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Michigan Reading Journal

*A Journal of the
Michigan Reading Association*

Winter 2020
Volume 52, No. 2

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- Third-Grade Reading Laws and Unintended Consequences
- Using Read Alouds to Target Social-Emotional Learning
- Expanding Vocabulary with Children's Books
- Integrating Michigan's Literacy Essentials into Prekindergarten Classrooms
- Engaging Boys in Literacy and Elementary School
- In Demand: The Education Cypher
- Diverse Literacy Experiences within a Pre-College High School Program



Painting by Lamarr Sanders



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The *Michigan Reading Journal*, ISSN 0047-7125, is published by the Michigan Reading Association, an intermediate council of the International Reading Association. The *Journal*, 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, preschool through adult levels. The *Journal* incorporates articles that address both theory and practice.

The Michigan Reading Association was founded in 1956. The *Michigan Reading Journal* has been published since the spring of 1967 and is abstracted and indexed in the “Current Index to Journals in Education” of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). Membership in the MRA includes a subscription to the *Journal*. Single copies are \$5.00 prepaid.

Because the *Michigan Reading Journal* represents an open forum, the viewpoints expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect or imply endorsement or advocacy by the Michigan Reading Association, its officers, or its members.

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From the Editors...

by **Kathryn L. Roberts, Ph.D.** and **Poonam Arya, Ph.D.**

Welcome to a new year, and a fresh start! Although many of us consider September the true beginning of the year, there is something to be said about coming back to the classroom refreshed, renewed, and recharged after the winter break. This is our final calendar year as Journal editors, and we're so happy to be beginning a new year with our Michigan Reading Association colleagues across the state.

To say we are excited about this issue would be an understatement. This academic year, and those leading up to it, have felt like a pressure cooker for many of us. The Read by Grade Three law is contentious, but a current reality in our state. We open this issue of the journal with an article by Gabriel P. DellaVecchia (University of Michigan), who shares with us an overview of the legislation, as well as positive steps we can take to support our children and teachers who are affected by it and remind us that our students are so much more than scores on a spreadsheet. Times are tense, but this is no time to give up on the humanity involved in teaching and learning. As everyone's favorite educator, Albus Dumbledore once said, "Happiness can be found in the darkest of times, if only one remembers to turn on the light," and what better way to turn on the light than to open a book.



**Kathryn L.
Roberts, Ph.D.**



Poonam Arya, Ph.D.

In this issue, our authors also help us to think about the other ways in which reading matters for our students. Ashley Schultz (Central Unit School District 301, Elgin, IL) and Alicia Baczek (Central Unit School District 301, Elgin, IL) help us think about how read alouds provide opportunities for socio-emotional learning. Dr. Rebecca Norman (Mount Saint Mary College, Newburg, NY) showcases the ways in which we can use careful selection of books and learning activities to foster enthusiastic engagement in our students, especially young boys. Drs. Sara Churchill and Kathy Everts Danielson (University of Nebraska at Omaha) discuss why it is important to explicitly teach vocabulary and review best practices in vocabulary instruction. In a Voices from the Region piece, Dr. Chad H. Waldron (University of Michigan-Flint) and Michelle McQueen (Regional Multi-Tiered System of Support Consultant) emphasize the importance of improving early literacy outcomes by implementing the *PreK Literacy Essentials* in early childhood classrooms.

In the Critical Issues section, Dr. Sandra M. Gonzales, Jonelle Lopez, Laura Torres, and Ana Calandrino (Wayne State University, Detroit) help us to think about the different ways in which our students engage and embody literacies, and what it means to be responsive to them. quan neloms (In Demand, Detroit) offers a not-to-be missed poetic focus on the importance of diversifying our teaching community, particularly to include a more proportional inclusion of Black male teachers.

We could not be more excited to share our "Must Read Texts" with you. We open this section with three book reviews: *A Teacher's Guide to Getting Started with Beginning Writers: Grades K-2*, written by Katie

Wood Ray and Lisa Cleaveland and reviewed by Dr. Meghan K. Block (Central Michigan University); *Beyond Literary Analysis: Teaching Students to Write with Passion and Authority about Any Text*, written by Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell and reviewed by Dr. Gina DeBlase (Wayne State University); and *No More Reading Instruction without Differentiation*, written by Lynn Bigelman and Debra Peterson and reviewed by Kathleen Plond (Wayne State University). Next, we have a guest book reviewer, Elena, from the *Elena Reads* book review blog. Elena is a sixth-grade student, who reviews books with a particular eye toward diverse representation. The column includes both an interview with Elena and several fantastic book reviews. We close this issue with *Great Lakes, Great Books* recommendations from our unofficial *MRJ* librarian, Lynette Suckow (Peter White Public Library, Marquette, MI).

We encourage our readers to read updates and information about the journal by liking the Michigan Reading Association page on Facebook, following @michiganreading on Twitter, and searching and following Michigan Reading Association on Pinterest. Our journal email address is mrj@wayne.edu. We invite you to join the conversation by contributing to *MRJ*. Please email article submissions that are appropriate for any of the sections in our journal to our email address. We look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks to our Wayne State University editorial team of Angela Harris and Sarah Schrag, who have done a fantastic job of supporting the work for this issue. We would also like to thank LaShan Mabry and Charissa Elmer from the Michigan Reading Association office; our MRA president, Theresa Hasenauer; and the MRA board for all of their hard work.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *MRJ*, and that you will continue to tell your friends and colleagues about us.

Happy Reading!



Kathryn L. Roberts and Poonam Arya

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Co-Editors, *Michigan Reading Journal*



President's Message...

by **Theresa Hasenauer, MRA President 2019-2020**

According to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, “accomplished teachers value diversity and appreciate the many facets of diversity students bring to the classroom, including language background, culture, ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, body image, household income, religious affiliation, family configuration, sexual orientation, physical or psychological exceptionalities, and literacy experience” (2016, p. 25). This statement is meant to simultaneously call attention to the changing demographics of students in many areas of the country, including Michigan, and educators' unwavering commitment to the education of the students in our classrooms. But as our student population has changed, have we? In this era of accountability, educators' jobs are complex and multilayered. Yet, we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that deliberate and purposeful planning of lessons around diversity can help educators move toward effectively delivering equitable instruction for all students.



Theresa Hasenauer

Who are the students in your schools? Your classrooms? Writing for the International Literacy Association blog, Hsiao-Chin Kuo stated, “[the] National Center for Education Statistics projects that by 2023 the percentage of White students in public school enrollment will decrease to less than half, whereas Hispanics are projected to constitute 30% and Asian/Pacific Islanders 5% of the enrollment” (Kuo, 2015, p. 1). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), 9.6% of K-12 students are English language learners, with many more that speak a language other English at home that are not included in this number. Gates (2015) states that between 2 million and 3.7 million children under age 18 have an LGBTQ parent, and approximately 200,000 of them are being raised by a same-sex couple (p. 1). All of our students need to know that they are seen, but also need to see themselves and their identities represented in the books they read. If you don’t know where to start in your classroom, try building your classroom library around books that represent your students. But that’s not enough. We also need to be sure that we build libraries in which students can see those who are different from them, windows into worlds they may not otherwise be able to access. Organizations such as the International Literacy Association have lists of book recommendations, if you need a place to start. Many blogs, including those written by Dr. Debbie Reese (<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/?m=1>), Dr. Laura Jimenez (<https://booktoss.blog/>), and Edith Campbell (<https://crazyquiltedi.blog/me-2-0/>) also post reviews on books and hints for finding books that highlight the diversity in our state and country, as well as tips for thinking critically about books that may misrepresent some of these groups. Start reading and reviewing books, on your own and with your students, and share that information with other educators.

It is important to start conversations around diversity. Most of our classrooms are already made up of students from diverse backgrounds and of diverse abilities, but those that do not are just as in need of access to books representing diverse groups of people, if not more so. Plan deliberate literacy lessons around engaging students in discussions about listening and learning from different perspectives. Together we can strive to bring awareness to all of our unique and amazing backgrounds!

Theresa Hasenauer Ed.S, Michigan Reading Association President

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Don't Leave Us Behind: Third-Grade Reading Laws and Unintended Consequences

by Gabriel P. DellaVecchia



**Gabriel P.
DellaVecchia**

Over the past two decades, nearly 30 states have adopted laws that either suggest or require retention for third graders who fail to reach a benchmark score on a standardized reading assessment. What are the consequences of these laws for teachers, students, and families? Are these laws an effective intervention to support struggling readers? If not retention, then what?

My journey into this maze of questions began when I started teaching in the fall of 2013. With a freshly minted Master's degree and a teaching license, I moved to Colorado, eager to start my new role as a third-grade classroom teacher. In my very first week in the classroom, I was confronted with the state's *Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act* (READ Act), which had gone into effect only one month before I started my new position.

The new law had appeared seemingly out of nowhere and was just as impenetrable to my administrators and my more seasoned colleagues as it was to me. While this gave me some small comfort, the collective confusion did not help as I tried to comply with the new law.

What we could glean was this: The state legislature was

concerned about literacy achievement. As a remedy, they had voted for a sweeping new law to try and hold teachers and families more accountable for students not meeting literacy goals. For every child in my classroom who was identified as one or more grade levels behind in reading, as determined by their score from the end of second grade on the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA2; Beaver & Carter, 2006), I had to create a READ Plan. Basically, I had to document my intervention strategy for that child and meet with the child's family to gain their approval and partnership. This part made good sense and was consistent with my intended practice.

However, in my classroom that first year, 11 of my 29 students were required to have READ Plans. So, in addition to getting my classroom off the ground, in addition to administering the DRA2 to all of my students, I also had to take an hour or so per child to create 11 READ Plans. I had to input the information into a hastily programmed and non-user-friendly online system maintained by my large urban district to verify compliance with the law. As far as I know, my planned interventions were never reviewed, and if they were, I never received any acknowledgement or feedback. In the

end, I was scrupulously documenting everything I was already going to do with each child, but losing hours of planning time and actual contact time with my students to satisfy paperwork requirements.

Near the end of the year, I had follow-up meetings with the families of every child on a READ Plan. For those students whose test scores were still below the benchmark, I was required to inform families that retention was an option. This seemed like a severe consequence, but it was a provision of the law.

Luckily, the district I worked for did not view retention as an effective solution for reading difficulties. They provided us with letters stating that retention was a choice, but not one supported by research or the district. After reviewing the letter, families were asked to opt in or opt out of retention for their child. In my three years of teaching in Colorado, not a single one of my families chose retention. I dutifully filed the retention letters away with the rest of the READ Plan documentation.

Overall, the READ Act felt like yet another entry in a long line of well-meaning bureaucratic checklists; it required time that I really didn't have to spare, but it was basically harmless.

You can imagine my surprise when, three years later, I moved to Michigan to start a doctoral program and discovered that Colorado's READ Act had a twin... with a twist. Not only was the intention similar, but the language of the law itself was nearly identical. What was the twist? While Colorado's law *mentioned* retention for struggling readers as an option to be discussed with families, the third-grade reading law in Michigan specified that retention was *mandatory*.

Disturbed by this higher-stakes and punitive variation on Colorado's comparatively innocuous reading law, I started doing research. I quickly discovered that it was not only in Colorado and Michigan. Twenty-nine states, plus the District of Columbia, have third-grade reading laws. Only 10 of them specify retention as a *suggested* intervention. For the rest, retention, without a good cause exemption, is mandatory (Table 1).

How Did We Get Here?

The first third-grade reading law was passed in 1998 in California (Weyer, 2018). Politicians, relying on an outdated idea of third grade as a line in the sand between students *learning to read* and *reading to learn*, decided to send a message to school districts and parents that "social promotion," students moving to the next grade based on age, would stop. In its place, students would

Table 1

Third-Grade Reading Legislation

States with Mandatory Retention (19)	States That Allow Retention (10)
Alabama ^a , Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan ^b , Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada ^c , North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, (also, Washington, DC)	Alaska, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Texas, Washington, West Virginia

Note. Legislation information provided by the Education Commission of the States (2018) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (2019).

^aAlabama's law was passed in July, 2019. Retention decisions will begin during the 2021-22 school year. ^bMichigan will begin making retention decisions at the end of the 2019-20 academic year. ^cNevada began implementation on July 1, 2019.

be required to take gatekeeping assessments to progress past third grade.

This emphasis on third grade as a critical predictor of future success gained traction in 2011 with a widely cited report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation called *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. In that study, the author concluded that students not reading proficiently by the end of the third grade were four times more likely not to graduate high school.

In the wake of that report and a nationwide call for increased accountability in education, third-grade reading laws have spread across the country. Considering their consistent proliferation over the last decade, for those states that do not already have a reading law, it may only be a matter of time.

The concern expressed by legislators is well founded: Many students in the United States do struggle with reading. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, the only nationwide reading assessment at the elementary level, only 37% of fourth-grade students performed at or above the *Proficient* level and only 68% of students performed at or above the *Basic* level (NAEP Reading Report Card, 2017).

Coupled with a shift in standardized testing to Common Core-aligned instruments which prioritize higher-order thinking like analysis and evaluation over simple identification, like the Smarter Balanced assessment upon which the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) is based, it is clear that American students need substantial support to meet the demands of being literate citizens in the 21st century. However, while proficient reading is obviously a worthy goal and a foundational component of a successful education, using retention as an intervention comes at great cost, with benefits that are murky at best.

