness towards others.	When teachers observe students expressing negative emotions and acting inconsiderately towards others, teachers can encourage students to pay attention to their own state of mind and demonstrate thoughtful actions towards others.	A kindergarten student stated that after she was mean to someone, she felt ashamed, indicating that she was developing appropriate emotions in response to her own negative behaviors.
<i>The Invisible Boy</i> By: Trudy Ludwig	Explores how children feel when they are not included. Students learn the importance of developing relationships outside their immediate group of friends.	When certain students are not included in group activities, teachers can encourage students to include children who are not part of their social circle.	First grade students were able to empathize with the main character who was being ignored. They said this would make them feel sad and expressed negative sentiments about the classmates who were ignoring him.
<i>Zach Gets Frustrated</i> By: William Mulcahy	Provides children with suggestions for positive reframing to employ an optimistic outlook when faced with negative situations.	When teachers notice children focusing on experiences that could affect them in a negative way, teachers can encourage students to consider alternative ways of viewing situations.	First grade students were able to identify situations in which they got frustrated and were able to describe strategies they could use to calm themselves down in negative situations.

Figure 1. Book Descriptions and Classroom Implementation (based on Britt et al., 2016)

### Interactive Read-Alouds

Teachers can use interactive read-alouds to guide students in their understanding of how a book's theme can connect to desired classroom behaviors and components of SEL. Wright (2019) describes interactive read-alouds as an “incredibly effective method for supporting children's literacy learning where adults read text to children and facilitate discussion of the text” (p. 4). Read-alouds are considered interactive when students are actively involved in thinking and talking about the text (Wright, 2019). Similarly, interactive read-alouds also offer opportunities to learn from text that students cannot yet experience independently and allow for enhanced discussions (MAISA Early Literacy Task Force, 2016a). When combined with strategic questioning, interactive read-alouds provide a way teachers can incorporate SEL into the regular school day (Britt et al., 2016).

For example, I incorporated texts into my interactive read-alouds that dealt with themes of loss and grief such as *One Wave at a Time* by Holly Thompson or *The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland. While this topic benefited the whole class, Eric, specifically, could connect to what the characters were experiencing. Texts with social-emotional themes can benefit all students' well-being but choosing a text with the emotional needs of specific students in mind can help them feel valued, while providing opportunities for the students to connect with characters to explore their own emotions. The following are four components of interactive read-alouds that can support SEL.

**Selecting Texts and Establishing a Purpose.** When selecting a book with social-emotional content, the teacher's choice will depend on the emotional needs of the students in their classroom. For example, if the teacher notices certain students are not being included in group activities, they may choose to read *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig. The teacher should convey the purpose of the interactive read-aloud to the class, while being cautious not to call out any individual students with those specific social-emotional needs. Instead, teachers can describe the purpose more generally. For example, they could say: “Today we are going to read *The Invisible Boy*. Pay close attention to

the colors in the illustrations to show how the character is feeling as we read.”

**Planning and Practicing.** The most effective interactive read-alouds are purposeful and planned (Wright, 2019). Planning an interactive read-aloud ahead of time includes “the types of questions, ideas and words that will be discussed” (Wright, 2019, p. 5). To help the interactive read-aloud be successful, the teacher should plan specific stopping points and questions to ask that will explore the story's connection to SEL. For example, when reading *The Invisible Boy*, the teacher could pause when the main character, Brian, is not chosen to play, left out during lunch, or seemingly ignored by his classmates and teacher. When the teacher stops, they can ask their students: “What do you notice about Brian during this part of the story? How do you think Brian is feeling? Why?”

**Connecting and Extending.** When reading aloud a book with the purpose of exploring social-emotional content, questions should be open-ended. They should emphasize how the character is feeling and allow students to make connections to their own emotions (Britt et al., 2016). Depending on the grade level, the teacher may also want to provide students with a writing or drawing prompt related to the aspect of SEL addressed in the book to assess and extend learning. Using the example of *The Invisible Boy*, the teacher could discuss connections between how Brian is feeling and a time when the students in the class felt left out. The teacher could extend this thinking with a writing or drawing prompt for students to reflect on the story in relation to their own emotions. Similarly, students could participate in role-playing scenarios connected to the theme of the text to extend their learning and benefit their social-emotional development. Role-playing is fun, engaging, and an important participatory element in the practice of SEL (Gfroerer & Nelsen, 2021).

**Using Expression and Tone.** Another consideration is tone of voice while reading the text aloud. If the purpose of the book is to teach calming strategies for students, the teacher could read the book in a calm voice. The expression and tone of the interactive

read-aloud should match how the character feels (Britt et al., 2016). If the character in the book is feeling sad or upset, like Brian in *The Invisible Boy*, the teacher's tone should match the character's emotions. Expression and tone not only help engage students with the text, but can assist students in identifying how the character is feeling, which can support students in identifying their own emotions to support their SEL.

### Small Group Instruction

Small group instruction is another literacy practice that can support SEL. Small group instruction “provides and supports opportunities for small group discussion of literature and disciplinary text so that students can draw on their own knowledge and the knowledge of their peers to co-construct the meaning of text” (MAISA Early Literacy Task Force, 2016b, p. 3). Small group instruction is differentiated and responsive to individual student needs (Berne & Degener, 2010). Similarly, Tyner (2019) explains that in order to differentiate literacy instruction, teachers can group their students strategically and deliver instruction to meet their needs. The grouping of students is also flexible in that the groups can shift based on the changing academic, social, and emotional needs of each student (Cox, 2014).

Using text that features social-emotional content and creating small groups based on students' social-emotional needs can help teachers focus on developing understanding of social skills and helping students connect emotionally to make meaning of the text (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). In the small group setting, children can benefit from the social experience of “practicing taking turns, listening to others, and using language in socially acceptable ways” while learning important literacy skills (Doyle & Bramwell, p. 558). Additionally, the small group setting could be a safer space to help students feel comfortable reading and discussing social-emotional content (Cox, 2014). Literature circles, book clubs, and instructional conversations can also support SEL and be facilitated within small group instruction to help students work together to develop a deeper meaning of the text.

In addition to interactive read-alouds, the small group setting allowed Eric the opportunity to read, connect,

and discuss text with social-emotional content in a safe space with peers he felt comfortable with. For example, we focused on how characters in texts handle their big emotions and safely express themselves. Discussing these ideas in a small group setting offered Eric an opportunity to share his thoughts, which he might not have felt safe doing with the whole group. The following components of small group instruction can support SEL.

**Establishing the Purpose.** Consider the following example. Students in the class are feeling upset because of continuing social conflicts on the playground. The teacher notices that these students are friends who are becoming frustrated while playing games during recess, causing them not to treat each other kindly. These social conflicts on the playground could escalate and cause the students involved to feel upset, worried, or anxious during class, impacting their readiness to learn during class. This is just one example of a situation a teacher might witness that could be positively impacted by SEL. However, the teacher might feel like they don't have enough instructional time in the day to address it, but they care about their students' well-being and want to guide them through this challenging social conflict in a positive way. One way the teacher could support these students is through small group instruction during their literacy block. This offers an opportunity for teachers to support the students' SEL by providing strategies for social conflicts in a productive setting that also benefits their academic learning.

Addressing a social conflict in this way can prevent students from feeling called out or in trouble. To help the students' experience be a positive one, the teacher should explain the purpose of their small group time in a way that assures students that they are not in trouble. During the literacy block, the teacher could begin their small group by saying: “Thank you so much for meeting with me today. I pulled you together to discuss this book with me. I think it could help you find a positive way to address the conflict you have been having on the playground. You are all great students and good friends, and I want to help you have more fun on the playground. I think reading about and discussing the characters in this book and how they work to solve



their problems might give you some ideas to use when you are feeling frustrated by a friend's behavior.”

**Selecting Texts and Offering Instruction.** After establishing the purpose with students, the teacher could introduce the book *The Energy Bus* by Jon Gordon. Depending on the grade level, the teacher could decide to have their students read the text independently or read it together. This is a book that focuses on the importance of being kind and developing a positive attitude during a challenging situation with friends. During the small group instruction, which could be broken up into numerous meetings over multiple days, the teacher could guide students in determining the theme, connecting the theme to their own social-emotional learning, and developing solutions to apply the ideas in this story to their own situation. By doing so, the teacher is addressing the students' individual needs both emotionally and academically. The small group addresses the social-emotional conflicts in a positive way, but students are also being provided with an opportunity to “draw on their own knowledge and the knowledge of their peers to co-construct the meaning of the text” (MAISA Early Literacy Task Force, 2016b, p. 3).

Connecting students' ideas, extending student thinking, and supporting claims with ideas in the text can all be accomplished during classroom discussions (MAISA Early Literacy Task Force, 2016b). Highlighting the connection between what characters think and feel allows students to analyze how the character's feelings are driving the plot and can connect the feelings of the characters to their own (McTigue et al., 2015). Classroom discussions focused on characters and students' emotional connections with those characters “fosters defensible insights and better understanding” (Roser et al., 2007, p. 558). One way to emphasize the social-emotional connections to characters is by the teacher supporting their classroom discussion with a graphic organizer. One such organizer is the chart for multiple perspectives (CHAMP) created by McTigue et al. (2015). I have included a modified version of CHAMP in Figure 2 that can help students understand characters motivations, describe how the characters are feeling, and connect their own emotions to the characters in the story.

This graphic organizer can be used to facilitate higher-level thinking and discussion in which students

<div>Name of Character: _____</div> <div>What the character is feeling.</div> <div>I know the character is feeling this way because _____ _____ _____ _____ _____</div>	<div>My Name: _____</div> <div>How this connects to my own feelings.</div> <div>What can I learn from this character? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____</div>
---	---

Figure 2. Connecting Character and Student Emotions (based on McTigue et al. 2015)

consider the feelings and emotions of the characters and how they can impact their own social and academic development. It is important to provide students with strategies that assist comprehension in structural elements (setting, plot, etc.) but also the characters' internal conflict and thoughts (McTigue et al., 2015).

Students, like Eric, coping with the emotional stress caused by ACEs may be able to identify a character's emotions in a story but may have a difficult time connecting it back to themselves. In order for Eric to apply moral lessons from a text to his own social-emotional learning, he needed to identify how the character is feeling, comprehend why they are feeling that way, then transfer that lesson back to his own situation, which can be a demanding task (Kruse, et al., 2020). This graphic organizer would help Eric organize how his own emotions connected to the character, learn from the character's experience, and apply it to his own life. The following are components of class discussion focused on character analysis that can support SEL.

**Selecting Texts and Establishing the Purpose.** Similar to selecting text for interactive read alouds and small group instruction, when choosing a text with social-emotional content to support class discussions, the emotional needs of the students should be taken into consideration. Additionally, McTigue et al. (2016) recommends selecting books with a plot driven by interpersonal conflict, characters that are relatable, and a text that is engaging and appropriate for the grade level. The text selection also depends on the purpose of the class discussion. For example, if the objective is to explore how to handle feelings of frustration in a positive way, the teacher may have students read the book *Zach Gets Frustrated* by William Mulcahy to their class during an interactive read-aloud.

**Offering Instruction.** After reading this book the teacher might use class discussion to analyze Zach's motivations, describe how Zach is feeling and why he is feeling this way, connect students' own emotions to Zach's, and discuss what lessons can be learned from the character. The graphic organizer could support the discussion in a variety of ways, depending on the grade

level. It could serve as a preliminary activity before the discussion for students to formulate their ideas, it could be used as a guide during the discussion and be filled out together as a class, or it could serve as a formative assessment and be completed following the discussion. Overall, focusing class discussions on topics connecting SEL and literacy can help students transfer ideas from characters in text to their own social-emotional growth.

## Conclusion

Many students who have experienced trauma could greatly benefit from SEL (Price & Ellis, 2018). Literacy instruction and SEL can overlap to set students up for long-term success both academically and emotionally. Students, like Eric, might have great potential, but ACEs present social-emotional barriers that make academic learning challenging. The ability to incorporate SEL into existing literacy instruction is one way to ensure we are meeting the individual needs of each student. Overall, teachers need to be prepared to support their students on a social-emotional level in order to reach them on an academic level to benefit their overall success and well-being.

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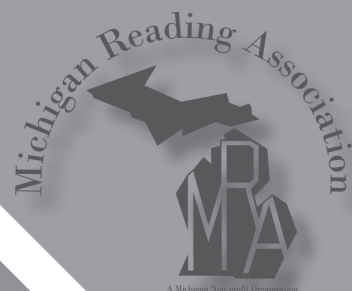
## Author Biography

**Allison Phillippe** was an elementary teacher for nine years and is currently a doctoral student in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education Program at Michigan State University. She is interested in teacher preparation and the connection between literacy and social-emotional learning. She can be reached at [phill911@msu.edu](mailto:phill911@msu.edu).



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# Teaching Students to Comprehend Cause and Effect Text Structure

by Jennifer A. Knight and Angela R. Child



One way to learn new information is to read expository text or text that provides information for the reader. Expository texts are organized quite differently from the narrative stories most students are familiar with and therefore may impact students' comprehension if they do not understand the organization or structure of the text (Yopp & Yopp, 2012).

Expository texts are organized by authors in a specific way to support the readers' comprehension. Furthermore, these texts include complex vocabulary words and facts, unfamiliar content, and features not often included in narrative texts (e.g., headings, captions, insets) that can also make it difficult for readers to comprehend (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013; Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2013). This organizational approach is known as text structure. Meyer (1985) identified five expository text structures commonly used by authors



**Jennifer A. Knight**



**Angela R. Child**

including description, compare/contrast, sequence, cause/effect, and problem/solution.

Teaching students to identify text structure improves overall comprehension by allowing students to anticipate the location of information, sort out important information from unimportant information, make predictions about the content, and summarize and recall information based on the author's explanation (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Shanahan et al., 2010; Williams, Nubla-Kung, Pollini, Stafford, Garcia, & Snyder, 2007). One reason students may struggle with comprehension of expository texts is due to the complex comprehension skills necessary to make meaning from the text (e.g., finding important information and judging sequence) and students not being aware of specific text structures and how to use those text structures to support understanding.

One text structure that students commonly encounter is cause and effect. Though commonly used, cause and effect structures can be challenging for young readers (Williams et al., 2007). Often in this text structure, the causes and effects are mixed into the information, making it difficult to distinguish between the cause and the effect and therefore making it more challenging to interpret

meaning. Understanding the text structure can help support students' comprehension because they will know what information they can expect to learn and where they will find the information in the text. Once text structure is identified, it is important for teachers to support students as they learn to understand and apply the different structures to reading; otherwise, comprehension can become overwhelming and confusing. Providing students explicit instruction in text structures supports students' development and use of text structures for comprehension (Pyle, Vasquez, Lignugaris/Kraft, Gillam, Reutzel, Olszewski, Segura, Harpzhaim, Laing & Pyle, 2017).

### **Teaching Cause and Effect**

As noted, cause and effect text structure is one structure young students will encounter often in expository text (Pyle et al., 2017). The goal of cause and effect text structure is to help the reader understand why things happen the way that they do. Defining cause and effect for students appears quite simple; yet helping students identify it in text requires explicit instruction in elements of the text structure. To begin teaching about cause and effect, teachers must explain that cause and effect refers to the event that happens and the reasons why the event happens. More specifically, teachers must explain that the effect was "a thing or event that happens" (Williams, et al., 2014 p. 5) and the cause as "the thing that makes the event happen" (p. 5).

Typically, when teaching cause and effect text structure, teachers look for well-organized texts that demonstrate this structure. Selecting well-structured texts allows teachers and students to recognize and apply the strategies specifically for cause and effect. During the explicit lesson on cause and effect, teachers must provide modeling and scaffolded practice to help their students internalize and apply the "why things happen the way they do" to determine the cause as well as "what thing or event happened" to determine the effects. When this type of instruction is explicit and practiced, students will be able to apply their understanding as they independently read more expository texts (Williams et al., 2009).

### **Explaining the Text Structure**

Identifying the text structure and providing a definition

for students is an important first step. At the start of the lesson, the teacher will provide a student-friendly explanation and definition for the text structure. For example, the teacher may say, "The author's intent is to help the reader understand what is happening and why. We often call this cause and effect. The effect is the event that happens. So you might ask yourself 'What happened?' The cause is the thing that makes the event happen. To find the cause, you might ask yourself 'Why did that happen?' In a text about the destruction left by an earthquake, the cause is the earthquake. The effects (or the what) could be houses destroyed, cracks in the roads, or people buried under rubble.

Because the concept of cause and effect can be challenging for students to understand, the teacher may try to focus examples on events or experiences in students' everyday lives. For example, asking students what happens when they wake up late for school will elicit answers such as "I have to rush," "I might miss the bus," "I do not get to eat all of my breakfast, my mom yells at me," "I forget my lunch" and so on. Teaching students to identify cause and effect on a personal level, or even through role playing, helps them understand actions and consequences. Next, teachers need to help students apply that thinking to the texts they are reading so they can anticipate the text structure and critically analyze the information to gain deeper comprehension of the text. This article will address how to support readers as they begin to identify and analyze cause and effect text structure.

### **Using Cause and Effect Signal Words to Identify Cause and Effect Structure**

Developing a vocabulary of cause and effect signal words for students may be an effective strategy. Signal words or cues signify to students that the author is providing the cause and the effect (see Figure 1 for examples of signal words). Teaching students to identify the signal words will support their identification of specific causes and effects within the text. It helps students understand what happened (effect) and why (cause). Teachers should be cautioned that helping students use the signal words is simply one strategy to use, but it is certainly not the only way to identify cause and effect.

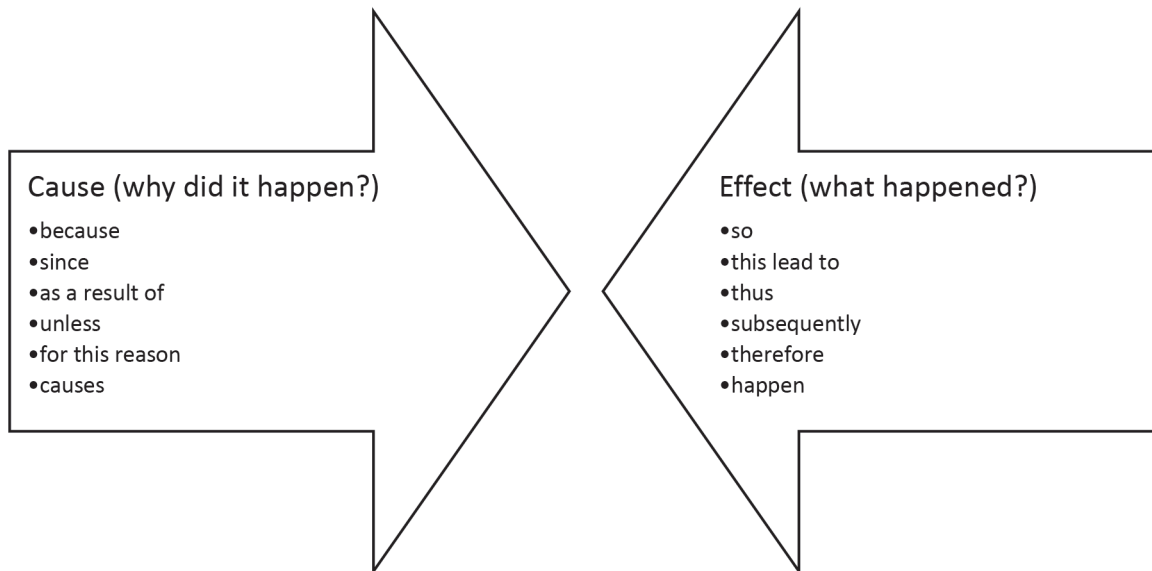


Figure 1. Cause and effect signal words.

