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From the Editors...

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From the Editors...

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

We write this letter during the beginning of 2021 holiday season. It is a time of mixed feelings here in Michigan, as the tragedy of the Oxford school shooting has just occurred. Teachers, students, and parents are struggling to cope with the sudden and tragic losses in Oxford and with gun violence around the country. Also, despite our early efforts and stemming the effects of COVID, public



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opinion and political winds have shifted such that—with the onset of Omicron—we are at a time where Michigan leads the nation in COVID transmission rates. And, we cap that with a looming teacher shortage in our state that already trails over two-thirds of other states in starting teacher pay and student spending. It looks like we may be in for a long, bleak winter.

That said, we want to look ahead, with hopes that “lessons learned” from pandemic pedagogy will carry MRA members—and our entire field of literacy studies—forward into conversations about more equitable practices. We seek hope and work to bring it to educators in the pages of *MRJ*. We echo again the theme of our upcoming 2022 conference, “Literacy Equity, Justice, and Building Beloved Community.” Our conference chairperson, Leah van Belle, reminded us in our fall issue that we can continue to learn and grow “our knowledge, skills, and tools to build toward a more equitable and just literacy education for all students,” and we hope that this issue helps move readers one step closer to that goal.

In our *Bridging Research to Practice* section, first, we gain insights from literacy scholar Dr. Julie Coiro, a leader in the study of reading and digital literacies, who reminds us that a simple question our students can ask—“What do I want to learn next?”—can undergird our entire approach to teaching literacy. Then, we turn to Dr. Elizabeth Isidro and Dr. Laura Teicher, Assistant Professors from Western Michigan University, who explore “Socially Just Literacy Teaching within Virtual Spaces: Proposing A Model for Practice” through the stories of three pre-service teachers working with K-12 students during COVID-induced remote learning.

From there, we move into our *Voices from the Region* section, where we welcome three individual authors and a trio of co-authors. In her article, “The Stance, the Text, and the Talk: Three Components for Critical Race-Oriented Interactive Read Alouds,” Rebecca Witte, doctoral candidate at Michigan State University, describes a three-part framework for engaging students in meaningful discussions about race and racism during read alouds. Alyssa N. Ginzler, a middle school ELA teacher at Caledonia Community Schools, shares strategies for helping students manage the cognitive load of complex writing tasks in her article, “Writing as a Vessel for Thinking: Incorporating Self-Regulation, Metacognition, and Formative

Assessment in the Middle School ELA Classroom.” In her article, “Free to Read: Growing Elementary Students’ Literacy in the Summer,” Allison M. Nieboer, a 5th grade teacher from Coopersville Public Schools, shares information about a successful summer reading program for elementary students that she designed with the support of some of her colleagues. Finally, Dr. Kathleen Crawford-McKinney, Dr. Asli Ozgun-Koca, and Kristy Rebar, colleagues from Wayne State University, write about the importance of integrating mathematics and children’s literature in their article, “Joys of Teaching Through Mathematics and Children’s Literature.”

In our *Critical Issues* section, we appreciate another piece from our regular contributors Jenelle Williams, Literacy Consultant with Oakland Intermediate School District, and Laura Gabrion, Literacy Consultant with Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency, who draw on the role that the *Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in the Secondary Classroom* play in learning to strike a balance between teacher *literature* and teaching *literacy* in secondary English Language Arts in their article, “Teacher of Literature and Literacy: Rethinking Secondary English Language Arts.”

Finally, in our *Must Reads* section, we find a mix of professional books as well as those for children and teens, beginning with young adult author Kristin Bartley Lenz’s review of *The Sky Blues* by Robbie Couch in “Sweet Romance and Ticking-Clock-Plots: An Entry Point for Exploring Identity and Intersectionality.” Our regular contributor Lynette Suckow, librarian at Peter White Public Library, in Marquette, offers insights on some great graphic novels with “Great Lakes Great Books Goes Graphic.” Then, Jeremy Hyler, a former middle level educator and now Manager of Educational Partnerships at the Center for the Collaborative Classroom, offers a review of Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides’ *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness* (*Editors’ Note: Hyler graciously chose to review this book, co-authored by one of MRJ’s co-editors, and received no additional considerations or compensation for doing so*).

Closing out this issue, we welcome Dr. Raven Jones Stanbrough, Assistant Professor from Michigan State University and a regular contributor, who reviews Gholdy Muhammad’s book, *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Model for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, which uses literacy practices of African American literary societies as inspiration for re-imagining literacy instruction for all students.

For this issue, we offer a special thanks to our new Executive Director, Jeanette Field, who has helped the three of us streamline the process of putting each issue of *MRJ* to press and get the physical copies of the journal into the hands of members more efficiently. Even in a time where pandemic-related delays are causing disruptions to the printing industry and mail service, Jeanette has been working with us well ahead of time to ensure that all the pieces of our production puzzle are in place and to bring voices of other educators—from Michigan and beyond—to the mailbox of you, our MRA colleagues, and through our open-access journal page: <scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>.

Finally, we encourage readers to look at the call for proposals for a special issue this spring, “‘Rooting to Rise:’ Centering Student Voices & Equitable Literacy Practices Through Joy and Social Justice.” This issue will be co-edited by Dr. Raven Jones Stanbrough and Zuri Hudson Stanbrough, and more information is available on pages 76-78 in this issue, and at <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/call_for_proposals.pdf>.

Sincerely,

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