What are the Potential Costs?

With so many states having already traveled down this path, I had plenty of prior examples to research. The more I dug into the data, the more I was unsettled.

Looking to our demographically similar neighbor Ohio, which enacted a nearly identical reading retention law in 2012, 5% of students did not meet the promotion threshold on the 2017–18 assessment—nearly 6,000 students (Ohio Department of Education, 2018). Even at a very conservative estimate of \$6,000 per year in per-pupil spending (Applegate, 2018), that is an additional \$36 million to provide one additional year of instruction.

The financial burden in Michigan could be much greater. Statewide, only 44.4% of Michigan's 102,000 third graders scored *Proficient* or above on the 2017-18 M-STEP ELA assessment (Michigan Department of Education, 2018a). Depending on how far below proficient those students were, without granting any “good cause” exemptions (a list of ways to sidestep the law—with its own set of problems which we will explore shortly), Michigan could be forced to retain nearly 60,000 students. Again, estimating a conservative \$6,000/year per pupil, that is a potential cost of \$340 million. It is doubtful that every student who does not receive a *Proficient* score would be retained; the Michigan Department of Education estimates that “only” 5% of third graders per year will be retained due to the law (Keesler, 2019); nevertheless, interventions for Grades pre-K–2 seem like a more worthwhile investment than requiring local districts to spend millions of dollars on retention.

More troublesome, statewide averages mask the disproportionate impact that reading retention laws have on minoritized students, particularly students of color, attending under-resourced urban districts. Consider the case of Ohio: although their statewide retention average last year was 5%, the rate of retained children, even after excluding “good cause” exemptions, was about 18% in Dayton, 16% in Cleveland, and nearly 15% in Columbus (Ohio Department of Education, 2018). Cleveland and Columbus alone accounted for almost 1,000 of the 5,854 students retained statewide (Ohio Department of Education, 2018). Since students of color comprise between one third and two thirds of the student populations in each of those cities (US Census Bureau, 2010), and because the retention rates in the

cities are so much higher than the statewide average, it can be inferred that students of color are consequently being retained at higher rates than White students.

A similar disproportionate impact on urban districts, resulting in a disproportionate impact on minoritized students, can already be predicted in Michigan. Using Detroit as a telling example, 82% of students who attend the Detroit Public Schools Community District are African American and 13% are Hispanic (Michigan Department of Education, 2018b). However, only 11.3% of students in the district scored *Proficient* or above on the spring 2018 M-STEP ELA assessment (Levin, 2018).

In light of these statistics, it is instructive to look back at the title of the widely cited Annie E. Casey Foundation report *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. While third-grade reading laws are intended to improve reading skills, they do nothing to address the wide-ranging effects of intergenerational poverty or the resulting inequities in school resources. Rather than lawmakers viewing low reading scores as an *outcome* of attending under-resourced schools, these low reading scores are instead identified as the *cause* of students failing to graduate high school. As a consequence, rather than being provided with the resources they have been denied, students and families are threatened with mandatory retention.

Because of disproportionate impacts, particularly on students of color, these laws are not only about literacy. Retention and its use, or misuse, becomes a question of justice. Is retention truly an effective intervention for literacy outcomes? In addition to the significant financial costs we have explored, what are the potential social and emotional costs of retention? Are there additional unintended consequences? To answer these questions, we can refer to the significant body of research on retention.

What Does the Research Say?

In the April 2003 issue of *The Reading Teacher*, Shane Jimerson and Amber Kaufman presented “A Primer

on Grade Retention Research.” Even when that article was published a decade and a half ago, retention was on the rise. The authors projected that, if the trend continued, an estimated 30-50% of students would likely be retained at least once by ninth grade (p. 622). That was *before* the spread of third-grade reading laws nationwide.

The justification for retention does not seem warranted based on the available data. As Jimerson and Kaufman (2003) reported in their meta-analysis of studies from the previous 75 years, nearly 700 analyses from over 80 studies failed to support the use of grade retention as an early intervention to enhance academic achievement (p. 625). Furthermore, over 300 analyses from over 50 studies failed to support the use of grade retention as an early intervention to enhance socioemotional and behavioral adjustment (p. 626).

Research released in the fifteen years since the publication of Jimerson and Kaufman’s article has consistently demonstrated that retention is a neutral intervention at best, and potentially damaging at worst (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Silbergitt, Appleton, Burns, & Jimerson, 2006). Even when it comes to increasing high school graduation rates, a common justification for the necessity of reading legislation, a literature review of 17 papers by Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002) found that retained students were consistently more likely to drop out during high school than non-retained students. Despite the research evidence, however, reading retention laws continue to proliferate.

This trend compelled the literacy research community to voice their concerns. According to a policy brief from the Literacy Research Association (LRA) published in 2013, “retention policies and initiatives are not consistent with the research literature, which overall does not support any long-term academic benefits for retention, but does suggest that there are negative social ramifications of such policies” (p. 2). The LRA policy brief recommended that states “suspend the use of policies mandating test-based grade retention until further research is conducted to examine the efficacy and ramifications of such policies” (p. 2).

Since the publication of the policy brief, some of that “further research” has been conducted, and it has only strengthened the argument against mandatory retention based on reading test scores.

A 2017 article by Schwerdt, West, and Winters examined longitudinal outcomes in Florida. This study is of particular interest, as the third-grade retention law passed in that state was among the first in the current wave of reading laws, meaning that students retained under the law were included in their analysis. The researchers found that students who were retained showed a large initial increase in achievement, but it faded to statistical insignificance within five years. They also found that, while retention had some relation to increased high school GPA and enrollment in fewer remedial courses, retention did not increase the probability of students graduating from high school.

As those with the most to gain or lose from retention, we cannot neglect the student perspective. In a striking study by Yamamoto and Byrnes (1987), sixth-grade students rated retention as being more stressful than any event other than losing a parent or going blind. In a replication of the study, students rated grade retention as *the single most stressful life event*, more stressful than even the loss of a parent (Anderson, Jimerson, & Whipple, 2002). If the majority of young people share these feelings, then retention is indeed a drastic method for improving reading outcomes.

To review what we know from a significant, consistent, and robust body of research, 90 years of studies suggest that retention provides short-term gains at best, and neutral or even harmful effects at worst. Retention has not been shown to enhance academic achievement or support socioemotional or behavioral adjustment. Recently conducted longitudinal analyses (Hughes, West, Kim, & Bauer, 2018), along with earlier studies, indicate strong correlations between retention and increased rates of students dropping out. Retention has difficult-to-quantify, but very real, impacts on the social and emotional lives of affected students. Most concerning, for an intervention with a long list of possible negative consequences, retention does not appear to

support sustained improvements in reading growth. Taken all together, the research does not provide compelling evidence to legally mandate retention in order to improve reading outcomes.

What Are More Effective Solutions?

So, if retention is not the answer, what is? Luckily, decades of literacy research point to more effective instructional practices and interventions, many of which are positive components of the current law. While there is not space in this article to describe particular strategies in detail, I will provide a few broad categories of practices backed by strong evidence from research. Rather than carrying the negative connotations of retention, the majority of these ideas posit that increasing motivation to read is the key to helping students reach their full reading potential (e.g., Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie et al., 2004).

Before focusing on practices for specific grade-bands, two strategies can be implemented for students of all ages: 1) supporting learners to spend more time with “eyes on print” and 2) strengthening collaborations between schools and families.

More “Eyes on Print”

One of the simplest, cheapest, and perhaps most effective interventions involves providing all learners with ample exposure to high-interest reading material (Allington, 2014; Kamil, 2008; Neuman, 1999). These opportunities can be provided out of school, either in the home or with frequent trips to the local public library. In school, it is not enough to have a classroom library; children need to be provided with time to read for pleasure (Gambrell, 2011).

Even if a school spends significant money on a research-based reading curriculum or a well-reviewed literacy intervention, it is unlikely to make a lasting difference unless students are supported to foster a positive attitude towards books and reading. Without experiencing reading as a pleasurable activity, children will avoid it (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). Teachers and families may find it useful to refer to the strategies of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (Guthrie et al.,

2004) for ideas about how to support students' motivation to read.

Strengthening Collaborations Between Schools and Families

Perhaps the biggest flaw in the logic behind reading laws is the artificial antagonism that they foster between families and schools. Rather than viewing the relationship between the school and the family as a seamless support network, mandatory retention becomes a threat to punish families by retaining their children for struggling with reading.

Schools can do their part to repair their relationships with families by creating and promoting parent-involvement programs (Sénéchal & Young, 2008). Like many states, including Colorado, Michigan's law also requires the creation of a "Read at Home" plan—tools to assist the family in providing interventions.

Family involvement has a clear and positive impact on children's reading acquisition (Crosby, Rasinski, Padak, & Yildirim, 2015; Sénéchal, 2006). The state can do its part by funding programs, run by schools or literacy nonprofits, to increase the capacity of families to promote a culture of reading at home (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000).

In addition to the two interventions mentioned above for students of all ages, specific interventions may be instituted in three age bands: early childhood, during the first years of elementary school, and for the years of schooling between the end of Grade 3 and high school graduation.

Increasing Focus on Early Childhood Education

As with many things, prevention is the best medicine. A growing body of research indicates the effectiveness of early literacy instruction (e.g., Barnett, 2001). This could involve easier access to quality childcare through subsidies or streamlined licensing of childcare providers who focus on exploration, language development, and play (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989).

A push for increased early education could also involve legislation for universal pre-kindergarten or at least increased attendance for full-day kindergarten. These programs should develop language and prereading skills using structured, well-organized, comprehensive approaches with activities including, but not limited to, building phonological awareness, explicit instruction in letter-sound relationships, developing vocabulary, and practice with concepts of print (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Education Leadership Network [MAISA GELN], 2016).

Improving Instruction, Interventions, and Assessment in Grades 1-3

Thirty years ago, while reviewing effective programs for students at risk, Slavin, Karweit, and Madden (1989) noted that early identification and intervention was key to successful remediation. Consistent with that still-valid assertion, Michigan's law stipulates that students should be put on an individualized reading plan within 30 days of being identified as having a reading deficiency.

While early identification is critical, long before a child is in need of intervention, we need to make sure children receive high-quality literacy instruction every day (MAISA GELN, 2016). Illustrative examples of these essential practices, which include strategies for fostering motivation to read (Gambrell, 2011), include:

- Cultivating a supportive literacy community in the classroom, involving student choice and meaningful and personally relevant reading/writing activities
- Performing interactive read-alouds using high-interest and culturally-responsive mentor texts
- Varying instructional groupings in both size and instructional level, including time for individual, pair, and group work
- Providing ample time for extended, authentic writing
- Building vocabulary and content knowledge in the context of instruction, not as a stand-alone activity
- Supporting students to be successful with challenging texts
- Providing specific and elaborated feedback for reading and writing tasks

While these practices can be implemented by a single teacher, their power is magnified when embedded within a comprehensive, schoolwide literacy program. This includes thoughtful integration and collaboration between regular, remedial, and special education services (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

Ironically, the push for high-stakes summative assessments has obscured the essential role that ongoing *formative* assessment plays in tailoring instruction to each student's needs. Michigan's reading law, like those in many states, stipulates that students should be assessed "at least three times per year" in Grades K–2. However, this increase in required diagnostic tests will only be effective if teachers use the data to adapt instructional strategies along the way. Also, mandated assessments should not replace systems of classroom-level formative assessments. Rather than relying solely on print-outs from computer-adaptive tests, teachers should continue to perform informal reading inventories and engage their students in one-on-one conferences to learn more about each child's strengths, interests, and struggles as a reader (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

Summer Intervention

If intervention within the classroom and remedial services are not enough, summer school is a potential option that is preferable to retention (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000), and offering summer reading camps—staffed with highly effective teachers of reading—is encouraged within Michigan's reading law. A targeted summer program could provide the smaller class sizes and one-on-one attention not logistically feasible during the regular school year. Summer instruction would also have the benefit of preventing "summer slide," the loss of instructional gains often observed at the beginning of a new school year (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013).

If formal summer school is unavailable, students can also be provided with books to read over the summer, accompanied by comprehension strategy instruction taught over several lessons at the end of the preceding school year (Kim & White, 2008).

Looking Beyond Third Grade

With all of the focus on third-grade reading, attention has been diverted from the fact that we learn literacy across our lifespans (e.g., Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001). It may be indisputable that early literacy is important, but a fatal flaw of reading laws is the mistaken idea that literacy instruction ends in third grade. In fact, much of the subject-specific vocabulary and disciplinary-specific conventions become *more* important as students move into middle and high school (Snow, Lawrence, & White, 2009).

Also, while we rightly focus on students as the beneficiaries of our educational systems, we cannot forget the role of the teacher. Effective preparation and ongoing professional development are essential to prepare well-informed teachers who have a variety of instructional and intervention strategies at their command (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The law in Michigan requires the use of an early literacy coach model. If not already in place, teachers and families should advocate for the hiring of coaches who meet all of the requirements spelled out in the legislation.

What Can We Do This Year?