### Using Guiding Questions to Find Cause(s) and Effect(s)

Teaching students to ask guiding questions as they read is an important aspect of text structure. It is a strategy to keep students focused on the key cause and effect information. For cause and effect text, teachers should teach and model for students how to find out what happened and why. The teacher would first teach students the guiding questions of what, “What happened?” and then follow up with why, “Why did it happen?” Asking what happened will support students to identify the effect. Asking why it happened will help identify the cause. For example, when reading the text about earthquakes (see Example 1), the teacher would ask themselves, “What happened?” and “Why did it happen?” Then they would answer their own questions by saying, “The text is talking about why earthquakes happen. Something happens to cause the earthquake so, in this text, the earthquake is the effect. I know this by asking what happened? Now I will read to see why it happens or what causes earthquakes to identify the causes. I read, ‘Earthquakes happen when two large pieces of the Earth’s crust slip and shake the Earth’s surface.’ That is the cause because it tells me why the earthquake happened.”

*Example 1:* “Earthquakes happen when two large pieces

of the Earth’s crust suddenly slip. This causes shock waves to shake the surface of the Earth in the form of an earthquake.” (Nelson, 2017, para 1). You can find the entire text at <http://www.ducksters.com/science/earthquakes.php>.

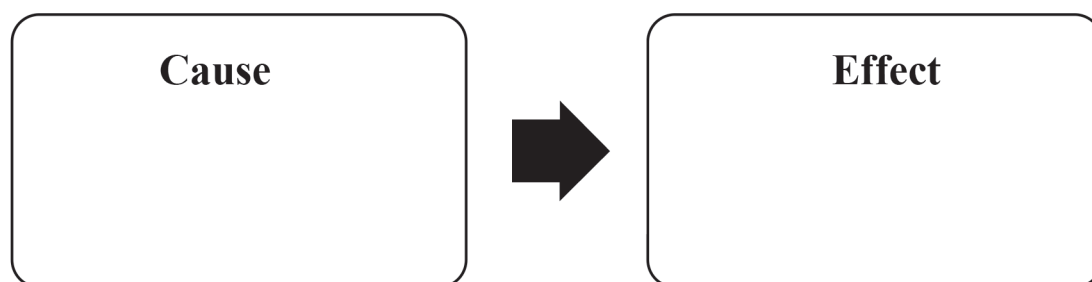
### Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers allow students to represent their understanding of the text visually. To support students’ identification of cause and effect, teachers could introduce several different types of graphic organizers. One type of organizer that might be useful is the single event organizer. This organizer helps students see how one cause impacts one effect (see figure 2). For example, because it rained heavily (cause), it led to a mudslide (effect). This example is helpful when first introducing cause and effect to students. Once you begin to analyze more complex sentences and paragraphs, you can move to chain reaction organizers (see Figure 3) and multiple causes and/or effects organizers (see Figure 4). If we refer back to our earthquake example (Example 1), using a chain reaction organizer would be useful to help students organize the information to identify cause and effect because this type of organizer would help students to see that something causes an earthquake and then the earthquake causes seismic waves. An example of multiple causes and/

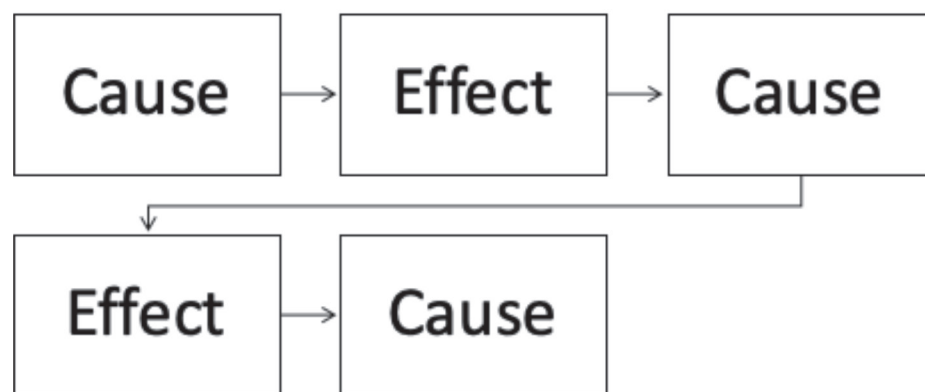
or effects would be heavy rain causes mudslides and flooding (one cause with two effects). Not drinking enough water and hot temperatures can cause heat-stroke (two causes with one effect).

One essential part of using a graphic organizer is to match the organizer with the text. If your organizer is irrelevant or mismatched for the text, it causes confusion for the students; as a result, summarizing the

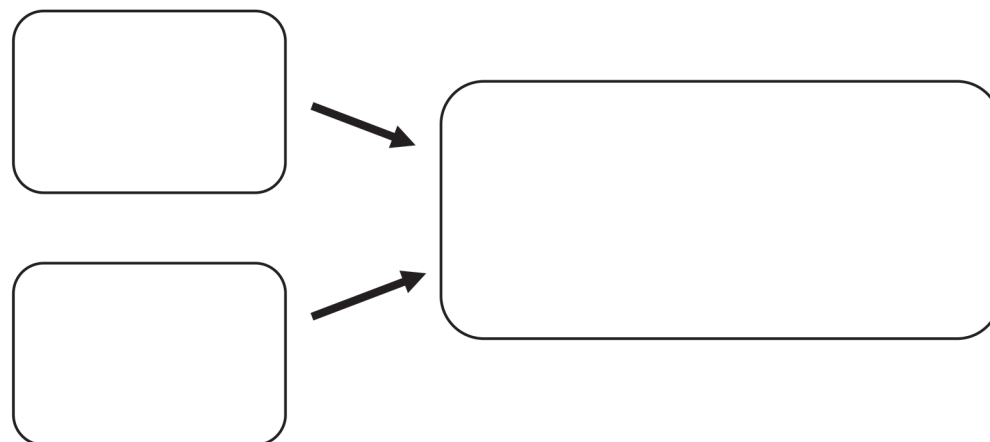
cause and effect becomes difficult. This is an especially important factor to consider when choosing graphic organizers for young students. For example, if the text has multiple causes listed and one effect that follows, the graphic organizer should match by having one effect box linked to multiple causes. If instead you use a single event organizer this mismatch can cause confusion for the learners and thereby impact students' overall understanding of complex informational text.



*Figure 2. Single Event Cause and Effect.*



*Figure 3. Chain Reaction Cause and Effect.*



*Figure 4. Multiple Causes and/or Effects.*



### Scaffolding the Thinking

The next step after introducing the structure, signal words, and graphic organizers is to allow students time to work with the teacher through scaffolding multiple types of cause and effect texts. This scaffolding allows teachers to support students' deeper thinking and summarization of cause and effect texts through reading and discussion. The objective is to get students asking, "What happened?" and "Why did it happen?" then providing evidence from the text to support their understanding.

#### Close Analysis of the Text

Clearly identifying when an author provides the cause or effect may be difficult for some students. Students may have trouble answering the what and why questions. It may also be difficult because there is no designated order for when the author may state the cause or effect. Many times, authors share the cause first as in the following example: *As a result of the heavy snow, the roof of the building collapsed.* The sentence could be rewritten providing the effect first: *The roof of the building collapsed as a result of the heavy snow.* Both sentences provide the same cause and effect and use the signal words *as a result* to identify the cause.

Once students have learned the signal words and practiced using them to identify cause and effect, the next step is to analyze the text. Teachers can model the following steps for students as they read and analyze:

1. Ask "what happened" (effect) and "why did it happen" (cause).
2. Circle the signal words in a single color based on identified cause or effect.

3. Underline the clause before and after the signal word matching the cause or effect color.
4. Summarize in a graphic organizer.

Example 2 provides the signal word caused (circled) with the clause following as the cause (underlined) and the effect clause first (double underlined). To model this for the students, the teacher talk may include: "I know that what happens or the effect is earthquakes, but I'm not sure what causes them. I will look for signal words to help me figure out why earthquakes happen. I see the word causes in the sentence. I know that is a signal word that can help me figure out why the earthquakes happened. I will circle the word causes in blue and underline what follows to see if it helps me answer why earthquakes happen." After modeling an analysis of the text, the teacher would then use a graphic organizer to model how to summarize the cause and effect.

*Example 2:* Earthquakes are caused when two large pieces of the Earth's crust suddenly slip.

Example 3 is one more illustration of how to analyze a short sentence for cause and effect. Teachers should provide scaffolded support for identifying signal words for cause and effect as students read more and more expository texts, at least until students are able to identify them on their own as they read independently.

*Example 3:* As a result of the heavy snow, the roof of the building collapsed.

As students become more and more confident finding signal words to identify cause and effect in short sentences, teachers can gradually provide larger chunks

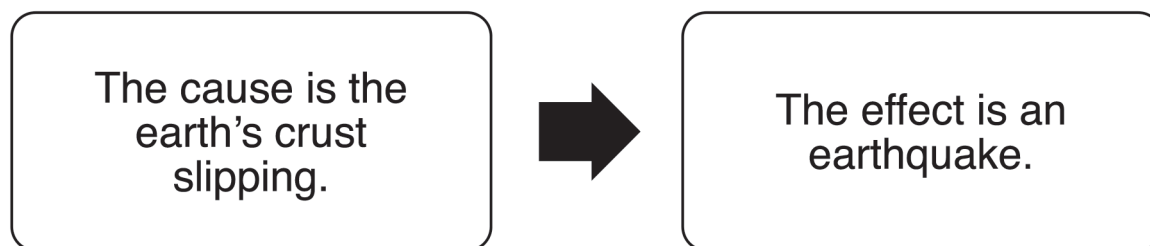


Figure 5. Example of single graphic organizer for Example 3.

of text (see Examples 4 and 5) for students to analyze. At this point, teachers may have to return to modeling how to identify multiple causes and effects in longer texts and provide the appropriate amount of scaffolding for students to become independent.

*Example 4:* It was hot and sunny (so) I spent the day swimming at the pool. I forgot to put on sunscreen, (therefore) I got a terrible sunburn.

Example 5 demonstrates how one cause can produce a chain reaction of multiple causes and effects. There are multiple causes and effects that happen when people pollute the rivers and one event leads to another. The clauses “this reduces the number of fish that can reproduce” and “fewer fish are born in freshwater” are both a cause and an effect of the original cause of people polluting the rivers as well as being their own causes for the decline in fish population.

*Example 5:* Fish habitats are destroyed (effect changing to a cause) (because) people pollute the rivers (cause). This reduces the number of fish that can reproduce (effect changing to a cause). (As a result,) fewer fish are born in freshwater (effect), and the fish population declines (effect).

Teaching students to successfully identify signal words, no matter the order they are presented is an important

strategy for comprehending cause and effect. Providing opportunities for students to use the signal words to closely analyze a well-structured text that embody the characteristics of a particular text structure will also improve overall comprehension (Williams et al., 2014).

## Final Thoughts

Teaching students that authors organize the text in certain ways to help readers identify information is critical for comprehension of expository texts. This organization is known as text structure. For many readers, especially those that struggle, understanding how to use that structure will support comprehension and may help them be more confident readers. Explicitly teaching students the different strategies for identifying cause and effect in expository text is one approach teachers can use to help students look for and utilize the author’s organization, thereby supporting students’ comprehension of the text.

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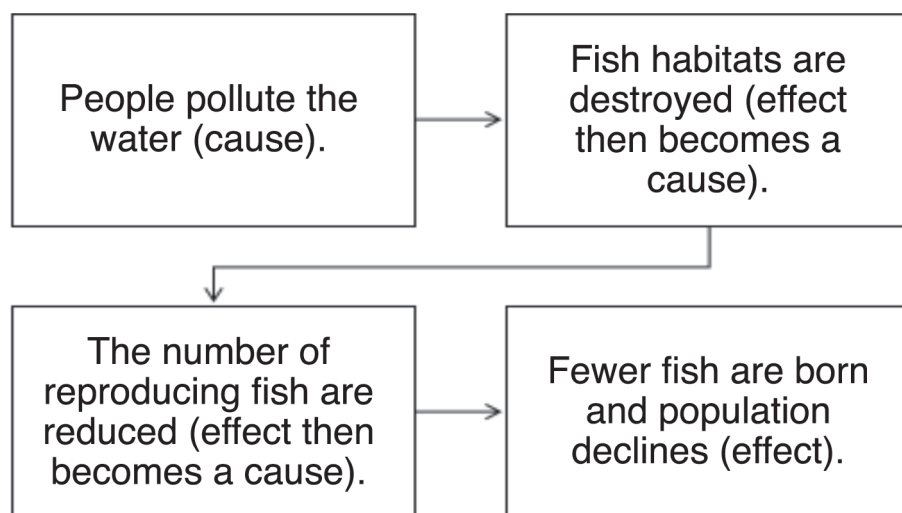


Figure 6. Example of a chain reaction graphic organizer for Example 5.

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## Author Biographies

**Dr. Jennifer Knight** is an Associate Professor at Northern Arizona University. She is interested in early literacy development, specifically reading comprehension, classroom teaching and teacher education. She can be reached at [jen.knight@nau.edu](mailto:jen.knight@nau.edu).

**Dr. Angela Child** is an Associate Professor at Dixie State University. She is interested in struggling readers, reading comprehension, and effective literacy instruction. She can be reached at [child@dixie.edu](mailto:child@dixie.edu).



# Policies, Practices, People, and Places: How Elementary Preservice Teachers Learned Literacy Teaching

by Chad H. Waldron



Over the last decade of educational reforms, elementary literacy teachers have been challenged to manage the successes and constraints of the educational policies and instructional mandates (Pardo et al., 2012). The local decision-making of teachers is enacted within highly institutionalized contexts and has been characterized as a “bricolage” (Levi-Strauss, 1968, cited in Erickson, 2004). In other words, teachers are working to create meaningful tools to solve local problems regarding available resources in the setting (Florio-Ruane, 2010). However, such activity is generally occurring “beneath the radar” of on-going policy and assessment (Erickson, 2004), meaning the teacher’s decision-making and choices are happening daily in their classroom contexts, thereby making it more difficult for the preservice teacher interning within an institutional setting to learn merely by watching the mentor. It remains unapparent how and what preservice teachers glean from other sources as they work to develop their pedagogy for literacy instruction. As such, teachers, across their experiences in the profession, face the tension of simultaneously meeting the needs of their students and the requirements of literacy policies and curriculum.

Teachers are dealing with mandated literacy curriculum



**Chad H. Waldron**

in different ways. Our research questions for this study centered on preservice teachers’ contexts for literacy instruction and the occasions in which preservice teachers witness and/or attempt local decision-making in response to mandated goals, materials, and assessments in their design of literacy curriculum and instruction. In our research, we inquired about elementary preservice teachers’ local decision-making and what learning experiences were valued as they interacted within various educational contexts and formed relationships with a variety of people during their internship year.

## **Review of Literature**

Teachers often discover how a student’s literacy learning is shaped by cultural and social assets, which cannot be separated from their context for learning (Cambourne, 2004). This negotiation of system-wide requirements within local circumstances to produce coherent curriculum and meaningful instruction is at the heart of teaching, and identified by literacy researchers as “best practice” (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). Yet, these opportunities for identifying “best practices” may be limited for preservice teachers depending on the opportunities they have to witness their mentor teachers’ thinking aloud or the degree to which they participate in planning instructional experiences with their teachers (e.g., Zeichner, 2010). As well,



transitioning to the classroom context presents new and often unexpected challenges to the preservice teacher. In the preservice experiences of student teaching or internship placements, the preservice teacher is confronted with the challenge of learning how to teach “on the job” for the first time, and thus, they are learning daily how to navigate the classroom context as they are simultaneously learning to teach. Long-term, mentored placements in classroom contexts are situated experiences that require interns to access knowledge of the community’s practices and provide opportunities for the preservice teacher to actively apply this knowledge into their work in the classroom (Cuenca, 2011). These authentic socializations in learning to teach, while also teaching students, create opportunities for preservice teachers to learn the balancing act of meeting instructional demands and their students’ needs.

Preservice teachers also face the tasks of developing their teacher identity and sense of agency in literacy teaching, managing an effective literacy classroom, and learning the curriculum specific to their school and classroom. The identity of a preservice teacher is dynamically shaped by their teacher education preparation, their current contexts for teaching, their own career goals as a teacher, their prior experiences as a learner themselves, and their professional experiences with children (Olsen 2008). The cultural tools and meditational systems of a specific context, such as a required literacy curriculum or educational policies in place, may guide how a teacher will enact agency over their students’ literacy learning (Lasky, 2005; Wertsch, 1993; Wertsch et al., 1991). These factors of teacher identity and agency may impact the ways in which a preservice teacher interacts with and uses their literacy curriculum.

Previous research has demonstrated how preservice teachers struggle with the tension of whether to follow a mandated textbook or teacher’s manual with fidelity or to abandon these materials if they do not match best practices for instruction learned through teacher education (Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006). Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on curricular materials that has created influential curriculum mandates and contexts

in which preservice teachers are being apprenticed into teaching and impacted the ways in which preservice teachers perceive instruction. For example, Pease-Alvarez and Samway (2008) found that a top-down reading mandate within one elementary school context created an environment in which novice and expert teachers alike either abandoned best practices in literacy instruction to follow the new curriculum with fidelity, partially abandoned some practices while maintaining others for literacy learning, or enacted resistance towards the new curriculum mandates in favor of maintaining their literacy instruction in a “business as usual” fashion. Each of these scenarios creates complexity in how a preservice teacher is apprenticed into teaching literacy in the elementary school classroom (e.g., Lortie, 1975).

Preservice teachers in elementary education need opportunities to learn how to negotiate the demands of curriculum materials and educational policies to support their students’ academic achievement as they work in classrooms where they are increasingly expected to teach to educational standards often linked to externally-mandated literacy curriculum, yet required in professional courses to teach in effective ways tailored to meet the needs, interests, and prior learning of their students in literacy (Madda, Griffin, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). These opportunities are limited in contemporary classroom contexts of top-down reading policies and requirements (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2010; Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). Understanding how elementary preservice teachers learn to teach literacy in their interning experiences is critical to their short- and long-term success. This understanding can also help us to see the instructional practices they may adopt and keep as new literacy teachers from these varied learning experiences.

### The Study

The research questions for this study were: (1) *What are preservice teachers’ contexts for literacy education* and (2) *On what occasions do preservice teachers witness and/or attempt local decision-making in response to mandated goals, materials, and assessments in their design of literacy curriculum and instruction?* A multi-method study

was used to capture patterns and trends within a large group of elementary preservice teachers completing their internship program within one academic year. The research worked to discover the local variations and opportunities in preservice teachers' teaching contexts, learning experiences, and local decision-making in literacy. This study used survey, think-aloud and focus group interviews, as well as analysis of texts (both interns' written unit development work and the text materials they used) to capture the perspectives of interns as they taught elementary literacy instruction. Surveys, think-aloud interviews, and focus groups were primary sources of data. Additionally, instructional documents were analyzed, and data was collected in several classrooms, schools, and communities. Six preservice teachers, selected voluntarily, served as the case studies to investigate the research questions. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identity and this research was approved by their university's Institutional Review Board.

