
March 2022

President's Message...

Jill Erfourth

Michigan Reading Association

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

Recommended Citation

Erfourth, Jill (2022) "President's Message...," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 54: Iss. 2, Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol54/iss2/4>

From *The Teachers & Writers Guide to Classic American Literature*, edited by Christopher Edgar and Gary Lenhart, 2001, New York, NY: Teachers & Writers Collaborative. Copyright 2001 by Teachers & Writers Collaborative. Reprinted with permission.

This work is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

President's Message...

by Jill Erfourth, MRA President 2021-2022

Rebound: “to bounce back after hitting a hard surface or object.”

Accelerate: “to undergo a change in velocity, or increase in amount.”

Rebound and Accelerate.

Across the many meetings, professional development sessions, and coaching conversations I have had this fall, this phrase has taken on multiple meanings as we embarked upon this school year. Educators were thrust into classrooms on full throttle to fill significant learning gaps, as if accelerating in this sense meant putting the pedal to the metal. We hear that we must also “go slow to go fast,” all the while trying to gas up our vehicles without ever coming to a full stop.



Jill Erfourth

This school year is not one we could have ever anticipated or predicted, as we began to see firsthand the long-lasting effects of a global pandemic. The effects are far more reaching than the loss of academic skills, as they extend to skills in socialization, communication and self-regulation, all the while recognizing, and dealing with emotions. Glaring gaps in access, sustainability, systems, and literacy equity are more evident.

For us as individuals, the role of an educator is ever-evolving, especially this year, and is no longer just a teacher but counselor, social worker, and behavior interventionist. Important resources are simply not readily available, but basic needs must be addressed and met for learning to be impactful, sustainable, and long-lasting.

In that sense, the pressure to push on that pedal harder and harder, however, has now almost forced us to put on the brakes. Educators were optimistic about in-person learning, face-to-face connections with students, and getting back to routine and structure. Yet, schools are closing again for days at a time, and some suspect fully remote learning might return this winter. The stop is coming one way or another.

What will happen when we stop? How are we addressing these gaps? What changes are we making as we move forward? This is an education crisis like we have never experienced, and we need to rethink what we want to do, reconsidering the goal of “rebounding” and “accelerating.”

As we now embark on 2022, while still coming to grips with the time-lapse since March 2020, a new calendar year always brings new hope along with a need to refocus. We must take the time to rebound, rebuild, and reset while balancing the acceleration of the throttle.

Literacy can give us a sense of healing and help us do just that. There are neurological and mental benefits to reading. Studies show stress reduction, mental stimulation, memory improvement, and improved focus are just a few of the immediate benefits. Books have the power to build empathy, community, compassion,

understanding, and agency. When students have difficulty expressing their feelings and emotions, the power of story can be a catalyst for conversations.

For instance, the beautifully written story *Outside, Inside* by LeUyen Pham (2021) captures moments when our world came together inside. At the same time, the change of the season stood still on the outside. As we emerged from the inside to the outside, we shared love, triumph, heartache, and despair stories.

Sharing our stories—whether by talking or writing or both—can bring understanding, empathy, and purpose. Writing is an expression of the human spirit. Putting our story to paper helps us go back to an experience and perhaps explore it more deeply to make sense of it. Through that process of expression and reflection, we come to gratitude for what is. We can bring students a sense of appreciation and gratitude through pen and story.

Rather than trying to “rebound” and “accelerate,” let’s think about some different actions we might take with our students. Reading a story. Writing a story. Sharing a story. The power of story can be a vehicle for healing, hope, and change. Lift student voices through the power of story to be the change they want to see in the world.

And, above all, take care of each other through the ride.

Jill Erfourth is the 2021-2022 President of the Michigan Reading Association. Jill has over 25 years of experience as an educator in Utica Community Schools. Previously she has served as a second-grade teacher for 18 years and a literacy coach for the past two years. Jill is currently a District K-6 Literacy Consultant in UCS. As a Macomb County Literacy Ambassador, she shares her love of reading and advocates for equity through literacy in Utica Schools and across the county. Jill is the co-author of *Interacting With informational Text for Close and Critical Reading*. She holds a master’s degree in Educational Leadership from Saginaw Valley State University. Jill has been nominated for Michigan Teacher of the Year, in which she placed as a 2018-2019 MTOY semi-finalist. You can reach Jill Erfourth at jerfourth.michiganreading@gmail.com.

References

Pham, L. (2021). *Outside inside*. Roaring Brook Press.



All stock images in this issue, unless otherwise noted, are used with permission under an open license from Unsplash.com.