At this point, some of you may be saying, "Those suggestions sound well and good, but seeing improvement might take years. Others involve administrative decisions or significant financial investments that are outside of my circle of control. What can be done *this year* to counteract the retention provision of the law?" In Michigan, like most states with reading laws, families, teachers, and administrators have two avenues to avoid automatic retention: alternative assessments and good cause exemptions.

Advocating for Alternative Assessments

According to subsection (5)(a)(ii) of the reading law, local districts have the discretion to choose an "alternative standardized reading assessment approved by the superintendent of public instruction" (MCL 380.1280f). While the developers of M-STEP vouch for its validity and reliability (Michigan Department of Education, 2017), the fact of the matter is that it is too new for any relationship to be established between

M-STEP scores and future reading achievement, let alone overall academic achievement. Rather than relying on the M-STEP, a district could choose from a number of free or very low-cost instruments to demonstrate student proficiency (for a selected list, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/alternateassessments>). While an alternative assessment may still reveal a reading difficulty, it is logical to make a consequential decision like retention based on an instrument that has been used and studied extensively.

Districts may also elect to avoid traditional standardized tests entirely, including associated concerns about unintended consequences of test interpretation (Messick, 1995), and instead have students demonstrate proficiency using a portfolio containing multiple work samples. A portfolio assessment combining snapshots over time would provide a more complete picture of student ability, particularly for students who suffer from test anxiety.

For families and teachers concerned about the gate-keeping function of a single assessment, they could work together to urge local administrators to choose either a more established standardized test or portfolio reviews for their district.

Using Good Cause Exemptions

Even if a district elects to use an alternative assessment, the switch may not happen soon enough for third graders facing retention at the end of the 2019–20 school year. More immediately, a student may be granted a “good cause” exemption and promoted to fourth grade, regardless of reading score, for any one of the following reasons:

1. the child already has an existing Individualized Education Plan or Section 504 intervention in place,
2. the child is an English language learner who has received less than three years of English language instruction,
3. the child has previously been retained in Grades K–2, or
4. the child has been enrolled in his/her current school

district for less than two years and the previous district did not provide a reading improvement plan.

A parent or guardian, any third-grade teacher, the Section 504 coordinator, or any member of the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team can request the good cause exemption. However, it is essential for families to know that good cause exemptions are neither automatic nor guaranteed. They have to be requested and then approved by the district superintendent or a designated representative.

Problematically, this two-step process will likely have disproportionate impacts on minoritized students. Families with limited English proficiency, and/or who cannot take time from work, may not know, or have the time, to request a good cause exemption for their child. Even after it is requested, the law stipulates that good cause exemptions are granted by the school superintendent. This is another area where the retention provision is likely to have a disproportionate impact on minoritized students. Families in smaller school districts will have an easier time contacting their superintendent than families in large cities like Detroit or Flint. Unless superintendents in large districts assign a designee, or otherwise create a streamlined process for requesting good cause exemptions, the number of cases to review could be overwhelming.

Where Do We Go from Here?

No one is arguing that literacy intervention is unnecessary. In fact, much can be done to strengthen literacy instruction in the United States. However, these rapidly spreading laws advocating for retention are not effective.

Ten states, including Colorado and Minnesota, have third-grade reading laws nearly identical to Michigan’s. The crucial difference in those states is that retention is mentioned as a *possibility*, to be discussed between the family and the teacher, and is not mandated. For states with existing reading laws specifying mandatory retention, amendments could be introduced to alter that single word. That simple change, from *mandatory* to *possible* retention, could make a tremendous difference.

It would leave retention on the table as an option, but it would shift the decision from one predetermined by the state to one elected by the family in consultation with the teacher.

In the meantime, I take comfort from a tiny moment in my teaching career. Near the end of my second year, I received a phone call from a researcher from the Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Department for my district. My heart sank. I figured I had done something terrible.

It was quite the opposite. Despite my initial anxiety, I had exceeded the district average in “graduating” students from their READ Plans. They wanted to know the secret to my success!

I told them it was nothing fancy. I fostered good relationships with my families and I sent my students home with sacks of books to read every week. I spent time one-on-one after school with my most struggling students. I used flexible grouping strategies and a mix of texts, both grade-level and instructional-level. I taught content through interdisciplinary units with meaningful, authentic final products. Most of all, I was lucky to work in the context of a schoolwide intervention plan, where regular, remedial, and special education instruction was coordinated.

We know what works best for our students. Now, we just need to convince the policymakers to listen to us.

Practical Steps:

1. *Contact your state legislators.* Although mandatory retention is currently the law in Michigan, all is not lost.
 - Send a hand-written letter: They are so rare these days that it will likely be read.
 - Organize like-minded teachers and parents to call. Whereas single calls can be ignored, a few hundred calls will send a message!
 - Talk about this issue in person with your local legislators. Try to schedule a one-on-one meeting or attend a town hall or a coffee hour.
2. *Speak to your school administrators.* Discuss effective instruction, interventions, and the possibility of utilizing alternative assessments. Reading laws, like Michigan’s (<https://www.tinyurl.com/Read-byGrade3>), often include research-based interventions. Are there items in the legislation or in this article you have not yet tried?
3. *Make use of the good cause exemptions.* Until the law is amended, the good cause exemptions provide a means of preventing retention for a significant number of children. In particular, families and teachers may want to consider subsection (8)(e), which allows for broad interpretation: requesting a good cause exemption “in the best interests of the pupil.”

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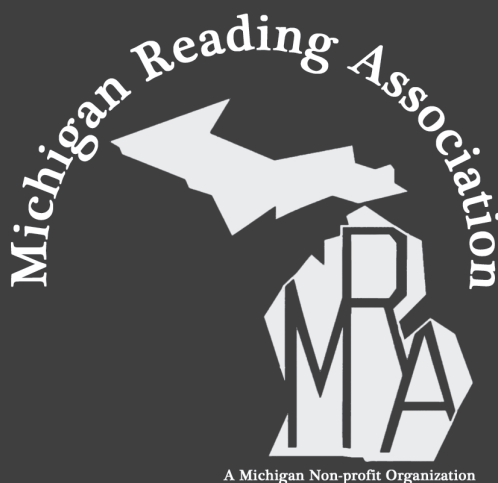
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Michigan Reading Association



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The Michigan Reading Association (MRA) is an organization of people who believe that literacy is the key to transforming people's lives. Chartered in 1956 by the International Reading Association, MRA has grown to be a leader in providing literacy resources to teachers, parents, and universities.

The mission of MRA is to promote literacy across the state of Michigan. Our association works toward this goal in several ways:

- We offer high quality professional development conferences for teachers, adult educators, administrators, and all those involved in literacy education. We also invite homeschoolers and parents to access the best in literacy professional development.
- MRA's Michigan Reading Journal is one of the top research journals in the country and is available in both print and electronic formats.
- MRA works with local reading councils around the state to provide support and professional development to members in every region of the state.
- The organization supports international literacy efforts, such as TEACH: Teachers Educating and Creating Hope. This group is comprised of many Chaldean and some non-Chaldean teachers in the Detroit area interested in helping those displaced families with necessities and schooling needs.
- MRA puts on two conferences a year. Our Annual Conference in March brings in 1600 conferees, 150 speakers, and 100 exhibitors from across the state and country. With over 30 breakout sessions every session slot, there is always something for everyone. Our Summer Literature Conference in July offers a chance to interact with authors and illustrators more closely in a beautiful summer venue.

As a Michigan non-profit 501(c)3, we are governed by a board of volunteers who work tirelessly to promote the cause of literacy throughout the state of Michigan.

Using Read Alouds to Target Social-Emotional Learning

by Ashley Schultz and Alicia Baczek



Introduction

For years, educators and the education system as a whole have valued literature for many reasons. Literature has been proven time and time again to assist students in their learning process. When children have a strong foundation in literature, they are more prone to become life-long learners and literature lovers. Additionally, in recent years, social-emotional learning (SEL) is becoming more valuable and sought after in education. Social-emotional learning allows students to problem solve and build social awareness. Combining these two aspects of education can be incredibly powerful if done purposefully.

Literature in the Classroom

The teaching of literature has been a major focus in education for years. Literature has always been a foundation for students to learn from and build upon as they progress through education as well as life. Jonda C. McNair, Editor of *Integrating Children's Literature* acknowledges that, "books have the potential to entertain, foster a love of reading, and inform while also affirming the multiple aspects of students' identities and exposing them to the values, viewpoints, and historical legacies of others" (2016, p. 375). Children need to be exposed to different types of literature. Unfortunately for some, school is the only place they have access to a variety of text. It is irresponsible to assume that children are exposed to literature at home, so teachers must immerse them in literature within the classroom. According to Bishop and Larimer (1999), history has shown that teachers and librarians see the relationship between literature and developing lifelong learners.

In education, students both learn to read and read to learn. Reading to learn goes beyond learning facts and information about the world around us. Reading allows us to learn about unfamiliar characters, cultures, social dynamics, etcetera. This shift in education has



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the potential to help students develop social-emotional skills that they will use throughout their education and beyond.

Using Children's Literature to Support Social-Emotional Development

Students spend much of their time growing up within a school setting. While at school, children are exposed to different social situations and interactions. It makes sense that school should also be a place where children build and practice important social-emotional skills.

Teaching only academics in school does a disservice to children's social and emotional needs. Children need to be taught SEL skills in addition to academic skills in the classroom. When teachers address social-emotional skills, students will grow not only academically but also interpersonally (Liff, 2003). Social-emotional learning in schools has been shown to have a positive impact on social-emotional competencies and attitudes in addition to academic growth (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger & Weissberg, 2011). Educators cannot assume that students are coming in with the social-emotional

skills necessary to aid in the development of social awareness and interpersonal skills (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005).

Teachers today feel overwhelmed trying to fit academic content and curriculum within the school year. Adding in yet another content area to teach regularly can seem unmanageable. However, it may be easier than it seems to incorporate social-emotional skills into day-to-day teaching.

Teachers play a crucial role in the development of social-awareness and interpersonal skills through literacy instruction. The current education system in the United States is producing students who are more academically intelligent but lack the emotional intelligence that is increasingly important in our society (Dar, 2016). However, educators are in a position in which we can make a difference and change the current educational trend in a positive way.

Many educators feel pressure to do it all: guide students to success, meet increasingly difficult academic standards, develop social-emotional learning, create an ideal environment for students, partner with families, etcetera. While this can feel unattainable, Darla M. Salay gives insight by stating, “with an ever-growing list of school requirements, no additional instructional time, and little guidance on how to teach social emotional skills, schools need ways to integrate social emotional skills within curriculum” (2018, p. xiii). Educators are capable of teaching social awareness by incorporating social-emotional learning into their curriculum. One curricular area in which this could be implemented is within teaching literacy.

As stated by Stevenson (1884/1992, as cited in Johnson, Huffman, & Jasper, 2014) for centuries, scholars have been aware of the connection between fictional narratives and social-emotional skills, primarily, social awareness. However, researchers like Lobron and Selman (2007) believed until recently that literacy and social awareness were two separate entities. It was in 2007 that Lobron and Selman realized that a close link exists between these two fields. These researchers

believed that although we separate these fields, the same skill is being practiced. Educators are teaching social awareness and literacy at the same time, without always realizing it.

Instead of struggling to teach both social awareness and literacy, teachers have the ability to combine these two fields by teaching social awareness through literature. “High-quality picture books can provide added dimensions to children’s thoughts and feelings, offer insight, model coping mechanisms, and pose possible resolutions to challenges” (Harper, 2016, p. 85). By choosing books with social awareness themes, teachers can tackle children’s emotional needs.

Building Empathy Through Literature

Studies have shown that reading literature improves one’s empathy levels as well as other social-emotional skills. “Reading high-quality literature with children can heighten the awareness of emotions, foster sensitivity to others’ feelings, encourage tolerance, promote empathetic behavior toward others, and reinforce moral development” (Harper, 2016, p. 85). Educators can build empathy amongst their students by aiding in the understanding of character traits and actions within literature (Cain, 2015).

Numerous studies have shown that when someone “transports” into a story, empathy is affected (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009). Literary transportation is when one “gets lost in a book.” During these times, the reader is able to emotionally experience what is happening in the narrative (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Mar, et al., 2009). In many instances, books evoke emotion in readers:

Readers experience the story and the emotional state of the characters, and thus gain rich insight into the reality of the character. Those emotional connections can drive not only interest and attention, but also the ability to understand and empathize with the social situation presented. (Colvin, 2017, p. 26)

This relationship between the reader and the narrative is unlike any other and has the power to impact the readers' empathy levels as well as their opinions, actions, beliefs, etcetera. Through reading fiction texts, students can learn aspects of human psychology while increasing knowledge about behavior within social settings (Mar, et al., 2009).

Reading narratives in the classroom gives students the opportunity to make emotional connections and participate in new experiences without leaving the room. According to Colvin (2017), readers who get lost in a book are mentally and emotionally experiencing what is going on in the story. Through these experiences, readers are able to be exposed to new social situations and can feel empathy for characters who may be unfamiliar to them. Readers are building social skills through their interaction with the text. Colvin implies that this transaction between readers and text has been shown to also reduce prejudices they may have and increase their helpful behavior. Literature allows readers to experience foreign aspects of the world, communities which they have never heard, cultures that they couldn't access otherwise, etcetera. This allows readers to experience these new situations in a safe and controlled way. Readers can reflect upon how they would respond in situations and think critically about how their actions could impact others (Colvin, 2017). This can be especially helpful for more reserved students; they are able to develop their social skills without being face-to-face with others. Laura Tavares, renowned author, states that "novels can develop empathy, humility, and tolerance—all the makings of a good citizen" (2017, p. 74). By reading narratives, students are exposed to social issues and new experiences.