The elementary interning teachers were assigned by their university to work in two large metropolitan areas located in one state in the industrial Midwest. During the year of the study, unemployment in the state was 10.2% and in the two cities anchoring the metropolitan area schools was 8% and 11.4% respectively (e.g., U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). These high rates of state and local unemployment reflected, at least in part, the near collapse of this state's core industry. We cite these statistics to foreshadow one of our study's key findings—the role of poverty, both sudden and chronic, in the transformation of elementary literacy learning and teaching experiences for both interning teachers and their students.

We proposed to investigate the thought and action of these interns as they surveyed the contexts in which they were working in terms of the resources and requirements for literacy education. Additionally, they were asked to design a two-week literacy unit in which they attempted to reconcile tensions between instructional mandates of educational policies and required literacy curricula. To address our questions, we collected and analyzed the data through using a triangulation of evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1978). The analyses

of the data included multiple iterations of open, axial, and closed coding to refine our coding scheme and begin theory building for the results (Charmaz, 2004). We formed grounded theory in relation to our research questions and linked it back to our theoretical framework/review of relevant literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1978). These theories were also developed through the individual case studies and thematic cross-case analyses within our multiple case studies (e.g., Stake, 2006). This iterative process enabled us to revise, elaborate, or reject inferences. It also enabled us to draw from multiple sources when crafting analytic descriptions (e.g., Erickson, 1986) to report our findings.

### **Results of The Study**

This study's findings show that the contemporary problems faced by our elementary preservice teachers are contextualized and historicized within the educational policies, instructional practices, educational texts, and competing interests preceding their entry into teaching. We found four styles of teaching that our six interning teachers adopted to bring relationship and coherence to their literacy instruction using mandated literacy curriculum. The four styles of teaching adopted were: (a) coping with the status quo in their literacy curriculum; (b) going outside the literacy curriculum; (c) hybridizing the literacy curriculum; or (d) bricolaging the literacy curriculum. These styles were contextualized to their classrooms, reflective of the policies, practices, and place in their field experience. Their teacher identities often influenced the style enacted within their classroom context. Their agency as a teacher, or their sense of influence over their literacy curriculum, was limited or maximized, depending on the contexts for teaching.

#### **Going Outside the Status Quo**

Two styles of literacy teaching, coping with the status quo and going outside the literacy curriculum, reflect how some of the six preservice teachers shaped teaching and instructional opportunities within their classroom contexts. In coping with the status quo of the literacy curriculum, the interning teachers interviewed for this study reported struggling to negotiate space or create hybridity in their literacy instruction within their class-

room when they were asked to design a developmentally appropriate literacy unit of study. Catherine, an intern-teacher in a fourth-grade classroom in a suburban school context, struggled to implement literacy centers to reinforce literacy strategies learned within the new basal reading series. She stated that her “mentor teacher said I went above and beyond and that it was something that could not be maintained because it was just, I mean, focusing on a small group. It required extra planning and work beyond what the basal was having us teach.” She also lamented how “I learned at the university how to teach comprehensive literacy, but now I am only using the basal reading program and it is not comprehensive. But it’s a district policy and we have to follow it.”

Another intern, Kim, who worked in a first-grade classroom within a large urban school district, has a similar story of coping with the status quo. She commented, “We have a very strict pacing guide that we are, you know, checked up on” by district literacy coaches. When they followed the established literacy curriculum as prescribed in their school, they were able to make limited contributions to the literacy curriculum or instructional design. Kim and Kloe, another intern in a second-grade classroom within the same school district, also tried out the style of going beyond the literacy curriculum. Kim developed a writing unit of study for her first-grade placement, centered on the fictional stories of Dr. Seuss. She stated, “My kids really loved it! It was so different from the writing we do for our basal series.” Kloe, alternatively, developed a poetry unit with reading and writing activities for her students, even when she lacked support around her. “I didn’t have the freedom with my mentor teacher in teaching literacy beyond this unit. We didn’t make time for writing and I wanted my students to be better writers.” In the end, Kloe’s poetry unit was well received by her mentor teacher and “it benefited our students’ writing—we could see it in everything they wrote...and I planned other writing units after it.” These examples demonstrate to us how the spaces for learning and teaching literacy were vastly different for our preservice teachers.

### **Spaces Between the Extremes**

It was only in the space between these extremes, and by

drawing on a varied assortment of resources for support, that the other preservice teachers we studied were able to cope with this dilemma (i.e., hybridizing their literacy instruction in ways that adhered to mandated standards) and used required curricular materials, yet crafted in their own instructional activities other texts, professionals and peers, or past experiences as learners along with their strong pedagogical content knowledge (i.e. bricolaging their literacy instruction). These subsequent teaching styles of hybridizing the literacy curriculum or bricolaging their literacy curriculum created new possibilities of engaging and motivating their students in the process of literacy learning.

Beverly and Kathy, intern-teacher in a sixth grade, suburban English-Language Arts block and in an urban kindergarten classroom respectively, became experienced in how to hybridize their literacy curriculum. Hybridizing literacy curriculum allows a teacher to pull upon “the strengths of their previous best practices [learned] and the policy requirements [of the curriculum and/or materials] to create an original pedagogy” that leads to high-quality teaching (Kersten & Pardo 2007). Beverly decided to also develop a poetry unit of study, using the themes from the district-developed literacy curriculum but with different resources. “It was Jack Prelutsky, the Shel Silverstein, you—the rhyming for little kids. These were sixth graders and I wanted them to see different versions of ‘poetry’.” She used adult poetry writers like Maya Angelou, song lyrics, and other relevant styles of poetry to read and model exemplar poetry, which in turn supported her students in their poetry writings, to meet the district instructional goals. “I pulled a lot from my poetry course that I took [at the university]. It helped to plan this unit.” Kathy had similar experiences in her kindergarten classroom as she planned to use two basal reading series, an original basal series to the district and a new pilot basal series. “We pick and choose what to use with our students. The phonics instruction was very repetitive. We choose what our students needed and the stories with more student involvement. I also used trade books and other literacy resources from the Internet to enhance our units.” Kathy, using her additional training as an early childhood educator, recognized the literacy

curriculum for the students must have diversity and that it was acceptable and “important to take the ideas they [the basal series] have and bring in my own stuff.” These two preservice teachers were different as they recognized the demands of educational policies and curriculum along with their developing senses of identity and agency to create literacy learning experiences for their students.

Bricolaging the literacy curriculum was different from the work of our other preservice teacher candidates, particularly those who hybridized their teaching. Levi-Strauss (1968) stated bricolage could be likened to a mosaic of available resources, or “tools,” orchestrated masterfully to support or create a new learning. In our study, Mike, one of our interning teachers in a 3rd grade classroom within a large urban school district, demonstrated what we liken to bricolaging. He also demonstrated a great deal of strong pedagogical content knowledge, or mastery over his content area of literacy in both teaching strategies and content awareness (Shulman, 1986). His unit theme of risk and consequences brought together the stories in their basal reading program, the writing resources that he found online, the grammar book that his mentor teacher had as a supplemental text, and the use of new literacies through technology communication with pen pals. He said, “I wanted to use the stories that my students were reading, and I realized that they needed some work in writing. We always focused on reading. I felt some writing would do them good. I designed my unit to include both reading and writing.” His teaching identity and sense of agency affected the instructional practices and materials used with his students. Mike’s bricolaging of a variety of instructional resources, along with his infusing of his own pedagogical content knowledge of literacy for third graders, allowed him to create authentic literacy learning experiences, free of one text, program, or policy.

### **Contextual Tensions of the Classroom and School**

Consequently, the styles of teaching enacted by the preservice teachers were also linked to the contextual tensions in their classroom and in the school. The elementary interning teachers immediately experi-

enced instructional and pedagogical tensions when they entered the classroom context. Focus group and interview data analyses indicated that they did not feel well-prepared to teach using the required, pre-packaged reading program materials. These pre-packaged curricula were often heavily laden with numerous materials, aimed to be comprehensive, yet not necessarily coherent, as reported by five of the six teachers. Artifact analyses also demonstrated how the materials included in the reading programs used were often not linked or not aligned with the instructional objectives found in state-level academic standards for the grade level. The teachers found learning to use the materials difficult, especially under the pressures of building and district level monitoring (i.e., instructional pacing charts or guides). In the focus groups, several of our teachers reported district literacy coaches or administrators coming in with “checklists” to see what instructional activities or pages were being completed on any given day.

The interviews and focus group revealed how the impasse in which they were left limited intern teacher voice and agency and induced guilt about not giving their students the very best literacy teaching. These interns were faced with this impasse yet held accountable daily to the classroom in which they were placed. They often lacked experiences and discourse about how to effectively weave coherent, responsive literacy teaching with the curriculum provided. Some interning teachers acknowledged that they would take the safe path of teaching the basal reading program as prescribed in their teachers’ manual. Catherine stated, and others agreed, “I was told to do something as the teacher’s edition stated and not to change it. This is different from what the university taught me about comprehensive literacy teaching.” Others attempted to hybridize their curriculum in various ways, drawing on resources including the Internet, their peers, and their prior knowledge and their own creative energy. This finding of negotiating between styles of teaching literacy begins to demonstrate how tacitly limiting the texts for teacher learning to prescriptive curriculum manuals affects research-based best practices in instructional pedagogy or their students’ interests and skills for literacy learning (e.g., Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006).



## Concluding Thoughts

We set out to inquire about elementary preservice teachers' local decision-making and what they learned of use in this process from the various educational contexts and relationships in which they participated in during their internship year (e.g., university courses; direct classroom teaching; conferences with mentors; the Internet; discussions with peers, past experiences as students). We wished to better understand, as teacher educators, how to best prepare our preservice teachers for teaching literacy in today's complex educational climate of educational policies, various instructional practices, and diverse places, all for the benefit of students' achievement and literacy learning. This led to exploring the learning of a complex practice within the context of both institutional knowledge and local action for making substantial contributions to social theories of education, the practice of teacher education, and teacher learning in literacy.

Our multiple case studies found, first, an increase in the use of basal reading programs in suburban and urban school settings. This shifts educational and social theory on how mandated curriculum is only found in "urban" contexts. We found many suburban school districts moving toward mandating and scripting how literacy instruction was delivered across their classrooms. It is rather reflective of changing educational expectations and the presumption of how "fidelity to the curriculum" will lead to students' achievement in literacy (Coburn, Pearson, & Woulfin, 2011). Basal reading programs or other forms of literacy curriculum are not inherently faulty or bad, but rather the teacher understanding, school leadership, and strict use after their implementation within classroom and school settings influenced their usefulness.

Second, the interning teachers who used basal reading programs equated them to the "literacy curriculum." This view of curriculum diverged from the university's setting where comprehensive literacy and best practices in literacy instruction within a wide variety of instructional materials, including basal reading programs, were advocated and emphasized (Madda, Griffo, Pearson, & Raphael, 2011). This leaves much to question and

research to further address the ways in which teacher preparation programs, field instructors, and mentor teachers can guide preservice teachers in using required literacy curriculum.

Third, we found the interning teachers were given limited access to teaching literacy and best practices in literacy instruction through required literacy curricula and other pre-established literacy instructional methods. This returns to the need for both local and global considerations of how to effectively select mentor teachers, support on-going mentoring, and select valuable clinical field placements that help prepare teachers for their future work in classrooms (Zeichner, 2010).

The fourth and most essential finding of our study, the ways in which interns managed their impasses on their own terms—a finding which challenges conventional wisdom in both mentoring and course-based teacher education. The styles of teaching (coping, going outside, hybridizing, and bricolaging) literacy provide lens on how preservice teachers were constrained or negotiated educational policies, required curriculum, and their own identity and agency as elementary teachers. Further research is needed to explore how these styles of teaching, particularly those of hybridizing and bricolaging, can be introduced in teacher preparation programs to ease the transition of preservice teachers from guided university experiences to their often independent first years of classroom teaching.

Learning to teach literacy is a complex, multifaceted process in and of itself. Educational policies and movements, such as *No Child Left Behind* and the *Common Core State Standards*, can potentially complicate how preservice teachers are apprenticed into their roles as literacy teachers at the elementary level. Learning to teach literacy, as exemplified in and across the cases in this study, is context-specific, resource-dependent, and policy-driven. This study helped us to learn how preservice teachers were dealing with mandated literacy curriculum and educational policies in very different ways. In supportive contexts and with the application of knowledge of teaching and subject matter, interns can experience agency, enhanced relationships with

students, and a sense of curricular coherence, reflecting both mandates and their own ideas. Mentor teachers, school contexts, and the teacher preparation programs must work better together to create more robust, positive, and open opportunities for the development of our nation's future teachers.

### Act Now!

- 1) **Create opportunities to “think aloud” with the interning teacher on the literacy curriculum and policies in your school.** Just as we “think aloud” with our students to allow them to see our in-the-head processes of literacy learning, our preservice teachers need to learn what it is like to “think as the teacher.” Take opportunities during instructional planning and teaching to make visible and clear your decision-making for your teaching. “Thinking aloud” can help your preservice teacher to learn routines, strategies, and skills faster for more immediate application with the students. It also allows them to see behind the curtain of what it takes to teach.
- 2) **Return to the high leverage practices (e.g., using comprehension strategies with students) your interning teacher knows and help them apply these practices to your classroom instruction.** High-leverage practices, those practices shown to have high frequency in classroom teaching and shown to improve student achievement, is the common language shared by mentor teachers and preservice teachers (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Teaching Works, 2021). Such practices as using reading comprehension strategies or teaching students’ vocabulary within a text have been shown to improve student achievement. You can help to bridge the university setting to the elementary classroom by talking about these instructional strategies and practices with preservice teachers to help them implement them within their own teaching.
- 3) **Talk about your own “agency” and “identity” as a literacy/classroom teacher in your**

**school.** Simply put, a teacher’s agency focuses on their sense of input or control over their curriculum and teaching. A teacher’s identity deals with examining your own beliefs, practices, and ideas you hold about teaching, learning, and literacy. If you make your own agency and identity clear, you can help your preservice teacher to begin to articulate theirs and help them to become more fully aware of what makes them a “teacher.”

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## Author Biography

**Dr. Chad H. Waldron** is an Assistant Professor of Education, Literacy, at the University of Michigan-Flint School of Education and Human Services. He is interested in literacy teacher preparation as well as community and family literacy initiatives. He can be reached at [chadwald@umich.edu](mailto:chadwald@umich.edu).



# “Does Your Arm Hurt?” A Content Analysis of Upper Limb Differences in Children’s Books

by Vincent Genareo and Amber Meyer



Vincent Genareo



Amber Meyer

Public media attention has created more recognition of, and pride among, people with upper limb differences (or ULDs). The recent spotlight on ULDs has stemmed from 3-D printed prosthetics, adaptive gaming devices, national role models (such as a 2018 Super Bowl commercial), and social media sharing. Though the attention has been largely positive, the widely-reported November 2015 incident of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump mocking a reporter with a physical disability forced social scientists to rethink how physical differences are viewed and, more importantly, how they are lived. Very little educational research has been done on the experiences of people with ULDs, and the information available for teachers, parents, and medical professionals is sparse (James et. al, 2006).

This study addresses this gap in research by analyzing preK-6th grade children’s books representing characters with upper limb differences (ULDs) to support teachers in carefully selecting which books to use in their classrooms. Children have the opportunity to develop self-awareness (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013) and positive self-identity (Hall, 2008; Levin, 2007) through their interaction with books in home and school contexts.

In addition, books can provide children with counternarratives to stereotypes and expand their exposure to other cultures and communities (Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007). Therefore, having diverse character representation with distinct messages told in children’s books can be beneficial to all children. As such, the research questions for this study were: *What children’s books exist for students with ULDs? What thematic elements are present within these texts? What plot elements facilitate classroom discussions about ULDs and differences?*

## Literature Review

### Upper Limb Differences

An upper limb difference is defined as missing part, or all of, an arm or hand; missing parts of the legs would be referred to as a lower limb difference. ULDs can be congenital (present at birth) or acquired through illness or accident. We have chosen the term limb *difference*, as is becoming more common (Bae, Canizares, Miller, Waters & Goldfarb, 2018), in contrast to its terminology in medical research (i.e., limb reduction, limb deficiency, limb abnormality), because it better encompasses a range of medical issues and does so in a more positive and inclusive way.



Incidence or diagnoses of ULDs have increased over the previous 20 years. Current estimates put the total number of U.S. children with ULDs at 32,500, total individuals with ULDs at nearly 600,000, and approximately 1,500 born each year (Zuniga, Carson, Peck, Kalina, Srivastava & Peck, 2017; Zuniga, Katsavelis, Peck, Stollberg, Petrykowski, Carson & Fernandez, 2015). Most are congenital (born-with), rather than acquired (occurred after birth). The causes for congenital ULDs are most often unknown (Michielsen, Wijk, & Ketellar, 2010). Whether or not a child needs, or chooses to use, a prosthetic depends on their specific ULD and if it prohibits typical or specialty activities (e.g., playing sports or making music) within their life. There exist many types of prostheses for a variety of conditions and functions, but many children choose not to use prostheses because of their lack of sensation or that prostheses themselves do not fit well or are uncomfortable (Zuniga et al., 2017).

With the rising levels of national awareness of ULDs, some support and connection groups have emerged online. For instance, Reddit, the social media platform, has several subreddits or discussion boards. In school, though, having a ULD may contribute to negative psychological effects on children's self-concept and self-esteem. To illustrate, research has shown that boys with limb differences may exhibit significantly lower self-esteem (Andersson, Gillberg, Fernell, Johansson & Nachemson, 2011), which may influence psychological and social well-being and academic achievement (Michielsen et al., 2010). Children as young as four can identify peers with physical disabilities (Dyson, 2005). There is current evidence that able-bodied students avoid interacting with peers with physical differences (Edwards, Camerson, King & McPherson, 2019), so teachers must be aware of the resources they can provide to aid in peer acceptance. Some current research, though, challenges the social effects of ULDs on children (Bae et al., 2018), suggesting children with ULDs may exceed the ability of the general population in forming peer relationships and maintaining positive emotional states.

As classrooms have become more inclusive of students

with special needs and differences, it is more important that general education teachers understand how to foster acceptance, empathy, and belongingness among their students. In order for acceptance and inclusion to occur, students must first be made aware of their peers (Maich & Belcher, 2012). Educators must understand the available resources and pedagogical strategies that encourage peer acceptance for students with specific disabilities and differences.

### **Multicultural Literature**

Sims Bishop (1990) argued that books serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors which allow the reader to gain perspectives into a larger human experience as it relates to one's own lived experience. The use of quality, diverse, multicultural books that include characters from traditionally marginalized groups in classrooms can provide an accurate representation of the world and day-to-day lived experiences (Sims Bishop, 1990). In addition, the opportunity for children from marginalized groups to see themselves represented by literature provides role models and affirming personal connections.

It is well-documented that children's books help teachers foster supportive learning environments through representation of exceptional children; this can empower children to accept their own and others' differences and demonstrate respect for and understanding of students with special needs (Blaska, 2004). By selecting and using high quality, multicultural children's literature that includes characters with ULDs, teachers can help illuminate the lived experiences of a marginalized group.

Diversity-focused children's books provide a number of important benefits for students with disabilities and their peers. First, they provide context for understanding experiences of those with disabilities. Boutot (2007) suggests teachers lead discussions from the book that examine socially atypical behaviors of characters with disabilities. This includes the way they may talk, walk, or move. This can help children understand reasons for differences and prepare them for understanding any special equipment they may need.

Children's books can also facilitate the construction of identity for those with differences. As children read books, they often seek those they can relate to; those with whom they identify can help to construct how they view themselves (Ullah, Ali & Naz, 2014). They seek characters representative of themselves and learn from the characters through which they see themselves. Teachers should have classroom resources for their students through which realistic representations are offered (Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016).

Diverse representations in children's books can be a resource for promoting peer acceptance within and among diverse groups. These books can illuminate feelings that children with disabilities may have so peers without disabilities can learn empathy as they read a book that expresses emotions caused by positive and negative peer interactions. Children, including those with exceptionalities, can struggle with effectively expressing their emotions (Lukash & Coles, 2002), so books may function as a surrogate for those emotions. Books can also support peers without disabilities to examine their own feelings toward students with disabilities and give them a greater understanding of their similarities and differences (Ullah et al., 2014). This acceptance can be nurtured by teachers through deliberate conversations about diversity in the books.

However, quality children's books representing characters with disabilities have been historically absent from classroom resources, in part due to the lack of published books in this area (Beckett, Ellison, Barrett & Shah, 2010). Further complicating the issue is that disability-focused children's books often reproduce stereotypes, negative portrayals, or oppressive terms or attitudes of characters with disabilities (Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016). Teachers must be adept at identifying relevant and bias-free texts for their classroom.

Suggestions for identifying quality children's books include looking for stereotypes, loaded words, tokenism, messages sent about lifestyles of characters with disabilities, the authors' and illustrators' backgrounds, copyright date, and overall book quality (Derman-Sparks, 2016). Additionally, Lintner (2011)

recommends that teachers should consider the following questions when selecting a children's book featuring characters with disabilities: (a) How are individuals portrayed? Sad, heroic, realistic? (b) How are relationships with nondisabled peers portrayed? (c) Are characters portrayed in a variety of settings? (d) Does the book encourage acceptance and respect? In this study, we expanded on these questions through the use of Nasatir & Horn's (2003) framework for analyzing children with special needs through illustrations, storylines, authors, and presentations of exceptionalities with the specific focus on children's books that represent characters with upper limb differences.

## **Methodology**

### **Positionality**

As educational researchers, we both hold an interest in exploring themes within preK-6th grade children's books representing characters with ULDs. Genareo is an educational assessment and program evaluator. As a parent of a toddler with a congenital upper limb difference, he started this inquiry as a means to discover children's books that would allow his son to positively see himself within the literature. Meyer's research focus is on inclusive literacy methods. As a teacher educator, she holds a strong belief in the power of the texts that are selected to engage, motivate, and interest children in reading.

### **Data Sources**

We identified and coded 24 books in this study. Children's books used in this study were identified from six sources, all of which were professional organizations specializing in working with children with ULDs, as well as algorithmic suggestions from national online bookstores. Three of the professional organizations were Limbs 4 Kids, Lucky Fin Project, and One Little Fin Blog.

### **Data Analysis**

We conducted content analysis to examine themes within preK-6th grade children's books ( $n = 24$ ) representing characters with ULDs. We used Nasatir & Horn's (2003) framework for analyzing children with special needs through illustrations, storylines, authors,

and presentations of exceptionalities. We modified the framework to adapt to the types of characters in the book (people and animals) and for use with books specific to ULDs; it was initially developed for analyzing content of books spanning across all types of differences. Examples of the modification included a category created to examine if, or how, prostheses were presented in the text or illustrations and specific look-for examples were created specific to ULDs, such as samples of loaded words taken from the books themselves.

Once we agreed on an appropriate framework, we independently coded the books. After coding was completed, we met to check for interrater agreement (percent agreement) and reliability by coding two of each other's books and crosschecking their findings. Scoring reliability was computed (Cohen's  $k = .84$ ; 89.1% agreement) and found *almost perfect agreement*, as defined by Leedy & Ormrod (1997). Once final agreement was completed for all books, we analyzed findings to determine the content and appropriateness of the texts. The findings were descriptively analyzed using the instrument, by examining frequencies of codes (such as Tokenism, Type of Role, Loaded Words, Author's Background), and by analyzing how these codes presented through explicit or implicit messages and illustrations.

### Findings

Results suggest a recent emergence of books featuring characters with ULDs. The books spanned genres, but most were biographical and intended to teach students about ULDs. Most books featuring characters with ULDs were intended for pre-K children. Nearly all books displayed tokenism in their presentation of characters. Stereotypes and loaded words were also present, but were most often used to teach and typically resolved within the storyline. There were also potentially problematic elements presented in the books.

#### What Children's Books Exist for Students with ULDs?

The 24 children's books that feature children with ULDs were published between 1991 and 2018. Most

books were published in 2017 ( $n = 7$ ). In contrast, the second highest number of books published in other years (2008 and 2012) was 3. Between 1991 and 2018, the majority of published books representing characters with ULDs were appropriate for early childhood and early elementary levels. Three books were identified as being appropriate for children in upper elementary grades. There were three different genres represented in the books: fiction ( $n = 13$ ), biographies ( $n=8$ ), and autobiography ( $n=2$ ). In preparation for this study, adolescent literature was also searched; no fictional adolescent literature was found featuring characters with ULD and these few books tended to be biographies or autobiographies.

#### What Thematic Elements are Present Within These Texts?

The types of characters with ULDs in the books varied. The character with ULDs was typically the main protagonist in the book or a supporting character used to teach the main character about ULDs. There were two non-fiction books that portrayed different people with ULDs that were explanatory in nature and featured athletes who had ULDs. The characters with ULDs included nine human males, four human females, a tree, and animals, such as an octopus, bugs, bears, cats, dogs, robots, and chimpanzees. Only one book featured an African American main character with an ULD.

The majority of the books were written by someone who was associated with people with ULDs. Nine books were written by people with ULDs, four were written by parents of children with ULDs, one was written by a grandparent of a child with ULDs, two were collaborations between children with ULDs and their parents, and five were written by medical doctors who specialize in working with people with ULDs. Two authors appeared to have tangential associations. In only one book was there no known ULD association between the authors or illustrators. Within these varied authors, there was not an agreement as to the terminology regarding the different limb. For example, some called it a *special hand*, some referred to it as an *amazing hand*, and others called it a *nub*, among other terms.

### **What Plot Elements Facilitate Classroom Discussions About ULDs and Differences?**

The plot elements facilitated classroom discussion of education and acceptance. Most books were meant to teach children about ULDs, but they taught about ULDs in different ways. Some books discussed medical procedures, medical terminology, prosthetic information, and types of doctors with which children with ULDs might interact. To illustrate, in one book, the main character is a boy without a ULD. He brings his older brother, who has a ULD, for show-and-tell, and the children in the class take turns asking his older brother questions (*Can you ride a bike? Does your arm hurt?*). This book was based on a true story in which the author brought his brother to the classroom and wrote the book to help inform other children who might have similar questions. Other books presented similar content in different ways, such as one autobiographical book in which the main character discusses various emotions, experiences, and adaptations that have worked for her. The book included stereotypes she has encountered throughout her young life, such as her frustrations when people stare at her hand or when they assume it is connected to her intelligence level.

The books were typically designed to promote acceptance of people with ULDs, either through peer understanding of their experiences and similarities or through sharing experiences designed to allow children with ULDs to connect with the authors' stories. One book included names and illustrations of the authors' heroes with ULDs, including Jim Abbott, a Major League Baseball pitcher, and Nicole Kelly, Miss Iowa 2013. Many books were designed to show that people with ULDs are similar in nearly every way with other children, including their feelings and home lives, and showed that some excel in unexpected areas. Some books also contained information for teachers. One book was written by a parent of a child with ULDs about their child's first day of school. During that day, the teacher painted all the children's hands for a classroom banner and the text explained how the teacher approached asking the child if they could paint both of their hands.

### **Potentially Problematic Elements**

There were potentially problematic elements found in some books. Nineteen of the 24 books contained loaded words (e.g., different, stupid, disgrace, and ashamed). In all but one book, loaded words were resolved with the storyline. In addition, the majority of the books utilized loaded words as a learning tool for student acceptance and were provided to explain feelings, emotions, and experiences of people with ULDs. The book that included unresolved loaded words was published in 2008 by a person without a ULD. This particular text presented a character with a ULD as being weak and defenseless as a result of his ULD. The character relied on others to help save him from his mishaps on a river, and could only be *made whole* by a prosthetist. The story concluded with the prosthetist fitting him with prosthetic, which fulfilled the character's feeling of wholeness. This feeling of being incomplete without a prosthetic may be a harmful viewpoint for children who should work on self-acceptance.

Another book, also written by a person without a ULD, was problematic in its presentation of self-acceptance. The book began with a character who was missing both arms thinking to himself about why he is alive, which is a problem itself. The character immediately resolves this existential crisis by praying, and by the flip of the page, he has accepted himself. There is evidence that religion or spirituality can assist some people with self-concept and self-acceptance, but this book presented major problems—the belief that one should wonder if their existence is warranted if they have a ULD—and created more in how quickly it claimed deep emotional distress could be completely resolved.

A further element that might be problematic is the simplicity of acceptance. It is expected in children's books that the storyline stays fairly concise, but a number of the books displayed an unlikely immediate acceptance of children with differences. The nuance of self-reflection and discussion that may be necessary for some students to accept others was not often brought up. Simply, in many of the children's books, acceptance was immediately offered by peers once they realized they shared common similarities. Only a small number of



autobiographical books discussed the feeling that peer acceptance was sometimes difficult.

### **Discussion**

Informative, engaging, and appropriate texts may be a way to bridge the understanding of differences among children. These books are desperately needed, as is information for teachers to make decisions on book quality. Based on the analysis, we provide several recommendations for consideration regarding children's books with ULDs.

#### **Recommendation 1: Avoid Narratives about Exceptionality**

In books about disability, Nasatir and Horn (2003) believed "the story should be able to be told in the same way even if the main character did not have a disability" (p. 7). In the present study, in all books but one, the storyline was dependent upon one or more characters having a ULD. We argue that writing a book that is specifically about that disability, and could not be told without, is now acceptable and more appropriate because books about children with disabilities are meant to teach and promote acceptance (Ostrosky, Mouzourou, Dorsey, Favazza & Leboeuf, 2013). Spotlighting differences among students by integrating the difference into the storyline is now common practice. What might be inappropriate, though, is how many of the books in the present study emphasized that the characters with ULDs are exceptional in other areas, using phrases and storylines about being braver than their peers or extraordinarily talented in certain areas like sports or music. Although children should understand that ULDs do not hold individuals back in many areas, and they may, indeed, be extraordinary in any area, the concern is that some stories relied on a character having to be extraordinary to gain acceptance. Stories that promote excelling as being a gatekeeper for peer relationships may be harmful in teaching children about differences.

#### **Recommendation #2: Diversify the Setting and Characters**

There was a lack of diversity within the settings and characters. Settings took place in the daily lives of

children, but the settings were generally limited to school, home, and occasionally in a doctor's office. While these are often the main settings of children's lives, it would be relevant for future books to take place in other settings, including community centers, culturally diverse venues, performance and sports arenas, as well as imaginary locations. This may broaden interest in reading the texts. Children with and without ULDs may better relate to books with more diverse locations and storylines.

In addition, there is a significant lack of diversity of characters with ULDs. Only one character was African American. To illustrate, there were fewer racially diverse characters than the number of bugs with ULDs ( $n = 2$ ) featured in these books. More attention needs paid to representing BIPOC characters with ULDs. In addition, males with ULDs were represented more in the texts ( $n = 13$ ) than females ( $n = 7$ ). Specifically, all males were White. An increase in female characters as well as racial and cultural representation across genders would increase the representation of diverse character with ULDs. This would provide characters that are more relatable to a diverse array of children.

With these recommendations, it is important to keep in mind that seven books ( $\sim 1/3$ ) were published in 2017. This trend is likely due to the increased public awareness of ULDs and self-publishing opportunities. There currently exist a number of avenues for authors to self-publish books without a publishing company, including crowd-sourced funding programs. Two books in this study resulted from a popular crowd-sourcing website. In general, we believed the quality of storyline and illustrations were strong in the self-published books. However, there was a wide range in quality in the self-published books, and a few contained grammatical errors in the text itself. There are also limited upper-elementary appropriate books and very few appropriate books for middle-school students representing characters with ULDs.

#### **Recommendations #3: Know Your Students with ULDs**

If a teacher has a child with an ULD in the classroom,

it is important they understand the individual child with ULDs when selecting texts. We recommend first choosing books that represent the specific type of ULD the child may have. There are children's books available for above- or below-elbow ULDs, books with characters who only have a hand difference, and books with unilateral (affecting one side) and bilateral (affecting both sides) ULDs. Next, teachers might consider books representing children who either do or do not use a prosthetic. Similarly, there are books featuring characters who live successfully with no prosthetic and books that either feature prosthetics or delve into the science of prosthetics. If the child is comfortable, they could possibly discuss their own prosthetic, if they have one, with the class.

Next, teachers should identify the purpose of the books. If the purpose is to teach children about the condition, a number of ULD books exist that explain what ULDs are and feature a number of different types of ULDs as examples. There are also books explaining the life experiences, both good and bad, of people with ULDs, and books that offer tips for children with ULDs, including tying shoes and making art. There are books that are written to inspire, entertain, or connect with children with ULDs. Regardless of the intended purpose of the book, the authors highly suggest teachers read the book ahead of time. Look for instances of stereotypes and negative portrayals of people with ULDs. If they are present, and they often are, decide if they exist to resolve common misconceptions. If they do not resolve in the book itself, we recommend not reading these books with the student with ULDs or the class.

Similarly, if teachers feel that issues are not presented at an appropriate level of complexity for the age of students, they must decide if they can facilitate a conversation that would lead the class to that level of complex understanding. In this study, we found many instances of peer or self acceptance presented in a simplified fashion; although ideal, acceptance likely takes longer and teachers should be prepared for a longitudinal process of relationship-building with students in their class. We believe it is also important that the book's author has a direct connection with ULDs. If the book's author has

a ULD themselves, or intimately knows a person with a ULD, their experiences may be more accurately represented in the text.

Next, teachers should be cautious when choosing self-published books. There were several identified that represented a high quality in writing, storyline, representation of children with ULDs, and illustrations, but others were poor quality in all areas. If the trend of self-publishing continues, and it most likely will, the majority of these types of books will come from this arena. The final suggestion we have for teachers is to allow the parent(s)/guardian(s) of children with ULDs to first read and review the books. Parents likely have a sense of appropriateness of the storyline and experiences presented in relation to their child. Use them as a resource because they have lived with the child through meetings with doctors, discussions with the child about their ULDs, and through positive and traumatizing social experiences.

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## Author Biographies

**Dr. Vincent Genareo** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Early and Elementary Education at Salisbury University. His teaching and research involves assessment development and testing, but his core interest is the education of people with upper limb diversities. He can be reached at [vrgenareo@salisbury.edu](mailto:vrgenareo@salisbury.edu).

**Dr. Amber Meyer** is an Assistant Professor at Salisbury University. She is interested in early literacy methods, bilingual educational practices, and social justice and equity issues. She can be reached at [almeyer@salisbury.edu](mailto:almeyer@salisbury.edu).



# Virtual Coaching: Throughout and Beyond a Pandemic

by Kimberly Blumke



Months before COVID-19 impacted all aspects of education, I was already researching ways to collaborate virtually with teachers. As an Early Literacy Coach at Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque Isle Educational Service District (COPESD)—and the only coach to cover 13 elementary schools and over 2,000 square miles—I was struggling to find the best way to work with teachers around the implementation of MAISA-GELN's (2016) *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy Grades K to 3*. In September 2019, our main office building burned to the ground, so I no longer had a place to hold professional learning sessions. I had moved my coaching sessions to a local district, but the long drive was a concern for some educators, and I wasn't getting the participation I had hoped for. And, of course, the availability of substitute teachers is always an issue.

When I decided to move my professional learning sessions online, the change was met with positive feedback. At the time, I offered half-day sessions for grade bands so one substitute teacher could be shared between two teachers. While teachers liked this format, it still didn't give me enough opportunity to coach teachers one-on-one. I started asking myself how I could use virtual platforms to not only provide professional learning but also achieve impactful virtual



**Kimberly Blumke**

coaching. In this article, I share the journey I took from searching for innovative ways to partner with teachers remotely to creating and implementing a virtual coaching program within my Educational Service District.

## Getting Started

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Early Literacy Coaching Model (2018) offered a road map of what I should be doing as a coach, but it didn't necessarily lay out specific steps for implementing a coaching cycle. I wanted our coaching cycle to be grounded in a constructivist approach where teachers were active, not passive learners, so they could learn by doing and reflect on their actions. I believe teachers need to have agency over their learning if it is to be meaningful to them. Researcher, speaker, and writer Andy Hargreaves argues, "Too many professional development initiatives are done to teachers—not for, with or by them" (n.d.). I challenged myself with designing a process for partnering with teachers that was meaningful and relevant through a virtual format.

I dug into articles and research on virtual coaching with a vengeance. One of the best sources I found was the Visibly Better website (2021) designed by The Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University; their Best Foot Forward Project (2021) included a toolkit for video observation. These resources emphasized reflection as a key part



of coaching. Additional research pointed to virtual coaching being just as effective, and possibly even more effective, than face-to-face coaching (Vernon-Feagans, Bratsch-Hines, Varghese, Bean, & Hedrick, 2015). I was intrigued! I knew virtual coaching could help me overcome the barriers of the physical distance and time restraints that I had been facing.

My research led me to several different companies that support virtual coaching. I looked at structures, requested quotes, participated in demos, and searched for customer reviews of the companies and their platforms. I compiled a summary of the research and proposed it to my supervisor during the winter of 2020. It turns out my supervisor had been thinking along the same lines and was very supportive of creating a virtual coaching program at COPESD. The two of us agreed to move forward with a company called Sibme to help us structure our program and provide an online platform for our work. It is important to note that virtual coaching can occur by using free online tools if funding isn't available for a platform.

### **Preparation and Program Roll Out**

I spent the spring and summer planning the structure of our virtual coaching program and creating support materials. My coaching partner, Kim Peters, and I rolled our virtual coaching program out to all building principals within our ESD in the fall. While the principals were understandably preoccupied with COVID-related challenges and planning, our program was met with reserved, yet positive, interest.