By discussing these texts, readers can develop an understanding of social issues. Conversation is essential in developing literacy skills and social awareness (Lobron & Selman 2007). "A good story combined with responsive and developmentally appropriate discussion can provide the opportunity for children to explore emotion-provoking conflicts and events that might mirror those emotions they or their friends routinely experience" (Harper, 2016, p. 85). Conversations give

students the necessary language to be able to describe their feelings (Harper, 2016). Lobron and Selman (2007) state that:

Providing opportunities to discuss the social ideas presented in texts is one of the best ways to ensure students develop the ability to talk about these issues. When children have the chance to think deeply about what they are reading and then put their thoughts into words, their understanding matures profoundly. (p. 536)

Discussions help students consider text a tool to help them understand culture and emotions (Chamberlain & Peterson, 2015).

The Educator's Role

Educators striving to teach the *whole* child should teach beyond academic material. Adding in social-emotional content can help students develop these skills within school.

A study done by Fatima Rehan Dar (2016) examined the impact of pairing empathy and pro-social behavior skills with academic teaching. Prosocial behavior within this context is defined as "a voluntary action that is intended to help another individual or a group" (Dar, 2016, p. 1). This study was done in Pakistan and, unfortunately, the study did not produce the evidence the researchers may have been expecting. Their observations and data indicated to researchers that the teachers participating lacked appropriate training in empathy and pro-social behavioral skills. While this study did not show the results they hoped for, it *did* provide researchers and educators with several recommendations for the classroom. For instance, in Dar's (2016) follow-up article, "Empathetic and Pro-Social Awareness in Primary School Students: A Case Study," she recommends that educators receive professional development training that focuses on empathetic and pro-social skills. Additionally, Dar recommends blending academic and social-emotional learning within the classroom and school as a whole. Dar also provides the reader with recommended in-class activities to use to reach this academic and social-emotional balance.

These activities include: role playing, dramatization, group work, discussions, reflective talks, and others.

Laura Tavares (2017) recommends partaking in character map exercises. These character maps allow students to analyze a character in literature, focusing on their traits, actions, problems they faced, and ways in which problems were solved. Tavares also claims that while working on these character maps, students internally analyze their own character which allows them to develop a critical and reflective view of themselves.

As we are beginning to realize, social-emotional development is becoming increasingly significant and necessary. Thankfully, teachers can incorporate aspects of socio-emotional learning into their classroom practices. Educators are in a role where they are at the forefront of this change. While the system as a whole is working towards this shift, teachers can work towards integrating more social-emotional learning into their classrooms on a regular basis. This shift is likely to benefit the nation's future leaders in a positive way.

Tackling the Problem

Reading books aloud was a passion that the authors of this article shared as teachers. In fact, it was a non-negotiable in both of our fourth-grade classrooms. No matter how stressful or difficult the day was, our students could depend on our daily read alouds. Sometimes we read novels and sometimes we read picture books. Starting on the first day of school, we began to build an environment where students could immerse themselves in the lives and adventures of various characters by listening to read alouds. Not only could students see themselves in characters, but they also could listen to stories about characters different than themselves.

While we shared a love of read alouds, we also had one big problem in common. Both of us saw students in our classroom that lacked social-emotional skills. Students in both classrooms struggled to resolve conflicts, build empathy, and see others' points-of-view. More frequently, students were coming to school not equipped with problem solving skills, and they didn't have social

awareness or the skills to maintain positive relationships. We were aware of the SEL standards (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.), and we saw that our students needed more support, but with our already hectic schedule, we had difficulty allocating time to meet our students' needs. Since read aloud was already part of our day, we saw this as an opportunity to help our students. We thought that if we selected read alouds that emphasized social-emotional themes, we could simultaneously build empathy and support our students' social-emotional development. We decided to conduct this study to see if careful choice in read aloud text, paired with various discussions and activities, could help students build social-emotional skills.

School and Participant Demographics

The school in which this research study was conducted was a Title I funded elementary school located in the Chicago suburbs and was rated as a "commendable school" as our performance was not in the top 10% of schools statewide. In 2018, our school consisted of 617 students with the following cultural demographics: 63.7% Caucasian, 2.4% African American, 16.9% Hispanic, 11% Asian American, 5.8% two or more races. Furthermore, 9.9% of our student population had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 10.4% were English Language Learners (ELL), 9.1% were low-income, 7.1% had chronic absenteeism, and there was 1.3% student mobility. These statistics were similar across the 4,175 total students within the school district (Illinois School Report Card, 2018).

All students who participated in the study were in one of the authors' fourth-grade classes, were between the ages of nine and 10, and consented to be included in the study. Additionally, all students received parental consent. Each classroom consisted of students with varying levels of supports.

Sara had 20 students who participated in the study. The class demographics included: 10 male and 10 female students, one African American student, four Hispanic students, three Asian American students, two multiracial students, and 10 Caucasian students. Of those students, two students had an IEP, two students had 504 plans

with accommodations, three students were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and one student had sensory processing disorder. Additionally, some students in Sara’s class received services of some kind: two students received vision services, two students received speech services, two students received reading services, and two students received social work. This class was also linguistically diverse, with multiple home languages. Three students had recently exited Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) services, and one student revoked Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) services.

Within Kathy’s class, there were seven boys and nine girls who participated in the study. Of the total 16 students, 10 were Caucasian, two were Hispanic, one was African American, two were Asian American, and one was of Indian decent. This class also had two students who had exited Limited English Proficient (LEP) services in the last three years and one student who received reading support.

Survey Results Prior to Study

Beginning this study, we administered a 14-question survey on social-emotional skills to gauge where our fourth graders were starting. This survey focused on Illinois Social/Emotional Learning Standard Goal 2:

Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships. See Table 1 for Illinois and Michigan SEL standard comparison. This social-emotional goal contained the following learning sub standards:

- A. Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- B. Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- C. Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- D. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways (Social/Emotional Learning Standards).

We chose to focus on this particular standard because that was the area in which our students struggled the most. We believed that students had difficulties with these SEL standards based on behavioral trends observed in previous school years. According to previous teachers, this group of students in particular had a hard time building and maintaining healthy, positive relationships. Of the survey’s 14 questions, three asked for simple information such as the student’s name, classroom teacher, and if there was anything else they would like us to know. For these more simple questions, students had a drop-down menu for answer

Table 1
Illinois SEL Standard Goal 2 and Michigan SEL Standard on Social Awareness

Illinois Social-Emotional Learning Standard	Michigan Social-Emotional Learning Standard
Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.	SEL Competency – Social Awareness The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

Note. Illinois SEL Standard Goal 2 adapted from “Social/Emotional Learning Standards” by Illinois State Board of Education, n.d. Michigan SEL Standard on Social Awareness adapted from “Michigan Department of Education Early Childhood to Grade 12 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies and Indicators” by Michigan Department of Education, 2017.

selection. The other 11 questions were SEL-based. These questions allowed students to evaluate their ability to put themselves in another's shoes, see other points of view, resolve conflicts, address feelings and accomplishments, understand diverse peers, and express their feelings.

After administering the survey, we analyzed what students thought about their abilities and skills regarding goal 2 of the SEL standards. The areas that our students scored the lowest was "listening to others' point-of-view," "getting along with diverse peers," "respecting others' point-of-view when disagreements occur," "complimenting others accomplishments," "solving problems with peers," "the ability to listen to others' point-of-view," and "the ability to disagree without starting an argument." Students had the most negative response when asked about their ability to describe their own feelings and their ability to stand up for themselves. Students had slightly more positive results in the other categories that included helping others and caring about others' feelings.

Books for Read Alouds

In order to target goal 2 of the SEL standards, we focused on picking read aloud books that contain characters or story elements that show relational dynamics similar to the ones mentioned within the goal. For instance, in *Lions and Liars* (Beasley & Santat, 2018), the main character struggles to fit in and is thrown into a situation where he is forced to see the perspective of kids he would usually have never gotten to know. Similarly, in *Wishtree* (Applegate, 2017), the main character associates with a different culture than her neighborhood peers. She also forms a relationship with someone from a different culture, despite the resistance from both sets of parents. This content and the resolutions show the reader how individuals and groups of people are more similar than different. There was a strong theme of acceptance in the read alouds shared with our students. Many of the books we chose also had social conflicts within the plot. These problems were addressed in ways that allow student to learn from the resolution process based on the character's development, words, and choices.

Implementation

Throughout the study, we set aside a 25-minute read aloud block each school day. During this time, we read and discussed picture books or novels. We would also revisit the concepts during our separate language arts block to discuss the read aloud and write about the story and/or characters. For a complete list of the literature used in our study and each book's corresponding SEL skill, see the Appendix. The read alouds were paired with discussions that focused on the emotional aspects of the story, how characters changed, and lessons learned.

To culminate a read aloud, students were asked to reflect on the themes and lessons present within the books. Additionally, students were able to write about relatable characters and recognize how characters changed. For example, after reading *Lions and Liars* (Beasley & Santat, 2018), one student wrote:

Fredrick is the main character in *Lions and Liars*. He is a very lonely, shy, and depressed character with no friends. The reason I know that is because he was saying that he has no friends and he gets made fun of a lot. That changed very quickly when he accidentally took a boat to a camp and made friends with the rest of group 13...Towards the end of the book Fredrick was very different from in the beginning. In the end of the book he was brave, strong and fearless and he also managed to make a friend.

Since the book focused on building relationships with peers; conflict resolution; and recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others; watching the students write about character development and change was rewarding. Classroom discussions consisted of student-led discussions with the teacher as a facilitator. Students discussed what they noticed in the text and what they thought it meant. Having discussions multiple times per book allowed students to see changes and build on the themes in the book by talking about the social-emotional skills and character development.

Survey Results After the Study

After 15 weeks of intentionally planned read alouds,

discussions, and activities, we administered the same survey to see if our students had a different view of their skills and abilities. Overall, students demonstrated a more positive view of themselves in regards to our targeted social-emotional skills. A majority of our survey questions aligned to a Likert scale ranging from one to four; one would indicate a lack of that skill or ability whereas four would indicate a student feels confident in the skill or ability. On average, students scored higher for every question from pre to post survey. While some growths were smaller, others were more drastic. Students showed the most growth when asked about their ability to stand up for themselves. The average score

increased from a 2.23 on the pre-survey to a 2.86 on the post-survey. Students also showed growth on survey items related to complimenting others, describing feelings, and problem resolution. On the pre-survey, seven questions showed a positive result (between 2.5 and 4). This increased to 11 questions showing a positive result on the post-survey; four of these 11 questions scored a 3.0 or higher. See Figure 1 for a visual of growth made between the surveys. See Figure 2 for a visual of the average growth between the pre and post-survey. No test of statistical significance was applied, but nonetheless our informal review of the data showed positive trends that were meaningful to us as teachers.

Average Response

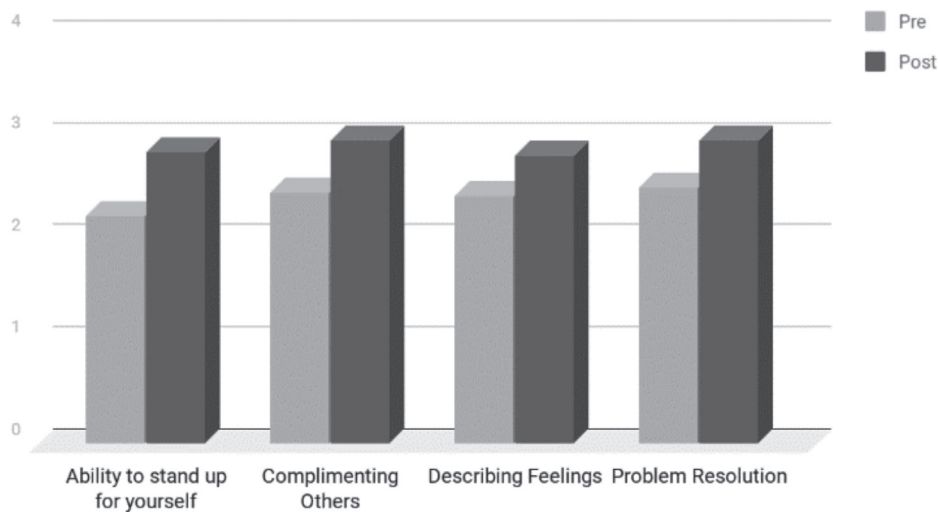


Figure 1. This graph indicates the areas in which students showed the most growth from pre to post survey.