We invited three districts to work with us as we began our first set of coaching cycles. We set up face-to-face meetings with the three building principals to explain the virtual coaching structure and share related documents. We explained expectations for the coaches, teachers, and principals and answered questions. All three principals were receptive to the program and were eager to move forward. While the principals talked about mandating the participation of all K-3 teachers, we emphasized that Thompson and Kosiorek (2017) argue: "Optional participation means that teachers have the choice of whether or not they will participate in the

program. The fact that the program is not mandated or forced on teachers is an important element to its success, especially in the early implementation stage" (p. 15). Based on our recommendation, all three principals followed our lead by sticking to voluntary participation.

According to Knight (2021), a coaching program can be successful or it can fail based on the level of principal support. Knight goes as far as to state that the easiest way to triple the impact of coaching is through principal support. Principals can support coaches by making sure they have the time to coach, encourage a partnership approach between coaches and teachers, understand that the coach-teacher work is confidential, and engage in regular meetings with the coach to make sure they are on the same page. Additionally, principals should do what they expect of teachers. Recording their own meetings and presentations in order to learn from them can go a long way in supporting coaching.

Next, we emailed teachers, inviting them to join us in a virtual coaching partnership. The invitation included a brief video explanation of our coaching program, as well as an option to view a more in-depth "infomercial." We asked teachers to respond with a time we could meet face-to-face to give them more information, create timelines, and deliver the iPads and mics (purchased with ESD funds designated for professional learning) that would be used for recording lessons. We invited 14 K-3 teachers, and eleven responded expressing interest. While it took some persistence, we eventually met with teachers and got them set up to begin our virtual coaching cycles.

Since then, we have only met with teachers remotely. At the time of this writing, 10 teachers have either finished the coaching program or are still working through it with the exception of one teacher who stopped after three cycles due to personal reasons. We consider completion to be after four to six cycles, with a preference of six cycles.

### **The Virtual Coaching Cycle**

Our coaching cycle consists of four steps, with the ultimate goal of helping teachers strengthen the

implementation of the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3*. These steps were created through collaboration with Sibme. According to the MDE Early Literacy Coaching Model (2018), coaching should be encouraging and not evaluative, so we try to infuse this notion in all of our work with teachers to build trust.

- **Step 1 Pre-Coaching Conversation:** This first, face-to-face meeting takes place once when we first begin our partnership. At this time, the coach and the teacher discuss which Literacy Essential will be a focus. The focus area will merge into more specific practices over the weeks, or at times, it may move to a completely different focus. Through the use of targeted, reflective questions, the coach guides the teacher in determining which areas will be most important to address to improve literacy instruction and the literacy skills of students.
- **Step 2 Teacher Recording and Reflection:** In this step, the teacher records a lesson and watches the recording to reflect on their teaching. Each teacher clips their video into a 10-12-minute segment to narrow focus on a targeted section of the lesson. The teacher creates time-stamped comments and questions as they reflect on what they see in the recording. Next, they share the clip and comments with the coach. With the Sibme platform, this is as easy as a simple drop-down menu and one click.
- **Step 3 Dialogue Cycle:** At this point, the coach responds to the teacher's comments and makes time-stamped comments or questions of their own. This exchange takes place asynchronously to allow teachers and coaches to respond back and forth when it works in their schedule.
- **Step 4 Collaborative Review:** At this point, the teacher and coach meet synchronously through Zoom or another video conferencing tool. The teacher and coach often watch the recording together, discuss the asynchronous conversation that took place, and collaborate to create new action steps and goals based on the

reflective conversation. The coach completes a Coaching Summary form that documents the highlights of the conversation, action steps, and when the next synchronous meeting will occur. Helpful resources can also be linked in the form. The action steps are added in the Sibme platform for the teacher to check off as they are completed.

Steps two through four—a cycle—are completed four to six times. We originally planned that it would take approximately one week to go through the cycle. We have found, however, that with the complications of COVID-19, the cycle takes longer. Quite often, it takes us two to three weeks to get through a cycle. As stated by Brown and L'Allier (2020), "There is no magic to the coaching cycle. The format is meant to be simple and predictable, but flexible enough to meet the needs of the teachers" (p. 55). Kim and I have agreed that it is crucial to be flexible with timelines as teachers are overwhelmed with teaching face-to-face with restrictions, learning to teach online, and managing the general toll the pandemic has had on teachers both professionally and personally.

With that being said, we have also found that we need to be persistent with our communication. Because teachers have so much going on, it would be quite easy for them to push the coaching process, planning, reflection, and meetings aside. We continue to follow up with teachers to keep them engaged in the process. One teacher recently shared that participating in the virtual coaching program holds her accountable for the action steps. It makes sure she sets time aside to reflect and discuss her literacy instruction. Hall and Simeral (2015) state that reflective practitioners "have awareness of their instructional realities, are intentional in their actions, accurately assess their impact, adjust their actions on the fly, and engage in ongoing reflection" (pp. 39-41). Partnering with teachers to facilitate reflection is pivotal to our work as coaches.

### Feedback

Kim and I feel that our virtual coaching program is going well, but what matters much more is if the teachers are finding value in it. We created midpoint and

endpoint teacher surveys to solicit feedback that we can use to improve our coaching structure and process. So far, the survey responses show teachers find the virtual coaching experience helpful. We asked a series of three questions using a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.” One hundred percent of responses scored all three of the following questions as a 4 or 5.

- Working with a virtual coach is impacting the work I do in my classroom.
- Receiving feedback on my self-recorded videos is improving the work I do in my classroom.
- Watching and reflecting on the videos I have recorded is helping me improve the work I do in my classroom.

Additional open-ended responses to the survey suggest that the teachers appreciate the flexibility of the program. They like the asynchronous structure to work through the cycle when it best fits their schedule, and they appreciate the flexibility Kim and I have for them for meeting timelines. Interestingly, teachers feel being a part of the virtual coaching program holds them accountable for keeping best practices in mind while planning and carrying out research-based lessons, even during a pandemic and the unpredictability occurring throughout the school year.

First-grade Inland Lakes Elementary teacher, Nicole Moore explained her experience:

This process has been unique, and new, and kind of inventive. It made me really excited to be a part of it. Through the process, I think the biggest takeaways were with the goal setting and the reflection we did together. I actually told Kim once that I didn't want to watch the video on the same day I recorded because I'll remember what happened instead of watching it with fresh eyes. Watching yourself teach outside of the moment is really powerful. You improve your skills because of this process. It is time-consuming, but taking the time to reflect on our teaching is something we should be doing anyway. The coaching cycle improved my teaching and my ability to pinpoint

a skill, reflect, and make adjustments that will also transfer to other parts of my teaching. It's good practice.

That said, it seems that the collaborative partnership between coach and teacher is also an important part of the process. For example, teachers seem unlikely to continue the practice of recording themselves teaching and reflecting on their lessons if we are not working with them. On the survey, teachers indicated that while they found it to be valuable, teachers probably would not continue using video unless they had someone to collaborate with around the recordings. This response suggests that it may also be possible to create a protocol for grade level or cross-district collaboration within an online platform for continuing the process of lesson recording and reflection.

We also have two surveys that we ask principals to complete to give their perceptions of the program. We have not received much feedback yet, but what we have received has been positive. One principal stated, “The work Kim is doing with my teachers is helping the teachers to recognize things that they might not have seen before. This is helping them to become better educators for our students and better teammates for the staff.” I have noticed that working virtually can make it more difficult to connect with principals. While working with teachers is our main focus, collaborating with administrators is a piece of our program we will need to improve by creating more intentional opportunities to touch base throughout the school year. Communicating with principals is important for keeping support for coaching in place.

### **Coaching the Coaches**

My virtual coaching partner, Kim, had the great idea of doing our own reflection to help us grow as coaches. With permission, we share our teacher coaching conversations that include our own time-stamped comments and questions. Then, we collaborate around the recordings, focusing on everything from our coaching verbiage to body language. We are essentially doing what we are asking the teachers to do. At first, it was a bit uncomfortable being so vulnerable, but we got over

it once we saw the value of opening ourselves up to specific feedback to improve our coaching.

In partnership with Sibme, we recently created a Michigan ISD Literacy Coaching “Huddle” in the Sibme platform. We hope to use this as a space to share and learn with other virtual coaches across the state. To date, we have participation from three different Michigan ISDs, and we expect that number to grow. Even coaches benefit from being coached. Coaches can benefit from participating in professional learning networks. Coaches are great supporters of one another and can offer inspiration, resources, and collaboration around similar challenges (Bakhshaei, Hardy & Ostrand, 2021).

### **Moving Forward and Reflecting on Our Work**

As we proceed, we plan to offer asynchronous collaboration opportunities among the teachers we coach. There is great value in this sort of collaboration. Teacher collaboration can not be overlooked if we want to improve student learning (EdVestors Making Space The Value of Teacher Collaboration, 2014). These collaborative opportunities will take place within our coaching platform.

We are still new to the virtual coaching world, but I am excited to be engaging with teachers more consistently at a much deeper level than I ever have. The asynchronous nature of the work allows time for me to do my own reflection, research, and plan for questioning to facilitate thinking prior to meeting with a teacher. Since I am working from home, it is easy for me to meet with teachers when it is most convenient for them, whether it is at 7:00 in the morning, on their prep period, after school, or in the evening hours. This kind of flexibility does not occur when dealing with time and space restraints. I feel that offering teachers control over when to meet greatly reduces the stress teachers feel. When teachers are more relaxed, it is much easier for them to utilize personal reflection in response to carefully crafted questions that prime the pump for refining instructional moves that are backed by the Literacy Essentials.

### **A Benefit for All**

I truly believe that the use of video, reflective conversations, and virtual meetings is a game-changer for our coaching at COPESD. Athletes and coaches have used video and feedback to improve for years. Good teachers, just like athletes, know that there is always room for improvement. That’s the beauty of our virtual literacy coaching program. It is for all K-3 teachers, because we know all of us can always get better. Quite often, the reality of what we view in a recording is different than what we thought was happening at the moment. We hear this time and time again from teachers. At COPESD, we will continue to break down the barriers of time and space with virtual coaching to partner with teachers to improve the literacy skills of our K-3 students.

For more detailed information and documents, you can view COPESD’s Breaking Down the Barriers of Time & Space slides here: <http://bit.ly/37ABv6H>

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## Author Biography

**Kimberly Blumke** is an Early Literacy Coach at Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque-Isle Educational District in Indian River, MI. Kimberly enjoys learning and collaborating with other educators to improve student literacy skills. She is interested in engaging adult learners through the use of educational technology and instructional design. Kimberly can be reached at [blumkek@copesd.org](mailto:blumkek@copesd.org).



# Grey Clouds and Silver Linings: Professional Learning for Secondary Educators during COVID-19

by Jenelle Williams



**Jenelle Williams**

## *Literacy in the Secondary Classroom: The Dream*

Long before the pandemic hit, members of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Disciplinary Literacy Task Force had been deeply engaged in thinking about what it might take to scale a statewide conversation about literacy in every secondary classroom. We dreamed forward and envisioned this scene:

*In the secondary grades, content-expert educators would enable students to develop the skills of disciplinary literacy, including the specialized vocabulary, communication practices, and tools for each discipline. From this, students would learn to navigate reading, writing, speaking, and listening demands. These demands would then shift depending on the contexts, purposes, and audiences specific to a discipline. Educators would provide instruction intentionally designed to support students as they are apprenticed into specific ways of thinking and communicating that are valued in subjects like mathematics, science, social studies, the English language arts, and all other secondary school content areas. In classrooms where disciplinary literacy is a focus, we would see students engaging in substantive, highly relevant learning that is readily applicable to life in and out of the classroom.*

Task Force members designed a document to help articulate this dream further – the *Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12*, which identifies ten sets of instructional strategies that can be applied across academic disciplines, along with discipline-specific versions (available at [literacyessentials.org](http://literacyessentials.org)). These instructional strategies are based on findings from an extensive review of a wide body of research conducted by a research team led by Drs. Elizabeth Moje and Darin Stockdill at the University of Michigan's Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research. Additionally, Michigan content and learning experts from the intermediate school districts (ISDs), state professional educator organizations, university researchers and educators, and the Michigan Department of Education have worked diligently to articulate these strategies within each of the four core subject areas.

As this work began in 2017, a group of Intermediate School District (ISD) consultants, representatives from the Michigan Department of Education, and additional content experts formed the Disciplinary Literacy Task Force. This group had a large dream and no budget. As many of us work for publicly-funded ISDs, the time spent on this project is possible due to a commitment

to sharing resources across Michigan's 56 ISD regions. Although we come from a wide range of communities across the state, all of our work is guided by a shared set of purpose statements. The Disciplinary Literacy Task Force exists in order to:

1. Scale the right work statewide
2. Ensure the work aligns with MAISA and MDE priorities
3. Secure and leverage partnerships that strengthen and further the work
4. Communicate statewide with practitioners, leaders, policy makers
5. Ensure equity in the delivery of services

As experienced facilitators of professional learning, Task Force members have continued the work over the past few years and feel confident that a commitment to continued shared learning around disciplinary literacy, as well as our collective consulting expertise, can make this dream a reality.

*What We Know About Effective Professional Learning Design: Pivoting PD in an Era of Remote Learning*

Professional learning design has come a long way from the old models of an annual, one-and-done in-service. Powerhouse organizations such as Learning Forward, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the International Literacy Association have also weighed in during recent years on the key elements of effective professional learning for all educators. Learning Forward's draft standards for professional learning include, among other categories, items that focus on equity foundations, a culture of collaborative inquiry, and leadership. Regarding equity foundations, educators are called upon to "establish a vision for equitable access to high-quality professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2020). As a Disciplinary Literacy Task Force, our purpose is to scale the right work statewide. For our purposes, the "right work" is ensuring equitable opportunities for Intermediate School District (ISD) consultants to learn about the *Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12* and consider implications for their local context. However, Task Force members also

know that full-time consultant positions are not shared equally among the 56 ISDs across our state, and many ISDs have one consultant to support the professional learning of K-12 teachers across all subject areas within their region. Additionally, as a small, 36-member Task Force with no budget, we have had to be smart about leveraging high-quality, free (or nearly free) resources and platforms. Task Force members have had to be willing to attempt new models for professional development, with ISD consultants learning alongside secondary teachers, instructional coaches, and leaders during what we named the "Introductory" and "Deeper Dive" Institutes.

The Introductory Institutes were held face-to-face in February and March 2020. These duplicate sessions provided participants with a broad overview of the process through which the *Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12* originated, including statewide stakeholders, the growing suite of *Essential Instructional Practices in Literacy* documents available on the project's website, and the key researchers. These sessions used activities to ground participants' understanding of disciplinary literacy along with the research that supports this shift in secondary classroom instruction. Finally, time was allocated for participants to use the Connect-Extend-Challenge protocol to briefly explore the practices themselves. With a promise to extend the learning via the Deeper Dive Institute, participants left with multiple resources to explore on their own in the interim. While we could not have anticipated the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning that abruptly changed our plans in March of 2020, we quickly shifted gears and planned to conduct the remaining Introductory Institute via Zoom.

Since the Deeper Dive Institute was going to be designed to extend professional learning around specific essential practices – and was still in its very early planning stages – it was quickly determined that a blend of synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning sessions would be both equitable and cost-effective. The format of these sessions is explained in more detail below, but to provide participants with additional

avenues for support, we created an asynchronous “teacher’s lounge” in Moodle and synchronous drop-in sessions that would allow participants to engage in real-time conversations.

Another proposed standard from Learning Forward places an emphasis on collaborative inquiry. Whether we identify this approach as teacher action research, teacher inquiry, or collaborative inquiry, we know that supporting teachers in identifying “puzzles of practice,” gathering relevant information and resources to support the inquiry, and engaging in attempting something new – and reflecting upon it – is a powerful tool to move instructional practice. For this reason, each asynchronous session of the Deeper Dive Institute has called upon participants to engage in inquiry cycles. After each asynchronous portion, participants join together to share their researchable question and engage in a modified Charette Protocol to receive feedback. This approach has also allowed consultants and secondary educators to do something that is not often supported by statewide professional learning efforts – make their learning visible. In a National Council of Teachers of English Position Statement, collaborative learning is identified as one of four key dimensions required in order for professional development to be an empowering experience for English Language Arts teachers (NCTE, 2019). By providing a dedicated space for teachers and consultants alike to share their puzzles of practice, as well as their successes and potential failures, we make a space for all educators to develop empathy for those they serve, whether this includes students or teachers. As educators, we cannot expect our learners to be willing to take educational risks or develop an inquiry stance if we are not able to try the same things.

The NCTE Position Statement also places emphasis on collaborative knowledge production. By modeling the types of inquiry stances and scaffolded sense-making for participants in the Introductory and Deeper Dive Institutes, facilitators offer a “two-track” agenda, empowering our participants to consider how to use such approaches within their own context. With such a unique opportunity to allow consultants and teachers

to learn alongside each other, we are seeing tremendous benefits. As the topic of disciplinary literacy is relatively new across the state, all of our participants are bringing both expertise in their roles and a curiosity about how to implement disciplinary literacy at the secondary level together, both of which provide an opportunity to bolster our current instructional approaches.

In addition to calls for collaborative inquiry and knowledge production, International Literacy Association’s 2018 Literacy Leadership Brief calls for teachers to

...be active learners within the event. They must be allowed to engage in new information (e.g., recognize and start with what they know and build toward the unknown) that is meaningful to them and is based on the work of their students. (ILA, 2018)

For example, in our most recent synchronous learning session, we engaged our participants in the “jigsaw” approach. The jigsaw protocol involves first chunking the text into portions, then “chunking” participants into expert groups based upon those portions, and finally bringing the jigsaw groups back together to discuss the article/excerpt as a whole. Using Zoom breakout rooms, we moved participants into both expert and jigsaw groups, thereby modeling how they might use the jigsaw protocol in their own classes, even if the learning would take place virtually.

#### *What We’re Still Learning: Best Practice in Remote/Hybrid Scenarios*

There has never been a shortage of “experts” willing to tell teachers about best practices, some with more research and experience to support their claims than others. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed the majority of educators (and “experts”) in uncertain or, to borrow an overused term, unprecedented times. While we may have research to support best practices with using technology, the American educational system has never encountered the reality of attempting to teach remotely, during a pandemic, with inequitable access to devices and broadband internet. The implications of this were not lost on Disciplinary Literacy Task



Force members, the majority of whom are content-area consultants from ISDs across Michigan that represent English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Leadership and School Improvement.

To that end, on August 4, 2020, Disciplinary Literacy Task Force members offered a virtual, half-day Introductory Institute. Due to the pandemic, we knew that most districts were not releasing any funds for teachers to attend any professional learning events. For this reason, and because we were not incurring any overhead costs, we decided to offer the Institute for free. Surprisingly, over 270 educators and consultants registered for the event. Of course, not every registrant ended up attending the event, but the planning team was encouraged by the positive response. Based on the success of the August event, we decided that there was sufficient interest to continue with our original plan and offer a follow-up professional learning series, the Deeper Dive Institute, as an on-going PD series during the 2020-21 academic year.

While facilitating the Deeper Dive Institute in a virtual environment allows for greater reach across the state of Michigan, it provides constraints as well. We knew that educators would be unable to use a substitute/guest teacher during the school day, so professional learning would need to occur after the school day ended. Additionally, since many teachers were teaching remotely, holding long virtual learning sessions after the end of the school day was out of the question. We set our sights at a 3:30 pm start time, often workable for secondary teachers, with a total time span of 1.5 hours for each of the four synchronous sessions. In between each synchronous session, participants would engage in approximately five hours of asynchronous learning organized in a Moodle course. Each asynchronous portion of learning included three categories of learning: Regarding the Research, Extending our Shared Learning, and Continuing Your Inquiry Cycle.

With such limited “face time” with participants during the Deeper Dive Institute, the planning team had to determine the appropriate amount of content to include. The *Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy*

*Instruction in the Secondary Classroom: Grades 6 to 12* outline ten practices for consideration. With only six hours of synchronous learning for the entire series, the planning team knew it would be futile to attempt to concentrate on all ten practices. To this end, we selected areas of focus that align to the planning process that teachers might use when planning a unit of study. We chose to begin with Essential Practice 1, which details problem- or inquiry-based approaches to planning a unit of study or lesson. This foundational practice is essential to adequately capture adolescent engagement and motivation. Once an authentic problem frame has been identified, teachers then need to intentionally plan to support student sense-making, all while using texts aligned to the problem frame. This led the planning team to focus on Essential Practice 2. Across all disciplines, there is extensive research and support for the role of academically productive talk in order to comprehend, consolidate, and refine ideas, so our third synchronous session focused on Essential Practice 5. For our final session, a focus on assessment *for* learning led us to Essential Practice 8.

With time in between sessions, the planning team knew that an effective throughline would be incredibly important. However, the most significant feedback was often delivered during the drop-in sessions allocated for the Deeper Dive participants. Scheduled as a kind of open office hours or casual chat, we offered these sessions as a way to connect the facilitators with participants as thinking partners. While only a small group of participants in the two cohorts attended these drop-in sessions, we were able to gather significant insights from their comments and concerns. For example, some were struggling to form connections between the synchronous and asynchronous sessions, which redirected our instruction in both formats. Additionally, to draw connections between the Introductory and Deeper Dive Institutes, regardless of the participants’ modality (i.e., face-to-face, synchronous or asynchronous), we relied upon explicit reference to our driving question: How can we leverage disciplinary literacy to deepen learning for all learners?

As we all know, despite our efforts, “The best laid

plans [...] often go awry” (Steinbeck, 1937). As a Task Force, we were thrilled with the initial registration responses: 116 participants signed up to engage in two cohorts. Then, reality set in. We were inadvertently confined by a global pandemic, so some participants never engaged, and some withdrew. In the end, between 20 and 30 participants have regularly participated in this virtual professional learning series throughout the 2020-21 academic year, and we continue to collect pertinent data about their learning experiences in an effort to guide future professional development opportunities.

### *Finding Silver Linings*

Despite our struggles with finding the “right” platforms and engaging secondary educators en masse, there have

been many silver linings from our own professional learning this year. First and foremost, various technological platforms have allowed Task Force members to build supportive learning communities that encourage risk-taking amongst educators. Perhaps the key to the success of this learning series is the parallel, reciprocal role of consultant and educator. As we strive to democratize the process, we become side-by-side learners. Collaboratively, we both encourage and model a process that includes inquiry, sense-making, and scaffolding. This is deliberately followed by collective reflection – What did we do? Why did we do it? How does it connect with our driving question? How might we use it in our own context? These approaches seem to be resonating with our participants, who have offered positive feedback (see Fig. 1 below).

I loved the small group discussion!	The use of the Charette Protocol and defining "text."	An opportunity to talk with other educators in my content area.	I finally settled on my inquiry question!! I feel really good about it.
I enjoyed using Google Jamboard to collaborate. Been using these a lot with students and they are central to a curriculum module I am developing right now.	Good to hear what others are considering for their research.	The many meanings of "texts" and their development into sets around an inquiry.	Listening to X has been helpful. It helped me think more like a scientist even though I come from an ELA background.
The Jamboard	Receiving feedback on my inquiry question.	Processing my research/inquiry.	Consideration of what "text" is.
I'm just so grateful to think deeply about teaching practice during a time in which it seems like we're all in survival mode. Thank you!	Discussion group. I loved gaining ideas from my group members!	Sharing and receiving feedback from my peers (safe space).	The necessity of discussion norms. Lots of great conversations.
The resources from my colleagues.	The additional resource harvest and background information on jigsaw	Breakout sessions went very well.	
Talk time with colleagues. Good balance of structure and talk time.	The "Talk Science Primer" shared why, how, and what about discourse. That was a nice conversation.		

Figure 1. Screenshot of shared GDoc from institute: What was one “glow” from today’s session?

The year ahead continues to ripen the possibilities for scaling this work statewide. The Disciplinary Literacy Task Force is looking forward to providing additional professional learning in the summer of 2021. For educators new to the conversation about disciplinary literacy, we recommend the Introductory Institute on August 5, and for those looking to further their learning, we recommend the Deeper Dive Institute August 11 through 13. For more information on these events, as well as registration links, please visit our latest newsletter at <https://www.smores.com/qcbjp-essential-practices>.

While there are many aspects of remote learning that have challenged our collective thinking, there are also those silver linings that will both enhance and improve our professional learning and instructional delivery. Combining synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning sessions might be the most effective way to reduce barriers and reach educators across counties, districts, and disciplines with the goal that, eventually, we will enact a vision where disciplinary literacy practices are taught in every secondary classroom, every day.

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## Author Biography

**Ms. Jenelle Williams** is a Literacy Consultant at Oakland Intermediate School District (Oakland Schools). She is interested in adolescent literacy, disciplinary literacy, and culturally sustaining practices. She can be reached at [jenelle.williams@oakland.k12.mi.us](mailto:jenelle.williams@oakland.k12.mi.us).



# Carrying the Stories of Las Mariposas: Literacy as Collective and Transformative

by Deborah Vriend Van Duinen

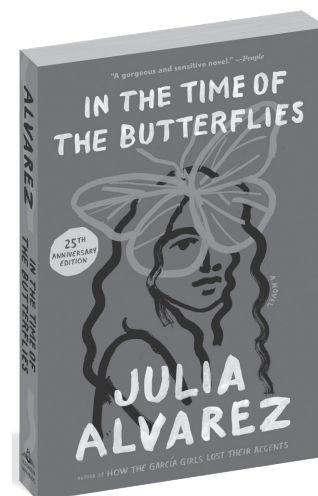


**Deborah  
Vriend Van Duinen**

In the epilogue of Julia Alvarez's (1994) historical fiction novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Dede, one of the main characters reflects on her decision to share the story of her murdered sisters. "We needed a story to understand what had happened to us," she says. In choosing to "carry the stories" of her sisters, Dede allows these stories to be remembered and take flight. She also allows herself and the world to be transformed by them. Alvarez's novel, based on the account of the four Mirabel sisters during the time of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, speaks to the importance of stories and storytelling as a way to collectively remember, honor, and make sense of our experiences.

The Lakeshore communities in West Michigan explored this concept of "carrying stories" as part of the 2019 NEA Big Read and Little Read Lakeshore programs, both month-long community-wide reading programs focused on the reading of a common book. The NEA Big Read Lakeshore program focused on Alvarez's story while younger readers took part in the connected Little Read Lakeshore program focused on Carmen Agra Deedy's (2017) children's picture book, *The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet* (Figures 1 and 2). Together, the programs consisted of over 50 main events that included lectures, panel presentations,

book discussions, art workshops, and music and dance performances. These events took place in a variety of spaces and were hosted by libraries, nonprofit organizations, schools, and businesses. While the purpose of the events was to explore the books' topics and themes from a variety of perspectives, the events were collectively designed to help readers reflect on the following guiding questions: What does it mean to carry a story? How do we do this well? Whose stories do or should we carry? What does it mean to speak up for someone or ourselves? What or whose voices need to take flight?



*Figure 1. Book Cover of In the Time of the Butterflies (Workman Publishing Company, 1994)*



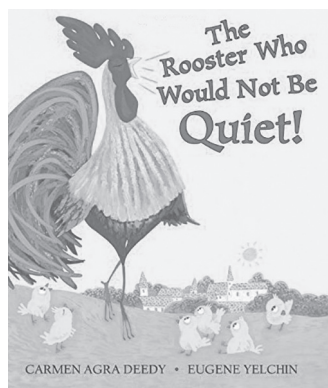


Figure 2. Book Cover of *The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet!* (Scholastic, 2017)

Over 10,000 readers, from PK-12 students to senior citizens, participated in these programs. Across demographics that often divide – race/ethnicity, age, educational, and work experiences – Lakeshore community members read and discussed *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet*. Using the stories as springboards, these readers also explored stories in their own lives, community, and in the world that needed to take flight. They listened to and learned from each other as they interacted and spoke up in book discussions and art workshops, sometimes for themselves, sometimes on behalf of others.

A unique aspect of the NEA Big Read and Little Read Lakeshore programs is their emphasis on creating art in response to reading the chosen books. Reading a text alone or even in a book club or class is only part of the experience. One of the goals of the programs is to encourage participants to take what they have read and discussed and use it to create something that speaks into or about existing issues within the community for the purpose of societal change, of trying to bring more justice, empathy, joy, and truth to the community and larger world.

To support teachers and community members in this, the NEA Big Read and Little Read Lakeshore programs hire local professional artists to serve as artists-in-residence. These artists help develop the concept for a community-wide art project and collaborate with

participating area teachers. Through class visits, the artists share with students how they approach the creative process and think about embodied texts through effertent and aesthetic responses to literature (Rosenblatt, 1982). The artists then help guide students to brainstorm ideas for their individual or collective art projects and assist students as they research and compose these ideas. The artists and teachers encourage students to use their out-of-school experiences and literacy practices to inform the content, medium, and genre of these projects and then work collaboratively with them throughout the process.

In November 2019, Lakeshore P-12 students and community members responded creatively to *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet* by creating art in response to the concept of “carry-ing stories.” With local artists, Joel School-Tanis and Erik Picardo, students created art pieces in a variety of shapes, genres, and forms by composing visual, audio, linguistic, and spatial representations of the stories they wanted to share. Some of these stories took the form of individually decorated butterflies (Figure 3). Other stories were done collectively by small groups or entire classes. These included photography, poetry, 3-D sculpture, graphic novel panels, paintings, and book covers (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Carry the Stories student artwork example.

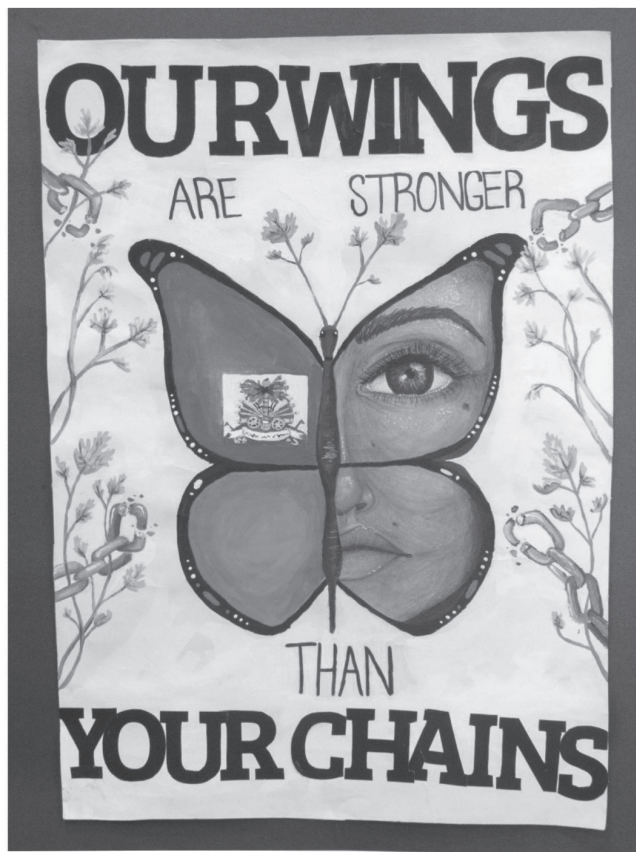


Figure 4. Carry the Stories student artwork example.

At the end of the month, students' art pieces were displayed in a butterfly-themed Student Exhibition of Learning event at the Holland Armory. Over 1000 people – teachers, students and their families as well as community members – attended this event and witnessed these stories taking flight (Figure 5).

### Reflections on Reading with Our Community

This powerful, community-wide experience prompts me, as the director of the NEA Big Read and Little Read Lakeshore programs, to think more deeply about how literacy could and should be considered in more collective and communal ways. Literacy is often defined and practiced as a solitary individual activity, as the skills, knowledge, and proficiencies individuals possess or perform. Sadly, school-based notions of literacy contributes to this. Reading initiatives, instructional support, and high stakes literacy assessments foreground individual literacy skills and focus on what often happens in an individual's mind. Literacy instruction tends to focus on proven methods that support a clearly defined and one-size-fits-all process of literacy skill development.



Figure 5. 2019 Student Exhibition of Learning Event (Photo taken by Rob Walcott).

But what if there were other ways to think about and experience literacy? What if literacy was understood and practiced within different frameworks? A historical look at literacy reveals that throughout the years and by different groups of people, literacy has indeed been experienced as more than just the acquisition of individual skills and knowledge.

In *A History of Reading* (1996), Alberto Manguel describes how it was not until well into the 10th century that reading changed from being a social activity that always involved reading aloud to others to an individual and silent experience. He tells of how Saint Augustine, in the 4th century, wrote bewilderingly about watching someone silently reading. Manguel posits that Augustine's surprised reaction reveals that reading with "eyes scanning the page and tongue held still" was uncommon. Reading was typically done out loud and in conversation with others; the very idea of reading for oneself was shocking.

This shared experience of reading continued until well into the 1700s. Historian Robert Darnton (1990) describes how reading continued to have social and collective purposes, often taking "place in workshops, barns, and taverns. It was almost always oral" (p 168). Reading a text brought people together and helped connect them to each other.

Historically, different groups of people have also experienced literacy in collective ways. In her book *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* (2020), Gholdy Muhammad traces the history of Black literary societies or "literary institutions" throughout the 19th century among Black populations. These collaborative teaching and learning spaces – typically with under ten members, but in some cases as large as over 100 members – helped members of different ages and experiences to develop literacy skills around "meaningful and significant texts," and to share their knowledge, ideas, and information (p. 25). The development of individual literacy skills was valued, but the societies also had a larger purpose. They also endeavored to "advance the conditions of African Americans and others in the

wider society" (p. 25). In other words, reading in these spaces wasn't just about reading the words on the page and taking in the information. The purpose of these societies was to "share knowledge gained from acts of literacy rather than keep education to one's self" (p. 26). Literacy was understood to involve some sort of collective action that would lead to the transformations of self and society.

Our community-wide reading program experiences, as well as these experts, offer us a view of possibilities for literacy understanding and instruction, even amidst what can be more narrow constructions of literacy.

Carrying the stories of Las Mariposas gave my Lakeshore community a glimpse into what literacy can look like as a social activity and responsibility. In the many programs we offered, students developed literacy skills such as close reading, annotating, predicting, and inferring as they read and discussed our chosen books. Yet, they also participated in the social aspect of meaning-making and the advocacy that came out of this. Reading *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet* and collectively exploring the concept of "carrying stories" prompted our community members. They reflected on stories in our own community that need to be carried such as immigration experiences, a lack of housing options, and racial inequalities. Collectively, we became more aware of stories of pain, fear, misunderstanding, and injustice that we didn't know about or fully realize. For some, this experience also gave us space for individual and collective stories to be heard, seen, and honored.

As students explored how to carry their own or others' stories, they developed writing skills such as stating and supporting opinions, organizing ideas, editing and rewriting. At the same time, they were supported in brainstorming and envisioning ways to collectively respond to and let these stories take flight. They were encouraged to articulate a vision of what could and should be in our community and world. Their individual literacy skill development, in other words, was reoriented for the transformation of self and society.



As I look back on this experience, I'm grateful for the ways that Muhammad's (2020) work gives language to this powerful community-wide reading program experience of collectively "carrying the stories." Our community's embodied experiences of carrying stories in visible and concrete ways helped us reframe the "whys" of reading. We got a glimpse of the benefits of collectively sharing knowledge from acts of literacy. We got a taste of what it might mean for literacy to be transformative.

In her keynote address to our Lakeshore community, Alvarez reflected, "When you read, you become someone else; you're exercising the muscles of compassion... It's so important to have a reading community if you want to be a free people." Framed in this way, reading and literacy necessitate interaction with others. We need each other to read, write, and tell the stories of our community and world. We need to compose, carry, and let these stories take flight so that we, as individuals and as a society, become more compassionate, empathetic, just, and free.

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## Author Biography

**Deborah Vriend Van Duinen** is an Associate Professor of Education at Hope College and Director of the NEA Big Read Lakeshore, a community-wide reading program. In her work with preservice teachers, she emphasizes inquiry-based teaching and reflective practices. Deborah writes and teaches in the area of English education, disciplinary literacy, young adult literature and adolescent literacy.







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# MRA 2021 Conference Reflections

by Jill Erfourth, Charlie Barshaw, Amy Romanowski,  
and Heather Jensen



**Jill Erfourth**



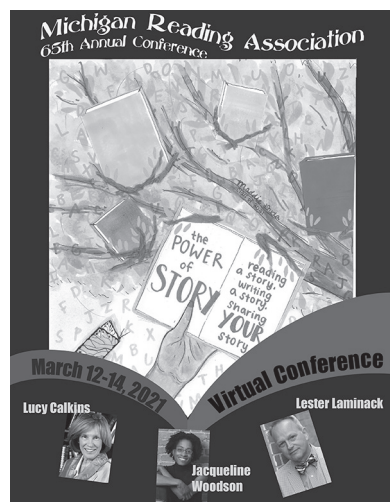
**Charlie Barshaw**



**Amy Romanowski**



**Heather Jensen**



During the weekend of March 12-14, 2021, hundreds of educators from Michigan and beyond gathered – in virtual spaces – to celebrate “The Power of Story.” Conference organizers, including MRA Vice-President Jill Erfourth, coordinated nearly 60 sessions using the web-based platform of Whova with Zoom meeting rooms to host our 65th annual conference. Here, four of our board members – Jill Erfourth, Charlie Barshaw, Amy Romanowski, and Heather Jensen – share their reflections on the experience of planning for and gathering in community for this unique MRA conference.

## **“Determined, Inspired, and Committed” - Jill Erfourth, Conference Chair and President-Elect**

The Power of Story couldn't have been more fitting for this year's conference. Stories have lifted us up, and stories have brought us to tears. The power is the connection between each story shared, whether through a book, a conversation, a presentation, an email, a text, or social media. I have to admit, I was pretty nervous about how well-received this conference would be and if it would still be as inspiring as it has been every year of our traditional in-person format. With so many brilliant and dedicated MRA members working behind the scenes, the conference well exceeded my expectations! It was incredible to feel as if I was in the living rooms of the keynote speakers one-on-one. I was not expecting that emotion at all! It felt intimate at times and brought me to tears listening to the most amazing story-telling voice of Lester Laminack and the inspiring and passionate words of Jaqueline Woodson and Lucy Calkins.