Average Score

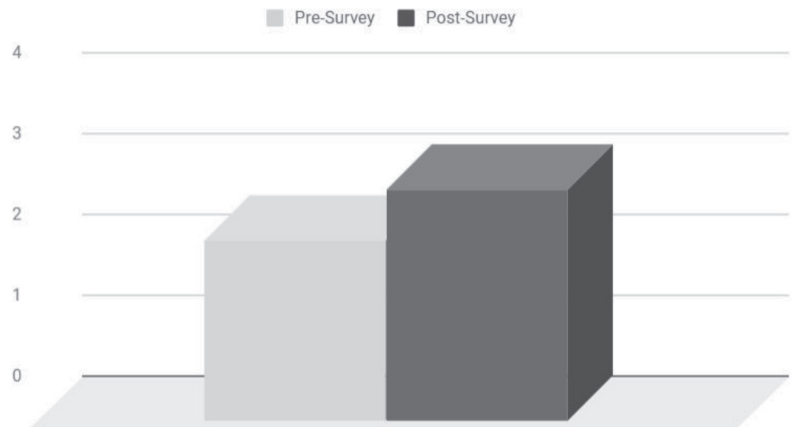


Figure 2. This graph indicates the average growth between the pre and post surveys.

Even without statistical significance, we were able to see a huge change in our students, in addition to seeing growth from the pre-survey to the post-survey.

Overall, we were pleased with the results of the survey, as every question we asked increased in some way. We also saw evidence in our classrooms that showed growth. For example, the writings and the discussions demonstrated an understanding of social-emotional skills. Our students were using words such as “vulnerable,” “confident,” “lonely,” “shy,” and “friends” to describe characters. They wrote about characters’ emotions, made connections to characters, and discussed character changes. We also saw results in how students dealt with everyday issues. One example of this is when there was an issue between friends at recess. One did not want to play the same game as the other. The students were able to resolve the conflict on their own by discussing the issue and how they could resolve it instead of avoiding it. Similarly, two girls were having difficulties within their friendship. As a way to resolve this, the girls wrote each other notes sharing their feelings, perspectives, and what they were seeing as the main issue. This allowed them to quickly come to a resolution and develop a deeper understanding of one another. Seeing our students grow socially and emotionally inspired us to share the benefits of reading SEL themed books during read aloud and how others can use this strategy in their classrooms.

Implications

A major piece of knowledge we have taken away from this experience is the importance of carefully selecting read alouds. We found it helpful to focus on one SEL skill, then research grade-appropriate texts to share with our students. In addition to using strategically selected read alouds, we tried to bring in more texts that have SEL themes for students to read independently. We found books that aligned to what we were looking for and book-talked them to our classes to motivate our students to read them. Reading them would give our students the opportunity to practice social-emotional skills in an imaginary world while reading a text independently. This practice allowed us to get a larger quantity of quality texts into our students’ hands.

In addition to exposing our students to carefully selected texts, our use of open-ended discussion made a difference in our teaching practice. Asking open ended questions such as, “Why might _____ be reacting this way?” or “What would you do in this situation?” allowed our students to think more deeply and put themselves in the characters’ shoes. We also utilized character maps which allowed students to analyze how characters changed over time and what led to these changes.

Teacher Tips

Incorporating read alouds in the classroom can be easy. Any grade from kindergarten to high school can utilize reading social-emotional books. We’ve created some tips for teachers who want to use this strategy in their classrooms. These tips can be found in Figure 3 (next page). A list of applicable texts can be found in the Appendix, along with their corresponding SEL skills.

Future Research

We believe that there is still research to be done in this area. It would be interesting to know what educators can do during read aloud time to enhance the transactional relationship between the reader/listener and the text. It was also evident that some students grew more than others, and we are curious as to what caused this difference. Could it be the students’ life experiences, strengths/weaknesses, how focused they were, or their participation in discussions? We believe that knowing more about how to best use thoughtfully selected texts can help teachers enhance the lives and skills of their students.

Final Thoughts

Reading aloud is already a regular practice in many elementary classrooms. Through purposeful selection, planning, and implementation, read alouds can facilitate the social-emotional development of students. It was inspiring to see the changes in students’ attitudes about themselves and others. Our hope is that students all around the world can participate in discussions, activities, and critical thinking fostered by read alouds to develop these important lifelong skills.

Tips Educators can Easily Implement

1. Devote time daily for your read aloud.
 2. Find books that relate to the SEL standard you want to target—be purposeful.
 3. Be a facilitator in classroom discussions and let them be student-led.
 4. Use character maps to track characters.
 5. Ask open-ended questions.
 6. Create stopping points ahead of time.
 7. Allow the time and opportunity for students to write about what they notice and what that means.
 8. Book talk similar books addressing SEL standards—get them exposed to this type of content through read alouds and on their own.
 9. Engage in discussions and writing from the perspectives of others.
 10. Act out scenarios from within the text and think of a way to rewrite the scenario for a better result.
-

Figure 3. Tips educators can easily implement.

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Appendix

Recommended SEL Themed Books

Text	Applicable SEL Skills
<i>Lions and Liars</i> by Kate Beasley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>Wishtree</i> by Katherine Applegate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>Each Kindness</i> by Jacqueline Woodson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>We're All Wonders</i> by R.J. Palacio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>The Rabbit Listened</i> by Cori Doerrfeld	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>Enemy Pie</i> by Derek Munson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i> by Malala Yousafzai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>The Boy Who Harnessed The Wind</i> by William Kamkwamba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>A Chair for my Mother</i> by Vera Williams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others

<i>Draw The Line</i> by Kathryn Otoshi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution
<i>Fish in a Tree</i> by Lynda Mullaly Hunt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>The Running Dream</i> by Wendelin Van Draanen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>The Invisible Boy</i> by Trudy Ludwig	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>Be Kind</i> by Pat Zietlow Miller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>Blackout</i> by John Rocco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother</i> by Patricia Polacco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conflict resolution ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others
<i>The Coal Thief</i> by Alane Adams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i> by Patricia Polacco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with others ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others ● Identifying differences and contributions among social and cultural groups
<i>365 Days of Wonder</i> by R. J. Palacio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building positive relationships with peers ● Recognizing the thoughts, feelings, and perspective of others

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Expanding Vocabulary with Children's Books

by Sara Churchill, Ed.D. and
Kathy Everts Danielson, Ph.D.



I once read the Edgar Allen Poe poem “The Bells” to my fifth grade students. They became obsessed with the word *tintinnabulation* and used that word throughout the year to describe anything remotely related to bell ringing. When I read that poem to my students, it wasn’t my intention for them to learn that word. Instead, I had intended for them to appreciate and use the repetition that Poe used in that poem. But what happened is that they were sincerely bemused, interested, and frankly confused by the word, so I explained it to them within the context of my read aloud. I spelled the word for them, showed it to them, and let them revel in the word. In that one brief reading aloud experience, my fifth graders truly learned that unusual word.

This article will briefly examine why it is important to explicitly teach vocabulary and review some of the best practices in vocabulary instruction, including three prominent strategies for teaching vocabulary: read alouds, developing word consciousness, and interactive activities. Following that is an annotated bibliography of children’s picture books that highlights selections that are useful for teaching vocabulary. Summaries of the texts and instructional suggestions are provided.

Word Gap

One of the battles that we fight with vocabulary instruction is the word gap that exists between high- and low-income families. Hart and Risley (1995) found that by age three, children from high-income families had been exposed to about 30 million more words than children from low-income families. “Students who have larger vocabularies are able to move ahead more rapidly in academic settings because they have more words to build on. The gap gets wider and wider” (Overturf, 2014, p. 22). Stanovich (2008) describes this as the “Matthew Effect” where students with large



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vocabularies excel in reading achievement, while those with smaller vocabularies fall farther behind in their reading achievement. Thus, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer analogy.

Vocabulary Benefits of Reading Aloud

Getting students interested in words often happens through reading aloud. In addition, reading aloud builds vocabulary and background knowledge (Tompkins, 2016). In fact, Hayes and Ahrens (1988) found that children’s books have more rare words per hundred than are typically spoken by two college-educated adults in conversation. Reading aloud also helps culturally and linguistically diverse children, as teachers who read aloud serve as “literate role models” (Au, 1998, p. 21).

For young students in particular, “the majority of words they acquire are not learned through direct instruction, but rather through their language environments and independent reading... Read-alouds have the potential to make a positive impact on the vocabulary learning trajectory by increasing students’ exposure to rich and

complex words” (Kindle, 2011, p. 9). Infusing vocabulary into children’s days by reading aloud with intentionality happens when “the teacher takes deliberate actions to be sure that students see and hear these words in a variety of contexts. Vocabulary learning becomes a goal and not a by-product” (Kindle, 2011, p. 14).

Vocabulary development associated with reading aloud nonfiction is especially important. “When informational texts are read aloud, they are the most generative time for vocabulary development in the entire school day” (Wright, 2014, p. 366).

Developing Word Consciousness

In addition to the impact reading aloud can have on vocabulary development, word consciousness also contributes to the journey of vocabulary growth. The following four components are important for vocabulary development: “Frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences; teaching individual words; teaching word-learning strategies; and fostering word consciousness” (Graves, 2016, p. 5). Word consciousness is associated with an awareness of and an interest in words (Anderson & Nagy, 1992). Word consciousness is what happened when I read Poe’s poem with the term *tintinnabulation*. Students became genuinely interested in that unique word.

Modeling an interest in words, pointing them out in texts that students are reading, and encouraging students to use interesting words in their own writing are all important parts of building a word consciousness (Graves, 2016). Teachers can be that model of curiosity about words as they get students to notice and pay attention to unusual and different words.

Interactive Activities

Promoting wordplay is also important. Blachowicz and Fisher (2012) pointed out that wordplay (including activities with homophones, homographs, or idioms) is well grounded in research and appropriate pedagogy.

Wordplay is an important component of the word-rich classroom. Wordplay calls on students to reflect metacognitively on words, word parts, and context.

Wordplay requires students to be active learners and capitalizes on possibilities for the social construction of meaning. Wordplay develops domains of word meaning and relatedness as it engages students in practice and rehearsal of words (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2012, p. 190).

Developing word consciousness through games and other engaging activities is recommended (Scott, Miller, & Flinspach, 2012). “In word conscious classrooms, teachers promote interest in words by drawing attention to interesting language and providing opportunities, activities, and materials for students to play with words and heighten their appreciation of language” (Ganske, 2019, pp. 206-207). The homophone match game with index cards is one such example. The index cards shown in Figure 1 were used with third graders. Each student received a card and then had to find their homophone match. The pairs then had to describe what each word meant and use them in one sentence, such as “This is a tale of how the manx cat lost its tail.”

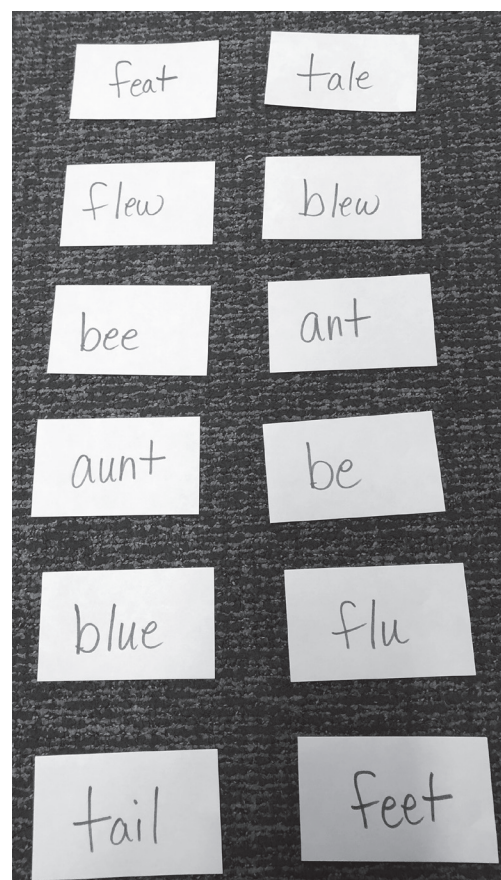


Figure 1. Homophone matching cards.

Activities such as this create an interest in words allow students to develop a curiosity about words. As Ganske (2019) writes,

...after developing word consciousness students tend to ask more questions about unfamiliar words, enjoy sharing favorite words, monitor their reading and talk for interesting uses of language, and feel a sense of empowerment for learning. Their metalinguistic awareness helps them to better understand word meanings in context through the use of morphological, syntactic, and semantic clues and to appreciate language when reading and writing. (p. 207)

Providing a context for interesting language promotes learning and “classroom discourse around books that encourages children to focus on text content in interpretive and reflective ways, and to attend to the interesting and precise language authors use to present that content, provides a robust context for learning” (Kucan, 2013, p. 280). The bottom line here is, in classrooms that utilize these techniques, words are noticed and discussed.

Best practices in teaching vocabulary

Reading aloud and creating an interest in language are instructional priorities, however, there are also other factors to consider when teaching vocabulary. The basic components of vocabulary learning are form, meaning, and use (Nation, 2001). In the following activity recommendations, the instructional focus is on meaning and use.