Jacqueline Woodson and Lester Laminack reminded us that the power of story serves as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, as coined by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop. As educators, we must ensure that work is at the forefront of our classrooms. Dr. Kim Parker



reminded us that it is not enough to have diverse books in our classrooms. The real work is having the conversations where we elevate student voices, build community, empathy, and understanding. I will continue to learn and engage in these conversations at my schools and district. There were so many inspiring sessions not only on the power of story but, just as importantly, how we continue to accelerate literacy learning for ALL students. One of the best parts of the virtual conference is that I can still go back and view sessions I didn't get to attend and can go back to watch them again.

Each year I think THAT was the best conference yet, then the next year I say the same thing. When I reflect on that weekend, the theme of the conference, and the many great sessions, it reminds me how grateful I am for this opportunity MRA continues to offer. I have never felt more determined, inspired, and committed to doing this hard work of being an educator! Thank you to all of our amazing speakers for helping us learn and grow to continue that work. It has never been more important!

**“Not only able to pull off a virtual conference, but to excel at it” – Charlie Barshaw, Innovations Co-Chair**

I shouldn't even be here.

My wife Ruth is an author/illustrator of children's books, and we were grateful to be invited to present at the conferences before rooms full of teachers. Then Ruth was brought on as a liaison to the children's book writers, and finally, because I was always hanging around, I too was asked to join the board. For years I scrambled, worked on marketing, did some writing for the blog, even did a few presentations. But when the call came to write up and publicize this year's featured speakers, I found my purpose. Putting together short biographies of the presenters was simple. I'd written for newspapers and magazines. I knew how to punch up a headline and conduct research. And much of the information was already compiled, thanks to the presenters themselves and the MRA staff.

But what floored me was the sheer number of experienced educators and activists, authors and illustrators, all working for literacy. There were so many quality presenters, I went from posting three times a week, to seven times a week. Finally, the day before the event, I highlighted another dozen presenters that I hadn't mentioned yet.

And why is that a big deal? This was the 65th annual conference. The Michigan Reading Association has been promoting reading and writing and creativity and literacy for students for generations. Many of today's teachers learned to love books, likely followed the siren's call to teaching, because their teachers were inspired by an MRA conference or program.

I am thrilled that they were not only able to pull off a virtual conference, but to excel at it.

And I am honored to be part of this grand tradition.

**“We are all lifelong learners, no matter what the platform” – Amy Romanowski, Great Lakes/Great Books Co-Chair**

The key takeaway from the conference was the fact that we are all lifelong learners and no matter what the platform, we will continue to strive to be better and do better as educators.

I want to help students use the power of story to grow their understanding of the world around us. There are many avenues in which to help students. The options are limitless. There is something for everyone. It is finding what works best for each learner and building on those skills.

I will continue to use the power of story to enhance the learning opportunities for my students. Whether it is a research project, a comprehension skill, or a speaking and listening skill, we all have stories to share and through those stories, I will help my students gain a deeper understanding of themselves as learners.



**“[To] feel seen and valued as an educator” – Heather Jensen, Great Lakes/Great Books Co-Chair**

The Power of Story Virtual Conference made me feel seen and valued as an educator for the first time in a long time. The sessions were inspiring and timely. I love that my learning has continued through the on-demand availability of the sessions. It has rekindled my passion for learning and teaching! It was great to connect with so many others who share our love for literacy. I have already implemented several of the strategies in my own learning community with amazing results.

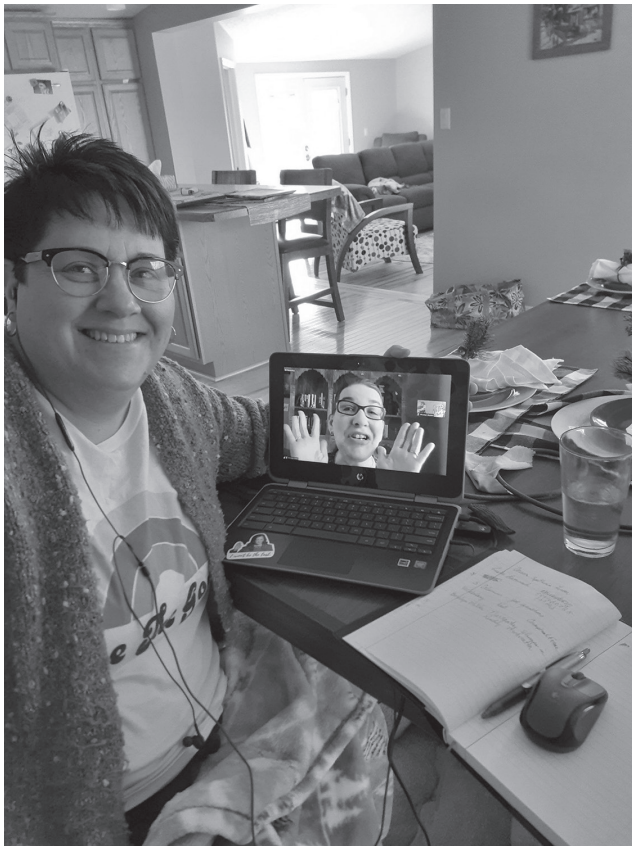


Photo of Heather Jensen participating in the MRA virtual conference during Donalyn Miller's session (Photo courtesy of Heather Jensen)

As of the date of this publication, the 2022 MRA Conference is schedule to be an in-person event. We welcome you to follow updates on the event at MRA's website, <[michiganreading.org](http://michiganreading.org)>.



# To Shed Love and Light on Blackness: An Interview with Dr. Lamar Johnson

by Carlin Borsheim-Black



**Dr. Lamar Johnson**



**Carlin  
Borsheim-Black**

As I write this introduction, in March 2021, Derek Chauvin is currently standing trial for the murder of George Floyd in 2020. We are still demanding justice for the death of Breonna Taylor. And we are standing in solidarity with Asian American and Pacific Islanders following the recent mass murder of eight Asian American women in Atlanta. It should not have taken these (and many, many other) instances of racial violence to shed light on the urgency of antiracist education. At the same time, as a result, more and more Michigan literacy educators are acknowledging a need to be antiracist in their teaching, as well as in their own lives.

And, of course, we know that our own classrooms are not immune to systemic racism. We, as Michigan literacy educators, are all implicated in the racial disparities we see in outcomes across our state. We need to do a better job of teaching about and honoring the languages and literacies that Black and Brown youth bring to our classrooms; we need to do a better job of interrupting white of literature curriculum by foregrounding BIPOC authors in our text selections; we need to do a better job of building on the funds of knowledge of all Michigan families and communities; we need to do a better job of being overtly antiracist in our teaching. And, as the editors of the *Michigan Reading Journal*, we need to do a better job of supporting Michigan literacy educators in this work.

To those ends, we are committed to showcasing contributions of BIPOC scholars and educators who are making a difference in antiracist literacy education today. Recently, I (Carlin) had the honor of interviewing Dr. Lamar Johnson about his forthcoming book *Critical Race English Education: New Visions, New Possibilities* (Routledge), which outlines his approach for teaching for racial justice in literacy classrooms. Dr. Johnson is Associate Professor of Language and Literacy for Linguistic and Racial Diversity in the Department of English at Michigan State University. In addition to preparing future English teachers to teach for racial justice, Dr. Johnson is also a television and movie writer and producer.

The following reflects excerpts from the one-hour interview I conducted with Dr. Johnson. The transcript has been edited for clarity and concision.

**In a recent article published in *English Education* (2018), you described yourself as a “survivor of the traditional model of school.” I found that phrase to be very powerful. Could you unpack what surviving the traditional model of school meant for you or what it continues to mean for other Black youth today?**

I grew up in a small town of Edgefield, South Carolina,

forty-five hundred people. We all pretty much went to the same school; my teachers were part of the community, people who my mom and dad had as teachers and who went to school with my grandma and great aunts. They taught in a very traditional way, whether they were white or Black. They were teaching from how they were taught. I remember learning grammar in fourth grade, about nouns, pronouns and punctuation. I remember learning grammar like, “If you speak this way, you’re wrong”—particularly if you speak Black language. I had gone through all of my schooling up into college thinking that if I spoke this way, that it was wrong. I didn’t know Black language was a real language—let’s be real about it.

I also encountered racism in school. I was disinvited to a birthday party my fifth-grade year by a white woman who actually taught me as a second grader. Her son and I were the same age, in the same class. He invited me to a birthday party—and then he also disinvited me and some other Black students in the class that same week. There were only five or six other Black people in our class, but his mom knew all of us because she taught us as second graders. And so being disinvited to a social event hit me in a very different way. I was hurt by that. I had never experienced racism, to my knowledge, in that way. In school, we learned about enslavement and racism, but it made it sound like something from the past, like this doesn’t happen now. Sometimes you buy into what people are teaching you at school. And then this happens? You can’t come to his birthday party because of the color of your skin. I remember my mom asking her, “How can you behave like this when you are a teacher?” I knew then I didn’t do anything wrong. I thought I had done something wrong, honestly, to be disinvited. There was a lot of spirit murdering going on.

I felt like a survivor because at any moment I could have been like a lot of my other peers who were checking out. A lot of my cousins talk about how they checked out as students. I didn’t check out because of my home life experiences. My mom had me at the age of 17. When I was in school, my mom was twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. I could see how she was trying to make it right and trying to raise me and my

sister. She remarried, so I had my step dad. I saw my dad, and I knew that he did not graduate high school. And even as a kid, I was like, “That can’t be me, that can’t be my story.” So, regardless of what teachers were telling me, I did it. I read all those white books. I was reading *Sarah Plain and Tall* and *The Boxcar Children*—all these white books, because I felt like I had to.

Then in seventh-grade, I finally had a Black teacher who understood me. She introduced me to culturally relevant teaching. It hit me differently. As a seventh grader, I was able to say, “I want to be a teacher. I want to be like Ms. Sharonda Ryans, and I want to teach English Language Arts, and this how I want to teach it.” Since the seventh grade, I knew I wanted to be a teacher because I actually engaged with a teacher who actually taught me the love of learning. I also knew then that I didn’t want to be like those other teachers who I had in the past.

**You have developed an approach to literacy teaching, Critical Race English Education (CREE), and you have recently written a book to introduce CREE to the world. Could you describe CREE for our readers?**

The book is called *Critical Race English Education: New Visions, New Possibilities*, because that’s how I look at it—we’ve got to envision this world that we hope to see and envision new possibilities. One of my mentors, Dr. Gloria Boutte, always asked, “Do you believe in the possibility of the Black child?” We have to ask ourselves that. Anything is possible when you believe in the possibility of the Black child.

And so, CREE sheds light and love on the Black literacies and the Black language that Black students bring to school spaces. The reason why Black kids are being spiritually murdered in the streets but also in classrooms is because many people don’t understand Blackness. If we begin to shed love and light on Blackness, we begin to push back against anti-Black racism, linguistic violence, symbolic violence, curricular and pedagogical violence that happens in these spaces. When I created CREE, it began to shed love and light on Blackness, on beauty in Blackness because that’s what I didn’t get in school.



CREE is about centering the Black literacies that Black students bring into classrooms to push back against whiteness and white supremacy, to decenter whiteness while centering Blackness. Like my advisor, Dr. David Kirkland, says, to deny Black folks their language and literacy practices is also to deny their humanity. And so, CREE asks, “Are we speaking from the Black radical imagination to see things through the Black gaze or are we seeing things through the white gaze,” which is what most teachers actually practice.

Toni Morrison talks about the white literary imagination, how a lot of the books, the lessons we learn reflect this white way of existing, being, speaking, and moving in the world. For example, racism is embedded in the English language. We see Blackness as something that is evil, that is bad. You can say “a little white lie.” It’s okay to tell a white lie, because it’s pure. But we say, “black sheep” or “the black plague.” All those names are bad and evil. But in Africa, the Black sun represents something very positive; the Black water represents something very positive. We don’t get to hear those stories. I think we really need to (re)define what Blackness means. We need to meditate on what Blackness is and what Blackness ain’t. And CREE does just that. If we decenter the white literary imagination and use the Black imagination, I think we can also begin to center the humanity of Black students.

Of course, CREE also looks at the Black Lives Matter movement and the physical violence that happens in communities. We can’t get it twisted—the reason why Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown, the reason why Breonna Taylor was killed, the reason why George Floyd was killed, and Trayvon Martin, and list goes on and on—was because those people were coming from the white imagination. We saw teachers in New York saying “blue lives matter.” We see messages on text threads calling students the n-word. That stuff is out there, and these people are also teaching Black and Brown students. And when those things happen, it perpetuates spiritual murder and physical violence. CREE challenges those things.

**You explained that CREE foregrounds, emphasizes,**

**celebrates Black literacies. Can you describe an example of what that looks like, maybe something you’ve taught that you really love?**

In my *English Journal* (2017) piece, I share an example of using Beyonce and Jay Z’s song “Black Effect,” (2018) off their album, *Everything Is Love*. They center Blackness in that song; they talk about why being Black is beautiful and why they wouldn’t want to be anything else. It’s also very historical—they give historical references. They are singers, but they are also scholars, they are storytellers, they are writers. You can do a lesson analyzing this text. They use literary devices. They use a lot of metaphors and similes and allusions. You still have your standards. You still hit on literary devices. Metaphor doesn’t change; it’s always a metaphor, whether Drake uses it, Beyonce, or Walt Whitman—a metaphor does not change.

You also could do a lesson on Black language. For example, in the song they say “I’m good on any MLK Boulevard.” That’s Black language. MLK Boulevard, Malcolm X Boulevard, or Rosa Park Boulevard, those are real Black communities, often poor communities. Beyonce and Jay-Z have money but they say, “We’re good on any MLK Boulevard, because we’re still Black and class does not trump race.”

You could also do a lesson to tie this song to Angi Thomas and *The Hate U Give* (2017). They talk about MLK in that book. They talk about Black Jesus. They use Black language. I have an activity where I put those two texts in conversation with one another around Black language. I give students a chart and the features of Black language. Students look at “Black Effect” to find the habitual be, signifyin’, and cultural references. Then they do the same for *The Hate U Give*. I ask them to explain how this use of Black language impacts the meaning of the text.

**As you’re talking about this, I am thinking that so much about how you enact CREE is an extension of who you are, of your identity as a Black man and your knowledge of Black culture. At the same time, at least 85 percent of the teachers in Michigan are**



**white women. Is CREE the same for white teachers? What work do white teachers need to do to enact CREE?**

My white teacher candidates say, “I’m having a hard time thinking about a lesson or activity I can do.” They can put together a text set, but when it comes to actually teaching this stuff they’re kind of scared because they also know, “I got to do my deep work. I can’t just stand here and teach about the Black Lives Matter movement and what happened in *All American Boys* without going there.” It’s different for *me* to talk about it as opposed to them to talk about it. They have to do the deep soul work and be honest. You probably won’t know how to begin to celebrate Blackness if you haven’t done your own soul work. But also, you probably won’t know how to begin to celebrate Blackness, if you’re not in tune with Black culture or any culture outside of your own, to be quite honest with you.

I think about bell hooks’ (1994) engaged pedagogy—when you bring yourself, your whole self, into the classroom space, it makes you vulnerable. When I’m teaching, I don’t detach myself. My students can tell you I was disinvited to a birthday party. I give them examples from my life so they can hear what it means when you really utilize CREE outside of just doing the standards. You have to be vulnerable, and you have to do the deep internal work, too.

And, I think what you’re asking is, how can white teachers teach Black students about something like Black language when Black students speak it already. It’s not about you *teaching* them Black language—they already know that. It is about needing to affirm them. And, I think it is about white teachers needing to talk about how whiteness and white people, people “who look like me,” uphold standard American English. And be vulnerable with them. Students appreciate when you’re vulnerable with them. When I was teaching high school, I was very much vulnerable with my students and that’s how I could make connections with them. You can’t do CREE and not be vulnerable. You have to center yourself.

In the book, I describe a racial storytelling assignment that asks you to think about how your past, present, and future voices are always in complicated dialogue with one another. How does your past experience with racism shape your present moment and your future? You have to do that soul work. When I have teacher candidates engage in racial storytelling upfront, then when we get to teaching and CREE three weeks later, they’re ready for it. They’ve begun the soul work. They can see, “I’ve taken my past moments when I’ve engaged in anti-Blackness, and I’ve looked at these things through a critical race lens to analyze my own experiences.” Then, we can move forward talking about teaching. I don’t think you can do CREE if you don’t do the deep soul work first.

And, too, if you feel like you don’t know, there are *so* many articles and books out there about white people teaching in this way. You go on YouTube and find examples. The resources are out there. You just got to do it at this point.

**While it should not have taken us this long to get here, it seems like we were at a moment, following George Floyd’s death and Breonna Taylor’s death, where many literacy educators are feeling a sense of urgency about anti-racist education. And they may be looking for ways to honor or renew their commitment to making Black lives matter in the classroom. What’s the relationship you see between literacy education and activism?**

Since the beginning of time, since our ancestors were enslaved, they’ve always used literacy, Black language, and activism. Think about the songs they used, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* or *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. Those songs are using Black language and literacy skills to escape to freedom. They used coded language to speak to one another so that the enslavers wouldn’t know what was going on. We can fast forward throughout time and think about during the Black power movement, the civil rights movement, “No justice, no peace.” Those things speak back to white supremacy and humanize Black folks.

With the Black Lives Matter movement, Black literacies are central to people protesting. And you see people say, “You about to lose your job, you about to lose your job.” They’re speaking back to systemic issues and anti-Blackness by using their language and literacy tools. You can’t talk about Black Lives Matter movement without talking about Black literacies.

And I think we can be creative in how we bring it into the classroom. When I was teaching high school, I had a student whose name was also Trayvon. One particular day, he spoke up, he asked, “Have you heard about the death of Trayvon Martin?” I hadn’t heard about that at that time. The other students started to say, “Yeah, that’s messed up. I heard about that.” I had to stop teaching. I pulled up CNN and decided, “Let’s look up CNN.” And that’s what we did. I changed my teaching right in that moment. We talked about it. And then I went home and said, “OK, let me begin to revise some things. I’m going to put this text on hold for right now. Maybe we can do *Black Boy* by Richard Wright right now and bring in this Trayvon Martin situation, and we will do expository writing, and we’ll write letters to the school board and to the legislature about what is going on with gun violence and how they are killing Black people.” And that’s what we did. I taught them expository writing. That wasn’t part of my unit; I had to be willing to switch some things up. If I hadn’t done that, I could have been perpetuating racial violence. Those students wanted to talk about that. And so, I think right now, in our current moment, you have to talk about the present-day justice movement. Black Lives Matter is more than just police brutality. It’s also about education, health care, and the humanity of Black folks. And also shedding love and light on the beauty of Blackness and what it means to be Black.

When I think about literacy and Black language and activism, I think those things go hand in hand in our current moment. Literacy is an action. It’s something you do, not just something you have. It’s something you do.

**There are a lot of communities in Michigan that are very conservative and really don’t see the place for**

**activism, perhaps especially Black Lives Matter, in the classroom. Teachers feel worried about that if they’re going to get backlash of some sort. How do you respond?**

As a teacher, I definitely had some issues with parents, Black and white. This is what we go through, if we do this type of work in the classroom. It is resistance work. You have to be able to resist. I’m not one to back down quickly. I won’t do that, because I’m always seeing myself as that little Black boy who survived that space. He’s always in my ear talking to me. If I *don’t* disrupt, what happens to that little Black boy? But I also know that is not all about me—it’s about our Black and Brown babies. It’s about them. And you know what? If you fire me, there are so many other school districts I can go to. Maybe sometimes it comes to that, but that rarely happens. But we got to know how to resist. We cannot be scared. CREE is a never, ever scared pedagogy. You have to be ready to resist.

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## Author Biography

**Carlin Borsheim-Black** is professor of English Education at Central Michigan University. Her teaching and scholarship prioritize antiracist English education. She can be reached at [borsh1cc@cmich.edu](mailto:borsh1cc@cmich.edu).



# Great Lakes, Great Books Friendship Stories

by Lynette Marten Suckow

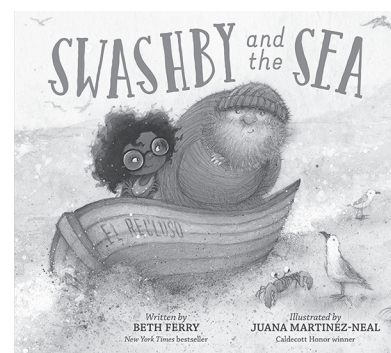


**Lynette  
Marten Suckow**

After a year of pandemic isolation, we realize the value of friends more than ever. While some of us may feel that we need to relearn social skills and how to interact with our peers, the pull of human interaction remains strong. Crafted with friendship as the underlying theme, the following stories show protagonists who are unsure of friendship, but crave a sense of belonging that comes with it. Storyline twists, along with amazing illustrations, made each one enjoyable and thought provoking.

This pandemic year was no different than any other, regarding the GLGB committee's dedication to reading hundreds of books. They ultimately selected 40, published within the last two years, to introduce K-12 classrooms to some of the best books available on the market. Teachers and librarians are encouraged to provide students with books from their grade-level lists, and allow them to vote on their favorites. Great Lakes Great Books is one of Michigan Reading Association's Student Involvement projects, promoting student participation in the reading process. After reading the selections below, we invite you to look for a classroom ballot, a student certificate, promotional bookmarks, last year's winning titles, and the opportunity to nominate your favorite new book on MRA's website ([michiganreading.org/awards/great-lakes-great-books/](http://michiganreading.org/awards/great-lakes-great-books/)). We invite you to treat yourself to all the suggestions on the 2021-22 Great Lakes Great Books list, including the ones here.

***Swashby and the Sea*** by Beth Ferry (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020) is a friendship story about Captain Swashby, who planned a peaceful retirement on the beach



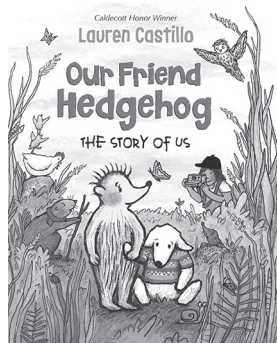
after a lifetime at sea. His plan for peace and quiet was soon interrupted by joyful new neighbors setting up their beach umbrellas next to his deck. He wrote unwelcoming messages in the sand to scare them off, but the ocean waves repeatedly washed away some of the letters, transforming the unkind words into fun phrases. Seeing only the transformed messages, the neighbors were convinced that Swashby was a great neighbor. Little by little, he joined in their activities, but it took an emergency to make Swashby realize how much he valued his new friends. The illustrations by Juana Martinez-Neal have soft, textured backgrounds with distinctive main characters who effortlessly convey emotion. The story's clever word play with messages in the sand could be reshaped into a creative language arts activity.

***Our Friend Hedgehog: The Story of Us*** by Lauren Castillo (Penguin Random House, 2020) is a study in contrast between a solitary existence and the fullness



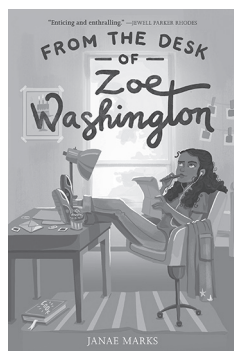
## Must Read Texts

of life with friends. When Hedgehog loses Mutty in a windstorm, he leaves his island to find the treasured stuffed animal. The journey takes him through the underground home of Mole, to the treetop home of Owl, across the river to Beaver's dam, into the meadow with Hen and her chicks, and straight to the house of Annika Mae. Hedgehog follows the trail of clues, finding new friends as he travels to each location. As his small world expands, he realizes how lucky the adventure itself had been. Annika Mae, who found Mutty along the river, returned him to Hedgehog. In return, Hedgehog retrieved her red notebook from Beaver's newly repaired dam. You may have guessed that the notebook got wet, smudging the pages, but the new group of friends went to work creating new pages and a new story for themselves. Young readers will enjoy well-constructed chapters that are visually supported by vivid watercolor illustrations.



### *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*

*Washington* by Janae Marks (Harper Collins, 2020) introduces Zoe on her twelfth birthday, aglow from a wonderful party with friends, as she receives a letter from the Massachusetts State Penitentiary, where her father has been incarcerated her whole life. She's intrigued, and writes back before her mom and stepfather find out. Meanwhile, Zoe has the entire summer ahead of her to patch up a misunderstanding with her best friend, Trevor, and begin an internship at a cupcake bakery in downtown Boston. She chafes when assigned to non-baking tasks, but finally accepts that there's more to a bakery than mixing the batter. Zoe continues to correspond with her biological father with assistance from her grandmother, who allows her address to be used for the letters. When Zoe finds out about a witness that could prove her father's innocence, Trevor

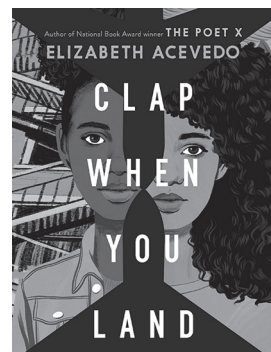


steps up to help her find the elusive person. The author embeds several social issues and the love of baking into this sweet novel, with friendship at the base of it all.

*The Magic Fish* by Trung Le Nguyen (Penguin Random House, 2020) is a color-coded graphic novel that allows readers to seamlessly make transitions from the present to the past and into the imaginative world of fairy tales. Nguyen layers together three separate storylines to show the melding of Vietnamese and American cultures through traditional European fairy tales. To help themselves learn more English, Tien and his mother read centuries-old fairy tales, including complicated and gruesome retellings of "Cinderella" and "The Little Mermaid." The tales are tied to the sea and its miraculous creatures, illustrating the arduous, overseas immigration journey of Tien's mother. Her story parallels that of the little mermaid, who left her home under the sea to live on land without the ability to communicate with humans. Both heroines feel the isolation of a language barrier, while seeking acceptance within a new community. Tien's own longing for love and acceptance has less to do with a language barrier than juggling two cultures on a daily basis and butting up against social norms. He can't find the right vocabulary to tell his parents that he's gay, and fears becoming an outcast if he confides in his friends. Nguyen's compelling story is presented with detailed and expressive graphics, giving this book the double impact of story and art.



*Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo (Harper Collins, 2020) is a mystery that unfolds chapter by chapter, as Camino and Yahaira alternately tell their stories. Camino lives with her aunt in the Dominican Republic, where her father joins them in the summer months. Yahaira





lives in New York City with her mother and her father, who travels for business each summer. Is it a coincidence, or could both of their fathers be the same man? Both worlds collide when Papi is killed in a plane crash on his way to the Dominican Republic, releasing the secrets of his double life. Camino and Yahaira will soon meet and work through new emotions in order to accept one another. As it turns out, their father wasn't the only one keeping secrets. Family structure, economic advantage, sexual identity, and sexual harassment are also factors in this complex page-turner.

## Author Biography

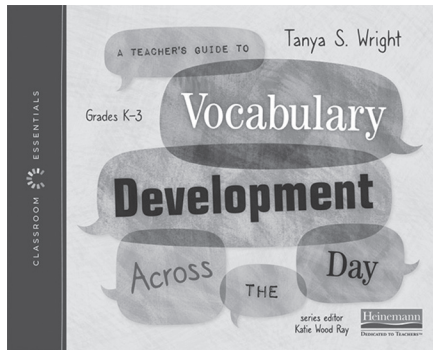
**Lynette Marten Suckow** works at the Peter White Public Library in Marquette, MI where she provides reference assistance with library resources and digital technology. She holds a master's degree in education from Northern Michigan University, is a member of the Marquette-Alger Reading Council, and serves on the Michigan Reading Association's Great Lakes Great Books Award committee. She can be reached at [lynette.suckow@gmail.com](mailto:lynette.suckow@gmail.com).



# Review of *A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day*

by Annie P. Spear

Wright, Tanya.  
(2020)  
*A Teacher's  
Guide to  
Vocabulary  
Development  
Across the Day*  
Wood Ray, K.  
(Series Ed).



Portsmouth,

NH: Heinemann Publishers. ISBN 978-0-325-11277-0 / 0-325-11277-0 / SKU E112772020 / 136pp

Dr. Tanya Wright opened the vocabulary floodgates with her newly-released book, *A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day*. She has been a leading researcher in Michigan over the past several years for the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3*, with frequent presentations around the topic of vocabulary. She has shared about vocabulary development, the research that supports it, and the findings of instructional practices educators can implement to support students. Regardless of whether you have seen Dr. Wright present at a training or conference, her latest book provides a relevant, engaging, and enticing text that will hook early literacy educators. Moreover, her call to educators to consider the ways in which we weave vocabulary instruction throughout the day within and across disciplines will appeal to content area educators, as well. Wright's book offers an important and engaging opportunity for cross-content book studies, discussions, and planning.

Throughout the text, Dr. Wright uses the metaphor of a gate; she demonstrates how we must keep that gate open for students, never letting it close. Through her well-crafted language, she relays the message to educators that we need to make vocabulary learning



Annie P. Spear

authentic and uses the text to explain why and how to provide this. Wright not only explains the importance of vocabulary instruction, she also demonstrates its importance to readers. At one point in the book, readers encounter sophisticated science passages. She invites readers to attempt to read the passage and asks them to reflect upon whether or not they can comprehend the text despite being able to decode all of the words within it. This activity provides an illustrative situation that underscores the importance of vocabulary knowledge in comprehending a text and the impact that a lack of vocabulary knowledge and/or the inability to decode words in a text has on readers.

Throughout the pages of her text, Dr. Wright provides relatable examples, even sharing her own children's vocabulary stories. By doing this, she creates rapport and trust with the audience. Readers will easily identify with her and her experiences. In fact, I laughed out loud and smiled several times as I interacted with the text. In addition to inspiring anecdotes, Dr. Wright provides research to support her recommendations. The balance of her research expertise with accessible language builds readers' confidence in her recommendations. Throughout the text, she continues to advocate on students' behalf as she urges educators to consider the importance of implementing explicit vocabulary instruction that is relevant and appropriate for children

and their needs. Educators will find this book useful because Dr. Wright also provides very specific examples of what they can do to support children's vocabulary throughout the day, across disciplines, and in a variety of contexts (whole group, small group, and individual). Examples from her own research and of other highly-esteemed researchers in the field of vocabulary are provided through samples, charts, graphs, student examples, and sample dialogues. These create ways for educators to envision the application of the research practices and help educators recognize that such instruction is reasonable and urgent.

Beyond the content itself, the supportive layout of the text invites readers in and keeps their attention. Beginning with a table of contents that is detailed and educative, readers know they will experience a fact-filled learning journey in each section. Throughout the text, a variety of design choices give readers opportunities to stop and reflect. Sections such as “You May Be Wondering” pose a question connected to what we might call an “intractable practice” and provide the research to guide readers as they are invited to consider such questions. “Tip” sections are sprinkled throughout and offer instructional tips linked to research, often including suggestions for language that educators could use to prompt and support students. In addition, a “What We Know” section provides snapshots of research with authors cited. Another useful feature of the book is the incorporation of student work samples. The student work represents authentic writing and uncovers the range of possibilities that shows readers Dr. Wright's suggestions can, in fact, be accomplished in real classrooms.

Another highly appealing feature of this particular series is the video sets that show teachers implementing practices that Dr. Wright presents. In total, there are seven videos aligned to particular areas within chapters. Colorful picture boxes with a freeze-frame of each specific video and its title are placed directly on the page. Accessing the videos is fairly simple, and a QR code is listed to give immediate access.

We know that effective instruction is grounded in

research-supported practices. When educators have access to texts that bring research and practice together, enhanced by insights directly from a leading researcher in the field, the resource is appealing and useful. *A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day* does exactly that and adds a literary blockbuster to Heinemann's Classroom Essential Series. Dr. Wright deserves applause, cheers, accolades, and praise for highlighting the importance of vocabulary learning in a relevant and engaging way. This book is a must read for all educators.

## Author Biography

**Annie Petrozzelli Spear** has been in the field of education for over 20 years and holds a Master of Education in Reading and a Master of Arts in Elementary Education. She has taught in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Michigan. She is an Early Literacy Coach at C.O.O.R. Intermediate School District, consultant, and co-author of *Let's Talk: Getting Your Baby Ready to Read*. Annie was a Principal Investigator and Reading Clinic Coordinator for The Literacy Center at Central Michigan University where she remains an adjunct faculty member. Annie aims to facilitate learning around literacy development and to provide actionable ways for educators to meet children's needs through research-supported practices. She has a passion for engaging and collaborating with families in authentic ways linked to literacy research. She lives with her family in Northern Michigan and can be reached at [anniespear@gmail.com](mailto:anniespear@gmail.com).



# **Michigan Reading Journal**

## **General Call for Manuscripts & Graphics**

The *Michigan Reading Journal* is the peer-reviewed journal of the Michigan Reading Association, which is composed of and serves more than 3,000 classroom teachers, literacy specialists, educational leaders, teacher educators, and university faculty.

The journal publishes on diverse topics related to literacy, including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, visually representing, technology, and literature for children and young adults. Submissions are invited in any of the categories below, though we are particularly interested in manuscripts that connect literacy and social justice or address new literacies (e.g., technology, graphic novels, podcasts, etc.).

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### **Bridging Research and Practice Articles**

Articles submitted in this category present original descriptions of research-based instruction that improves the literacy learning of students ranging from birth to college age. Articles describing research-based practices in literacy teacher education will also be considered. Manuscripts in this category must include 5-10 practical steps to guide readers in applying the research to their practice. Manuscript submissions should include APA formatted references to the relevant research literature and must not exceed 5,000 words (including tables, figures and appendices; excluding reference list) in 12-point font and left-aligned. Any charts or graphics must be of high-quality and in black and white. These manuscripts undergo blind review by members of the journal's editorial review board.

### **Voices from the Region**

Articles submitted in this category will showcase evidence-based literacy practices being implemented throughout the state and region in such varied spaces as classrooms, districts, libraries, after school programs, online schools, homes, daycares, preschools, ISDs/RESAs. We are specifically interested in submissions from practitioners who can share tips and ideas about what is working in their context, why they are engaging in these ideas, and how others could do this, too. Our goal is to hear from a range of practitioners in and around the state who are interested in literacy. Manuscripts in this category should begin with an introduction to the authors and the context of their work. Please also include APA formatted references to the relevant research literature, if appropriate to the piece. Manuscript submissions should be between 750 and 2500 words (including tables, figures and appendices; excluding reference list), double-spaced, and in 12-point font and left-aligned. Any charts or graphics must be of high-quality and in black and white. These manuscripts undergo blind review by members of the journal's editorial review board.

### **Visual Artifacts and Graphics**

Submissions in this category share visual artifacts of literacy teaching practices through photos of teachers and students engaging in literacy, literacy projects, literacy centers, and artifacts of student learning. Each image should be clear, in focus, of a high resolution/quality, and sent as a full-size jpeg or tiff file attachment, accompanied by a brief, 50-100 word description. Documents must be scanned, not photographed; the latter will not be of high enough quality for publication. By submitting an item in this category, the individual indicates that he/she has obtained consent from the district, school, teacher, parent, and child to use the image for publication. The journal's editorial team reviews submissions in this category.

### **Letters to the Editors**

We invite and encourage your letters in response to what you have read in the Michigan Reading Journal. Did research presented help you better understand teaching and learning? Were you inspired to try a new teaching strategy? Are you still puzzling over a topic recently featured? Is there something you haven't seen in the journal that you want us to address? Let us hear from you, please. Letters may be edited, with author's permission, for publication.



### **Nominations for Professional Books to Review**

We invite and encourage nominations of professional books to review for our Professional Books of Interest column. Please send book titles, author names, and year of publication to us via e-mail with a brief 1-2 sentence description of what the book is about and why it should be reviewed in *MRJ*.

### **Reviews of Children's and Young Adult Books**

Have a great book that you and your students love? We invite teachers of students of all ages to write and submit book reviews of children's and young adult books of any genre that have been published in the last year. Book reviews should be no more than 200 words in length.

### **Manuscript Review Process**

Below are the questions that the journal's Editorial Review Board members use when reviewing submitted research manuscripts and practitioner pieces focused on sharing teaching practices. The questions are intended to guide reviewers and help them shape their written summaries of feedback and recommendations regarding publication. The answers are forwarded to authors, along with the publication decision. The editorial team will provide feedback on spelling, grammar, mechanics, APA format, etc, so reviewers should focus their review and feedback on the more global guiding questions below. The guiding questions can also serve to help authors shape their manuscripts in order to meet standard for publication in *MRJ*.

### **Reviewers' Guiding Questions**

- Does the article address an important or compelling topic for reading practitioners in Michigan? Why or why not?
- Does the manuscript contain an appropriate blend of theory, research and practice? Are there ways to improve this balance?
- Does the article offer practical implications or suggestions, based-in-research, that reading practitioners can implement? Are there additional implications that would improve the manuscript?
- Does the manuscript include enough information on how-to practical steps for classroom or practitioner implementation (i.e., What can teachers do on Monday morning?)?
- Will the article appeal to MRJ's diverse audience? What can be improved?
- What are the revisions that you would recommend to improve this manuscript for our practitioner audience?

### **Submitting Your Work**

To submit your article, you will need to create a Scholarworks account by clicking on the "Submit Article" link at <[scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj)>. Then, you will follow the instructions to submit a manuscript to the *Michigan Reading Journal*. Shortly afterward, you will receive an email confirming your submission.

The submission process consists of the following steps:

1. Read and accept the Article Submission Agreement
2. Provide information about yourself
3. Provide information about any authors
4. Upload your article and related items

Before you begin, please be sure you have the following items:

1. Article Title
2. An abstract (separate from the article body)
3. Keywords for your article (optional)
4. Article in Microsoft Word (.docx) format.

Also, please note that articles must be submitted without a title page, abstract, or page numbers. These will be provided by the system. This is especially important so that you do not include any identifying information about the authors, as the article you submit will be sent to reviewers. No part of the submission is final until all steps have been completed and you click the final Submit button. The review process begins as soon as *Michigan Reading Journal* receives a readable article, along with the abstract and article title. You will receive further communication from the editors after your submission is accepted into the system and prepared for peer review.

**Deadlines:** The *Michigan Reading Journal* is published three times yearly—fall, winter, and spring. Manuscripts are reviewed with deadlines of July 15 (fall issue), October 15 (winter issue), and February 15 (spring issue) each year.