Word walls are often used to remind students of vocabulary words after they are defined and discussed. They are “designed to serve as visual scaffolds and are a common classroom tool used to support reading and language instruction” (Jackson, Tripp, & Cox, 2011, p. 45). Going one step beyond word walls, Gallagher and Anderson (2016) described the use of Graffiti Walls and Picture Word Walls. “The Graffiti Wall and the Picture Word Wall are both adaptations of a traditional word wall and are designed to promote word consciousness, establish efficient routines, provide ongoing review

of words, address misconceptions immediately, and require universal participation” (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016, p. 275). The Graffiti Wall allows students to write their word in a graffiti style on an index card in the center and then in each corner put categories used in the Frayer model: definition, antonyms, a sentence highlighting the word’s meaning, and an illustration of the word. The Frayer model is a graphic organizer that utilizes those four categories to help the student master the vocabulary (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969; see example in Figure 2.) In the Picture Word Wall activity, students use cards to illustrate the meaning of the word for all to see. An example is illustrated in Figure 3.

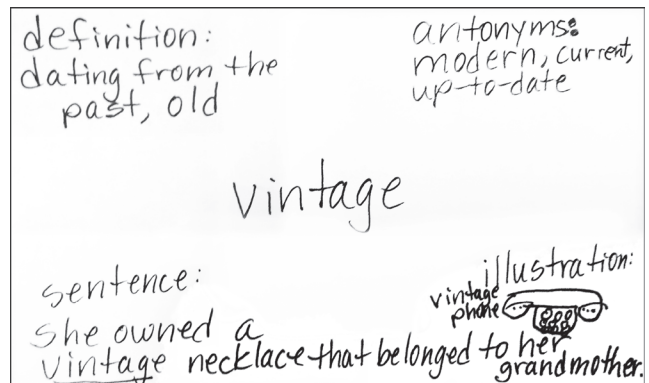


Figure 2. Graffiti Wall card example.

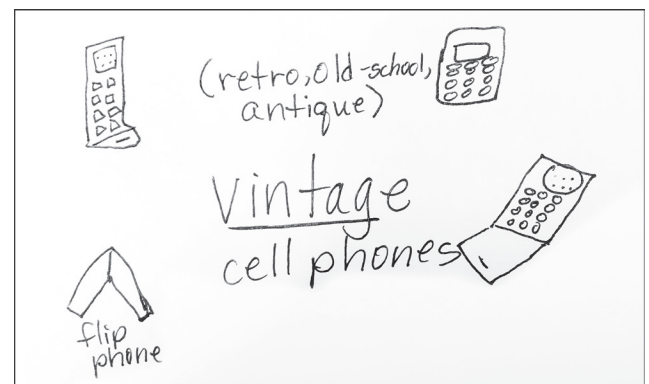


Figure 3. Picture Word Wall example.

Activities that teachers plan during vocabulary instruction should be active, engaging, and collaborative. While a vocabulary journal or planner based on the Frayer model can be a good introduction to learning vocabulary, it is the engaging activities that teachers

employ that truly cement the words in the student's mind. One way in which teachers can quickly and easily review vocabulary is to create lanyards for the students to wear, each with their own vocabulary word. As the teacher needs to create groups, dismiss students, or line them up, they can refer to the vocabulary on the lanyard. "Line up if you have a word that means..." Other engaging activities can include rap songs, board games, photo albums, and scavenger hunts, just to name a few. Incorporating these exercises makes the learning both fun and repetitive, both of which are important aspects of vocabulary instruction (Overturf, Montgomery, & Smith, 2013). It has also been found that the quality of the vocabulary activities provided, including read alouds, is more important than the quantity (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005). It becomes important, then, to ensure that books selected for classroom read alouds, as well as the educational activities offered that are focused on vocabulary, have rich phraseology, strong word play, and engaging content.

Conclusion

In order to make vocabulary instruction active, engaging, and collaborative, Graves (2016) suggests a four-part plan: 1) provide rich and varied language experiences; 2) teach individual words; 3) teach word-learning strategies; and, 4) promote word consciousness. Utilizing picture books can provide ample opportunities to accomplish these goals. Encouraging wide reading and interactive read alouds of picture books promotes word consciousness and exposure to rich and varied words. When students encounter new words during independent reading, they often simply skip over them. Fostering word consciousness helps combat this tendency and encourages students to learn new words incidentally. When teachers read aloud with attention grabbing vocabulary and engage students in interactive discussions about some of the rare words heard in the text, they can help students extend their vocabulary schemas (Beck & McKeown, 2001). "The consistent attention to authors' word choices and structuring of phrases in high-quality literature is one way to support students' developing word consciousness; it also provides a context for connecting vocabulary development and writing" (Kucan, 2013, p. 292).

More information about appropriate vocabulary practices can be found in the *Essential Practices in Early and Elementary Literacy* (MAISA-GELN, 2016). For more information, see: <https://literacyessentials.org/>.

What follows is an annotated bibliography of picture books celebrating words that can enhance the development of word consciousness. These books are quality choices to read aloud and can be used as springboards for teaching vocabulary.

Annotated bibliography and ideas for creating an interest in words:

Crum, S. (2017). *Mouseling's words*. New York, NY: Clarion.

Grades: K-3

Mouseling loves her cozy nest, her parents, her siblings, and the words her Aunt Tillie brings home from the restaurant where she works. One by one, her siblings leave the nest to find their way in the world, until only Mouseling is left. She builds up enough courage to not only leave the nest, but become a word discoverer and face a monster—better known as a cat. Mouseling discovers that the words she collects can help her build a new friendship and open her eyes to a new world.

Mouseling describes how the words she collects look, sound, and feel. Teachers can use this text to highlight how students need strong word choice in their writing. By reading several of Mouseling's word descriptions, teachers can also emphasize how to create voice and tone with word choice. This book would also be a great tool to use as an activity for similes where students could pick a word and describe how the word looks and feels.

Groeneweg, N. (2013). *One word Pearl*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Grades: 2-5

Pearl has a massive collection of words. But when a tornado of words overtakes her room, she is left with only a few in her treasure chest. She doles them out one word at a time, finding just the right word when she is asked. Even though she is careful, Pearl still runs out of

words and silently looks on as her friends go about their school day. Being brave, Pearl finally decides to go back and face the tornado in her room. There she discovers all her words, put together in new and exciting ways!

Students can create their own treasure chest of words in their writer's notebooks or on a word wall in the classroom. The real magic will happen, though, when they use their words in their own writing projects. A great tool to refer to during writing conferences, these treasure chests can help readers put together words in their own exciting ways.

Halдар, R., & Carpenter, C. (2018). *P is for pterodactyl: The worst alphabet book ever*. New York, NY: Sourcebook Explores.

Grades: 3-8

This alphabet book is the "worst ever" because none of the words illustrated on each letter's page sound like that first letter in the word, despite starting with that letter. Case in point: *pterodactyl* on the P page, spelled with an initial p, but pronounced tair-o-DAC-tell. All the words in this alphabet book follow the same pattern. Alliterative sentences are used throughout the book and the helpful glossary at the back of book defines each word, plus offers a pronunciation key for each word. Funny and informative, the illustrations also show word meanings. For instance, the G page shows a gnome at a table with a gnat nibbling his gnocchi. This is a great book to challenge even the most advanced vocabulary learner.

Students could add to the words they find that start with silent letters as they encounter them or do a Picture Word Wall for the words in this book.

Hills, T. (2012). *Rocket writes a story*. New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade.

Grades: K-3

Rocket discovers that inspirational words can be found anywhere. After completing his word tree, Rocket decides to write a story with all his special words, but a new friend teaches him that he can always discover new words and that friends can work together to create the perfect story.

Teachers can use this book to illustrate many different parts of the writing process. From brainstorming with word collections, to overcoming writer's block, to peer conferencing, this story is full of lessons for writers.

Johnston, T (2019). *The magic of letters*. New York, NY: Neal Porter Books.

Grades: K-2

"Letters hold power. You can shuffle them around to make loads of mighty words" (Johnston, 2019, n.p.). This book was written by the author in response to her grandson, who on the first day of kindergarten said, "We're learning the letters, but what do they do?" This book shows the power that letters that form words have. Words such as *enchanted*, *flibbertigibbet*, and *quesadilla* are celebrated in this tribute to words.

Students could keep a list of fun or unfamiliar words they have heard throughout the day or the class could collect them on a word wall or chart of Wacky Words.

Lehrhaupt, A. & Pilutti, D. (2018). *Idea jar*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Grades: K-2

A teacher keeps a jar of unique words on her desk as a brainstorming tool for her students. When the ideas don't get used in stories, they take over the classroom. The students jump into action putting the words into a story. The ideas are finally happy to be useful and slide back into the jar to be used in new stories in the future.

Teachers can use this book to encourage brainstorming in writing. Creating their own jars of words, whether an actual physical jar or simply a list on paper, can help students who are struggling to figure out what to write. Teachers can also incorporate magnetic poetry to show how you can put these wonderful words together in different ways to create something new.

Patterson, S. & Patterson, J. (2017). *Big words for little geniuses*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

Grades: 2-6

From *arachibutyrophobia* (fear of peanut butter sticking to the top of your mouth) to *zamboni* (machine

that smoothes out the ice on an ice rink), this book introduces children to a big word for every letter in the alphabet, complete with pronunciation guide, definition, and context-clarifying-illustration. Even more big words are included at the end of the book to encourage a love of language to grow.

Students could add actions to each of the words to help them create a muscle memory of the words. Students could also create their own illustrated alphabet book of words from A to Z that they find appealing or create a class Picture Word Wall of words they hear or see during the day.

Reynolds, P. H. (2018). *The word collector*. New York, NY: Orchard Books.

Grades: 2-6

Jerome collects words that he hears, sees, and reads. He enjoys the words that connect, transform, and empower. He learns that sharing his words is the best gift of all.

Students could collect their own words in a visual dictionary or a digital format, adding interesting words they hear, see, or read every day. The teacher could model this with an anchor chart of wonderful words that are heard, seen, or read in the classroom daily. Students could even practice giving their words to others, be that their classmates or younger students.

Rowe, C. (2018). *Ebenezer has a word for everything*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishing.

Grades: 2-5

Ebenezer loves words. He loves words so much that he collects them and tries to give them away like lemonade. Though his friends and family listen to Ebenezer talk about his favorites, no one quite appreciates words the way he does...until he meets Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald knows exactly what to do with all of Ebenezer's words. Their friendship illustrates how you can go from amazing words to thrilling stories when you work together with a friend.

Teachers can use this story to help reinforce steps in the writing process like brainstorming and conferencing.

Students can create their own dictionary of words to brainstorm topics and work with a peer to develop and refine their writing.

Ruzzier, S. (2016). *This is not a picture book!* San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

Grades: K-1

Duckling is out for a walk and discovers a book lying on the ground. Excited, he scoops it up to read it. But Duckling soon discovers, this is not a picture book! It's full of words! Frustrated, he begins to throw the book away, but soon he realizes he knows more words than he thought! And he knows that all these words will come home with him to stay forever.

This would be a solid choice to use with emergent readers to introduce the concept of sight words. The cover is filled with words that tie to the story, and young students would have fun pointing out all the words they know on the cover. The inside jacket has a synopsis of the story, but some of the words are scrambled. Teachers could show this image to students, explaining how learning to read might sometimes feel like letters are all jumbled up. After turning to the back cover, where the synopsis is unscrambled, teachers can reinforce the idea that learning to read little by little and word by word will help them become full-fledged readers.

Shulman, M. (2014). *Mom and dad are palindromes: A dilemma for words... and backwards*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

Grades: 2-6

Palindromes are words that are spelled the same way forward and backwards. Bob, the narrator of the book, talks about his dilemma as having a name that is a palindrome. Embarrassed, he goes to tell his mom and dad, only to discover that they are also palindromes. Throughout the book, other palindromes are introduced. The book ends with Bob saying he's solved his problem, he will use both his first and last name: Robert Trebor—which is, of course, another palindrome.

Students could collect their own palindromes or illustrate the ones listed in the book.

Sierra, J. (2018). *The great dictionary caper*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Grades: 2-5

The words slip out of the dictionary in this romp that is a celebration of types of words. Within the book, seen leaving the dictionary in a word parade are anagrams, antonyms, conjunctions, contractions, homophones, interjections, and many more. All of these types of words are explained in humorous form and are also defined in the glossary. The ending of the book hints that the words are also going to escape from a thesaurus, so a sequel is surely in the works!

Students could choose one of the categories of words in the book (antonyms, conjunctions, etc.) and make anchor charts defining and giving examples of each. See Figure 4 for an example of a homophone anchor chart.

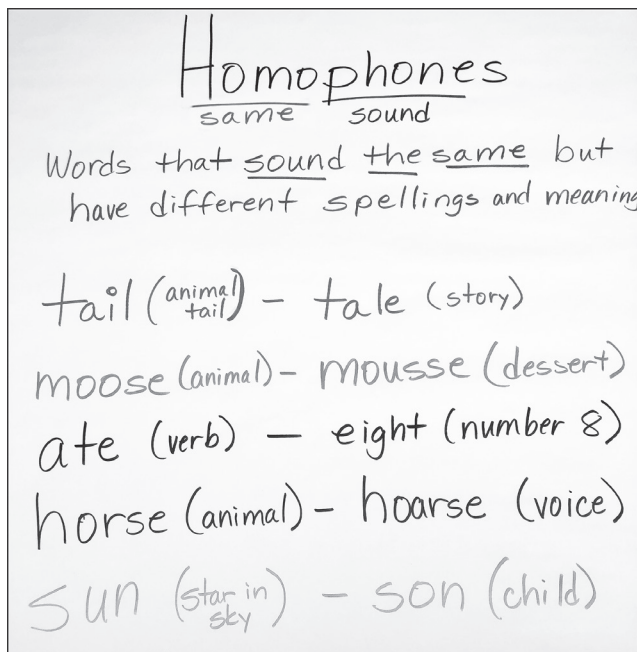


Figure 4. Homophone anchor chart.

Skipp, H. (2018). *A pandemonium of parrots*. Somerville, MA: Big Picture Press.

Grades: All Ages

Who knew that a group of hummingbirds is called a bouquet of hummingbirds or that an ambush of tigers denotes a group of them? Collective group names of animals are shared in this colorful book with poems about the animals on all of the pages, as well.

Students could find more collective nouns and write their own poems about such interesting words. Or they could do a Picture Word Wall of the collective nouns they read or find, complete with pictures of the items/animals surrounding that collective noun.

Uhlberg, M. (2016). *The sound of all things*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishing.

Grades: 3-5

A young boy explores the New York area with his deaf parents. His father asks the boy to use other senses to find the words that will describe the sounds all around them. When the boy replies that the roller coaster is loud, the father replies, "Many things are loud. Please tell me better." This begins the boy's search for just the right words to describe the sounds of all things. Teachers can use this book to encourage students to add to their descriptive writing.

This book can be a great read aloud to use for "show, don't tell" lessons in writing. Highlighting the similes and metaphors in the book, along with the word choice, teachers can encourage students to work on finding ways to use their senses to describe the events and people in their own writing pieces. Modeling and guided instruction pieces could include pulling noisy items out of a jar and finding ways to describe the sounds they make.

Van Slyke, R. (2017). *Lexie the word wrangler*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books.

Grades: 2-5

Lexie is a word wrangler, meaning that she can easily make compound words, grow letters into words, and make new words by changing the letters around in a word. But then she discovers that someone is messing with her words, turning her *bandana* into a banana and turning the *desert* into a dessert. When she meets that someone, they conspire together to tame some of the more dangerous words. The end of the book includes a dictionary of some of Lexie's favorite wrangler words, such as *bandana* and *bedroll*.

Students could make lists of compound words to "tame" with illustrations to break them apart, such

as rattlesnake, thunderstorm, earthquake, shipwreck, sunburn, etcetera. Or students could make personal dictionaries with words they hear or read that they find interesting that they could also illustrate. This book has a slew of them such as: cantankerous, varmint, and scoundrel.

Warren, R. (2018). *Words to love by*. Nashville, TN: Zonderkidz.

Grades: K-3

This sweet little book teaches us that words may seem little, but they really have the power to change our lives. By choosing our words carefully, we can make others—and ourselves—feel wonderful. It's easy for us to lose our temper and let words fly that we can't take back, but if we are thoughtful about which words we choose, we can change lives.

This book is a great conversation opener with young students about how our word choice makes others feel. Social emotional topics like conflict resolution, respect, and apologizing are just a few of the discussion opportunities that arise when reading this book. Students can make a list of words and phrases to use when helping others or solving a problem. Role-playing the difference word choice can make in a social situation is a great way to get students actively involved and thinking about how they choose to express themselves.

Conclusion

With thousands of picture books to choose from, educators can easily find one—or several—to use to encourage vocabulary growth in their students. By reading robust selections aloud, fostering word consciousness, and implementing engaging and active learning vocabulary lessons, teachers can intentionally expand the writing repertoire of their students. That, like tintinnabulation, is music to the ears.

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Author Biographies

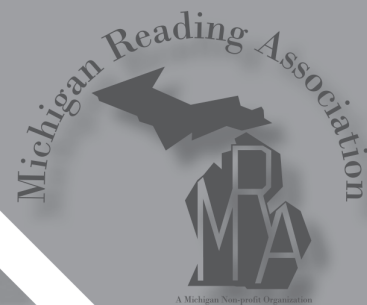
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Arriving At School Ready! Integrating Michigan's Literacy Essentials into Prekindergarten Classrooms

by Chad H. Waldron, Ph.D.,
and Michelle McQueen



**Chad H.
Waldron, Ph.D.**



Michelle McQueen

Families worry about whether their children are ready for kindergarten. Teachers and school administrators are concerned that too many children are entering school before they are ready. Legislators nationwide are investing in early childhood education to improve young children's readiness for school. Why have we become so preoccupied with kindergarten readiness? One reason is the mounting evidence on the significant relationship between the income gap and children's social and academic skills at kindergarten entry, along with research showing that children's skills at the beginning of kindergarten strongly predict their achievement throughout their schooling (Chatterji, 2006; West, Reaney, & Denton, 2000). The increasing emphasis on accountability puts pressure on K-12 teachers and schools to ensure that students meet the standards, and they, in turn, put pressure on preschool teachers to create high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood experiences, a proactive measure in helping young children along a path of educational success (e.g., Barnett & Frede, 2011; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2008).

In Flint, Michigan, the urgent work needed to help our young children to be ready for learning is acutely apparent. The Flint Water Crisis, which increased lead

exposure in our community's water supply, has placed our children at higher risk for developmental and health issues that may impact their learning success (Hanna-Attisha, LaChance, Sadler, & Schnepf, 2016). Even before the Water Crisis, the Flint community was embarking on work to shift the literacy outcomes for children and families in the community through two-generational literacy programming. This work has been collaboratively guided by the Flint and Genesee Literacy Network and several community partners, including the local colleges and universities, hospitals, educational partners, and community foundations. Together, these partners are collaboratively leading the "Flint Kids Read" community-wide campaign. A key part of this campaign is the Flint Public Library's support of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, an international book-giving program providing a free high-quality, age-appropriate book each month to children from birth through their fifth birthday within participating communities (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2019).

Such initiatives are critically important to "moving the needle" on early literacy outcomes and children's academic trajectories. Improving literacy outcomes is necessary within our community, statewide, and

throughout the United States. In Michigan, our “Read by Grade Three” law (or Michigan Public Act 306, 2016) has made this critical need for improved literacy outcomes of even greater importance.

Michigan's *Literacy Essentials*

Addressing the urgent need for literacy change, the Michigan Department of Education and several organizations joined together to lead cohesive literacy efforts on the same goals (Michigan Department of Education, 2017). These organizations have led this work through a collaborative network approach. The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators-General Education Leadership Network's (MAISA-GELN) Early Literacy Task Force, as a leader in this work, has been working to develop a continuum of literacy practices across birth through twelfth grade. These “essential instructional practices in literacy” are “research-supported instructional practices that can have a positive impact on literacy development. The use of these practices in every classroom, every day could make a measurable positive difference in the State's literacy achievement. They should be viewed, as in practice guides in medicine, as presenting a minimum 'standard of care' for Michigan's children” (MAISA-GELN Early Literacy Task Force, 2016, p. 1). The continuum of essential instructional practices in literacy, or *Literacy Essentials*, from birth through twelfth grade includes a grade-banded instructional practice guide, each with a list of 10 research-guided literacy practices and accompanying instructional examples.

The Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD), to implement and scale up their continuous improvement in early childhood education, used the MAISA-GELN's (2016) *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten* (hereafter, *PreK Literacy Essentials*) in all of their early childhood classrooms, facilitating implementation through the use of early literacy coaches and on-going professional development opportunities. This work took an integrated systems approach by utilizing the resources of “Flint Kids Read” and was funded, in part, through a generous grant of the Flint Kids Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. This work, like all instructional practice and systems change, took

coordinated, reflective efforts. For this article, we focus on the first year of implementation of the *PreK Literacy Essentials*—the experiences, what was learned, and the forward momentum needed for continuous learning.

How the *PreK Literacy Essentials* Work in our Context

The Genesee Intermediate School District is a comprehensive system serving all of Genesee County. For this first year of implementation, the Flint community was the first layer of implementation and this included a focused population of 92 educational settings for three- and four-year-old children. These settings included Head Start and state-funded programming. Since this is a multi-year effort to integrate the *PreK Literacy Essentials*, expert early childhood educators were needed to serve as early literacy coaches. Instructional coaching, particularly literacy coaches, have are beneficial and necessary for effective professional development and change in literacy outcomes within and beyond early childhood settings (e.g., Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Powell, Diamond, Burchinal, & Koehler, 2010). This first year of implementation required four early literacy coaches, who visited 92 educational settings. These instructional coaches in early literacy were experienced early childhood educators who had successfully led their own early childhood classrooms. They also received formal training in the *PreK Literacy Essentials*. These coaches were responsible for leading professional development sessions, in-classroom modeling of early literacy lessons, sharing supplemental resources for early literacy instruction and assessment, and providing in- and out-of-classroom consultations. These responsibilities would help to facilitate a system of professional support and development.

Effective professional development for early childhood educators includes knowledge- and practice-focused professional development, leading to improved knowledge for the educator as well as improved quality and child outcomes (Zaslow, Tout, Halle, & Starr, 2011). With this orientation towards knowledge- and practice-focused professional development, the four early literacy coaches and their Birth to Age Five Literacy Coordinator set out to support the 10 instructional practices of the

PreK Literacy Essentials. Three instructional practices were of particular emphasis in this first year based on educators' interests and assessment-informed needs: "read aloud with reference to print" (Essential #2), "interactive read aloud with a comprehension and vocabulary focus" (Essential #3), and "play with sounds inside words" (Essential #4) (MAISA-GELN, 2016, pp. 2-3). While these were of particular focus, all educators would receive professional development that connected to the other essential instructional practices as well. These instructional practices would provide the foundation for professional development, instructional coaching, and resource sharing.

To implement the intentional, research-guided practices of the *PreK Literacy Essentials*, key areas of local focus were selected where these practices could be easily implemented in daily instructional routines across various PreK settings (Figure 1). The first key area was connecting the instructional practices of the *PreK Literacy Essentials* into the existing lessons of *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* (Teaching Strategies,

2010). This curriculum is widely used throughout the GISD. This was the easiest connection to make as the *PreK Literacy Essentials* are not a curriculum, but rather effective instructional practices in early literacy that can be used with any child in any curriculum. The lessons found in *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* provide a wealth of possibilities for continuously (on a daily basis) implementing the *PreK Literacy Essentials*. This also provided for the use of a variety of resources found in the curriculum. The second key area was selecting high-quality and high-interest trade books for literacy lessons that would connect to or extend beyond *The Creative Curriculum* resources. These trade books often focused on informational text concepts (e.g., interactive reading and writing about spiders using *National Geographic Kids: Spiders*, connecting to Essentials #4 and #6). Books from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, as part of the "Flint Kids Read" campaign, were used as read aloud texts (knowing that the children were receiving these books in the home too) across the PreK settings. A variety of the *PreK Literacy Essentials* connected well to these texts, whether through creating a dramatic play center (Essential #1) around a theme or concept from the text or connecting with families about the book they just received in conversations and communications (Essential #10). Literacy lessons were shared with all educators to provide common knowledge, skills, and practices that would enhance instructional opportunities with all children.

The monthly professional development sessions, the third key area of focus, allowed for the practical "sensemaking" of integrating the *PreK Literacy Essentials* into daily instructional routines. As mentioned earlier, but it bears repeating, knowledge- and practice-focused professional development is critical to supporting early childhood educators' knowledge and skill to create instructional change (Zaslow, Tout, Halle, & Starr, 2011). Monthly professional development sessions centered on one particular essential instructional practice (for example, "brief, clear, explicit instruction in letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, and



Figure 1. Intentional research of *PreK Literacy Essentials* into PreK daily instructional practices.

how letters are shaped and formed”- Essential #5). In a session, the essential instructional practice was covered in depth using the definition and examples provided in the *PreK Literacy Essentials* document (MAISA-GELN, 2016). Then, in each session, educators examined these suggestions and planned opportunities to integrate the instructional practice within their own instructional routines. They cross-collaborated with educators from other sites and brainstormed with the early literacy coaches on how to resolve any challenges they faced. Here are just three examples across the months of how the educators planned to return from these monthly professional development sessions to their classrooms to integrate the *PreK Literacy Essentials* into their daily instruction:

- Planning and then implementing a dramatic play center of a local restaurant or grocery store infused with lots of print that could be used to help the children work on their letters (like writing the menu or placing an order) (Essential #1- “Intentional use of literacy artifacts in dramatic play and throughout the classroom” and Essential #5- “Brief, clear, explicit instruction in letter names, the sound(s) associated with the letters, and how letters are shaped and formed”)
- Planning and then implementing interactive read alouds and connected writing activities using


existing texts from their *Creative Curriculum* units (Essential #3- “Interactive read aloud with a comprehension and vocabulary focus” and Essential #6- “Interactions around writing”)

- Extending their own classroom-based family engagement activities to include the *Flint Kids Read* newsletter tips or activities, often modeling these activities in brief or extended interactions with families (Essential #10- “Collaboration with families in promoting literacy”)

These active connections were always made to other essential instructional practices and how to best implement or enact these instructional practices within their diverse classroom contexts. It is also important to remember that all of the *PreK Literacy Essentials* hang together for creating research-guided literacy learning opportunities every day (MAISA-GELN, 2016). Educators often left these sessions with positive feedback, instructional plan ideas (for *The Creative Curriculum* and beyond), and materials to support enactment in their own contexts. (See Figure 2 for our tips for What Worked for Us in Professional Development Sessions—and will hopefully work for you too! See Figure 3 for a sample lesson we provided in our professional development sessions).

1. **Help your attendees plan ahead:** Be clear and specific with your attendees about the objectives for each professional development session. Give them readings (e.g., the *PreK Literacy Essentials* document) to plan ahead for the big ideas.
2. **Listen and learn about the Essential:** Start each professional development anchored in the specific essential(s), reading the definition and talking about the instructional examples in turn. Use videos (those in the online modules for the *PreK Literacy Essentials*) to bring the Essential to life in classrooms. PowerPoint works well to organize all of this, along with plenty of handouts.
3. **Think It, Make (Plan) It, Take It for the Essential:** This was critical for our success. We provided sample lessons to use with their children as well as having the educators prepare lessons or activities, right there, that they could use the next day or week with their children. We moved systematically from “thinking about” the Essential to actively “making/planning for” and gave them resources to “take back” to their classrooms.
4. **Debrief and Plan Ahead:** Be sure to conclude with plenty of time for clarifications, questions, or next steps. Also, check in about what educators liked in each session or felt needed to be changed for the future.

Figure 2. What worked for us in professional development sessions.



Print Knowledge Read Aloud Planner

This planner promotes intentional teaching of print and letters and sounds knowledge. Only use 3-4 brief teaching points.

PRINT

Title: Grumpy Pants

Essential #2 Read aloud with reference to print

TSG Obj. 17: Demonstrates knowledge of print and its use

- Select and pre-read text selected
- Daily read alouds include verbal and non-verbal strategies for drawing children's attention to print

HOW TEXT IS READ:

- ☒ Words are read from left to right, slide finger under words
- ☒ A line of text on a page is read word by word from left to right, point to words
- ☐ Lines of text on a page are read from top to bottom (unless the text is meant to be read differently)
- ☐ "Return sweep" - at the end of a line of text reading continues on the next line down at the left side again

IDENTIFYING PARTS OF PRINT:

- ☒ Space separates words from each other, point this out
- ☐ Words, sentences, and texts have a "beginning" and "end," point this out
- ☒ Each word has a "first letter," "last letter," and "middle letters," point this out

NOTICING & TEACHING: Identify what you intend to teach.

Suggestions of instructional focuses:

1st + Reading
PAGES: Any

HOW TEXT IS READ: Non-Verbal

Read the entire book. Using your finger to move from left to right. "I'm turning the page to read what happens next. When reading a story you always read the left page (point to the text and read) then you read the right page."

2nd+ Reading
PAGE: 7

PARTS OF PRINT: Verbal

"None. Still grumpy. Read this with me." (Point to each word as you read it.)

"None. Still grumpy. There were three words that we read. Let's look at the spaces between each word." Point out the spaces (2).

Suggestions of instructional focuses:

2nd+ Reading
PAGES: 12 & 13

HOW TEXT IS READ: Non-Verbal

"He tried to shake it off. (Point to each word as you read it. Repeat the pointing to each word as you read, "But he was still grumpy."

2nd+ Reading
PAGE: 1

PARTS OF PRINT: Non-Verbal

"This word *bad* (point to it) is written twice on this page. *Penguin was in a bad mood. A very bad mood.* The first letter in the word bad is *b*. The last letter is a *d* and the middle letter is an *a*." Model pointing out each letter.

LETTERS

Title: Grumpy Pants

Essential #5 Brief, clear, explicit instruction in letter names, the sound (s) associated with letters, and how letter names are shaped and formed

TSG Obj. 16: Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet

- Identify the print that will be utilized (book, chart, environmental print)
- Use tools that foster the development of letter-sound knowledge

UPPER-CASE AND LOWER-CASE LETTERS/ PUNCTUATION

- ☒ Knowledge of **upper-case and lower-case letters** and their roles, and **punctuation** can also be considered in concepts of print

ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE

- ☒ **Alphabetic principle**- a concept of print defined as the understanding that by putting different letters together in different ways, words are made (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005).

NOTICING & TEACHING: Identify what you intend to teach.

Suggestions of instructional focuses:

Small Group Setting, 2nd+ Reading
PAGES: 19 & 20

LETTER(S): Ss

"*SPLASH!*" On these pages we see penguin has jumped in the water. This is the letter *S* like in Sheldon, sun and splash. The letter *S* makes the /s/ sound. Let's write the letter in the air, pull back, in, around, down, and back around."

Small Group Setting, 2nd+ Reading
PAGE: 5

ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE: to

"On page 5, the word *his*, is in the middle of the sentence. The word *his* is spelled with the lowercase letter *h-i-s*. When these are put together they always spell the word *his*. Say that with me, *his*."

Suggestions of instructional focuses:

Small Group Setting, 2nd+ Reading
PAGE: 4

LETTER(S): Ff

"On page 4, the sentence is, *He stomped his feet all the way home.* The word *feet* begins with the letter *f* like feet, Fiona and fun. *F* makes the /f/ sound.

Small Group Setting, 2nd+ Reading
PAGE: 16

PUNCTUATION: ... (Elipse)

Read, "*Then penguin took a dep breath and he counted...*" These three dots together are called an **elipse**. It means something is coming, something is going to happen. The next page shows more elipses.

Figure 3. Sample lesson plan from professional development session on linking *PreK Literacy Essentials* #2 and #5.

It was also important to share the work of *PreK Literacy Essentials* beyond the boundaries of monthly professional development sessions and coaching visits to sites. A local website and monthly newsletter for educators, our fourth key area of focus, was established to expand the resources, opportunities, and information about the *PreK Literacy Essentials*. It was also important to emphasize resources (e.g., YouTube videos and free training modules available on www.literacyessentials.org) that could support the educators in their development in the *PreK Literacy Essentials*. These resources were often used in our professional development, but this allowed for access after the sessions. The website and newsletter allowed for continuous contact with the instructional practices emphasized by the coaches' visits and in the

professional development sessions. Finally, "the collaboration with families in promoting literacy" (Essential #10) cannot be underestimated for its significant importance (MAISA-GELN, 2016).

Our final key area of focus was expanding our reach and integration of families into our early literacy work. The Genesee Intermediate School District had well-established and effective ways of engaging families in their early childhood sites. This work was intended to simply increase children's literacy engagement at home. A "Flint Kids Read" monthly newsletter was developed, which provided family-friendly tips and ideas for literacy in the home (see excerpt in Figure 4). This newsletter also featured the books of Dolly

Parton's Imagination Library, so families would be watching the mail for their child's latest book. The early literacy coaches worked closely with the educators to implement on-going interactions with families around

literacy concepts. In addition, family literacy events were held at early childhood sites and community events to encourage families' engagement with literacy at home. These events were well attended and received.



Issue 2

TALK TO YOUR CHILD THROUGHOUT THE DAY.

Language development begins in infancy and is an ongoing process. Children will begin to understand words (receptive vocabulary) much easier than they will be able to say words (expressive vocabulary). Listening to you talk, read, and sing helps children eventually learn how to speak.

INFANTS

BOOKS FOR INFANTS

Peekaboo Kisses, *Barney Saltzberg*

Peek-a-boo!, *Roberta Grobel Intrater*

Peek-a-who?, *Nina Laden*



Cover your eyes and then show them to your child while saying "Peek-a-boo!" Read a peek-a-boo book with your baby.

Look at your baby as you talk to him. When he coos or babbles, talk back. Infants start to use gestures for meaning, such as raising their arms to be picked up. At about one year, infants start to understand object permanence (that a face or a toy is still there even if it's covered up).

[Learn More](#)

TODDLERS

Figure 4. Sample excerpt of *Flint Kids Read* newsletter.

Conclusion: How You Can Integrate the *PreK Literacy Essentials* in Your Context

Taken together, these key areas of local focus (Figure 1) allowed for our early childhood sites to integrate the instructional practices of the *PreK Literacy Essentials* into daily instructional routines. It was important for us to share out our structures and routines as it is important for our state's continuous work to improve literacy outcomes for all children in Michigan. These structures and resources could be adapted and scaled to your local contexts in your work with the *PreK Literacy Essentials*. This model is also adaptable beyond early childhood environments and on to the grades K-12 environments, with the appropriate *PreK Literacy Essentials* (available at www.literacyessentials.org).

To get started with this work, here are some suggestions from what we learned:

- 1) Start by **reading** the MAISA-GELN's (2016) *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten* and **viewing the accompanying online modules together** with your educators.
- 2) **Develop professional development sessions** that include your local curricula, expectations, and experiences. Make sure these sessions are active, engaging, and have plenty of take-aways for their classrooms. This will make the *PreK Literacy Essentials* authentic to your educators, their children, and their classrooms.
- 3) **Provide on-going support within those classrooms.** You may not have the benefit of early literacy coaches, but on-going support from site coordinators, professional learning communities (PLCs) at each site, and free web-based tools can be implemented. This will create support for educators to do this important work, each day, with every child.

This continuous professional development, resource sharing, and early literacy coaching using the MAISA-GELN's (2016) *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten*'s 10 instructional practices has positively impacted our early childhood settings and instructional practices. We know it can make a difference in your prekindergarten settings, too.

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Engaging Boys in Literacy and Elementary School

by Rebecca R. Norman, Ph.D.



**Rebecca R.
Norman, Ph.D.**

If you ask my third grader, he will tell you, “I hate reading, and I hate writing. Books are boring.” Yet, you can find him reading a book in Cynthia Rylant’s *Henry and Mudge* series or Jarrett Krosoczka’s *Lunch Lady* series without prompting, he refuses to go to bed without listening to a chapter from our family read aloud, and he writes his own book series (Figure 1), songs (see https://youtu.be/GVswD_jpOY), and movies (see <https://youtu.be/NoW0Pk0IOvw>).

Like many boys, and other reluctant readers and writers, William separates the reading and writing he does in school from the reading and writing activities he does at home (Fletcher, 2006). For him, reading and writing in school are forced activities and ones he finds boring. When given choice of whether, where, and what, he reads and writes for pleasure.

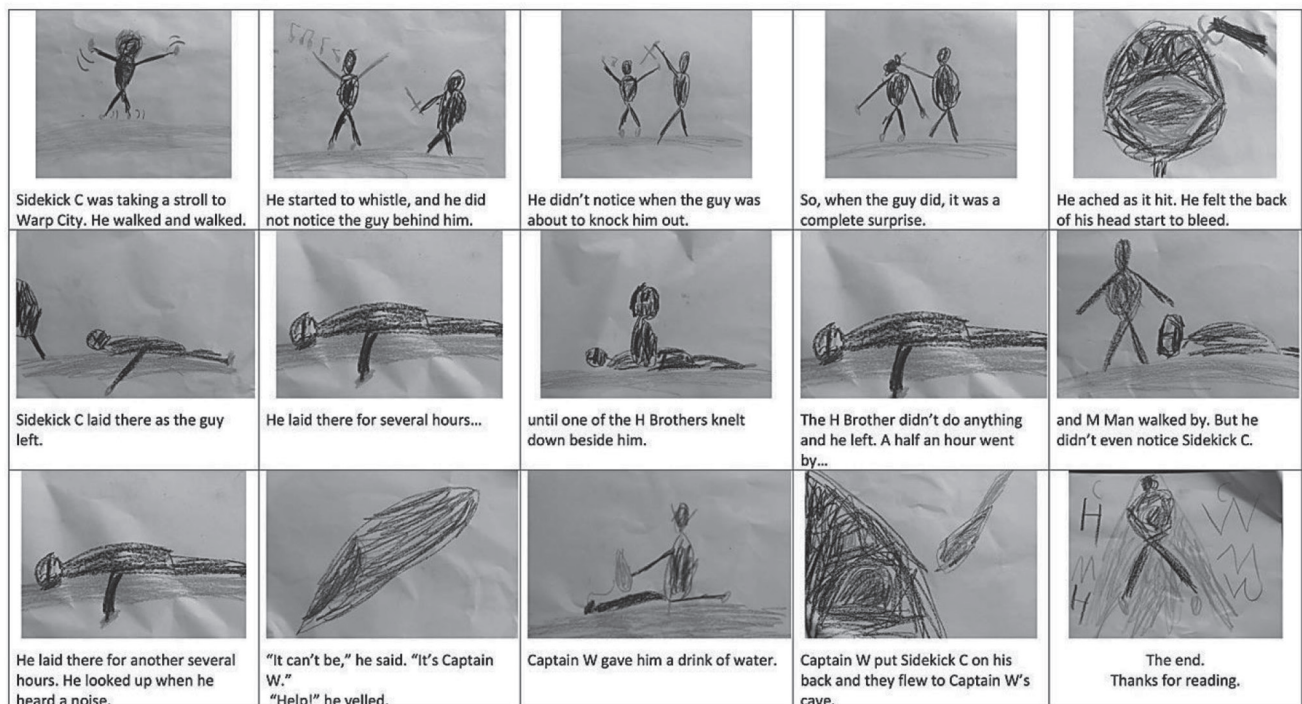


Figure 1. *Captain W and the Good Samaritan*, an example of writing completed outside of school.

How can we help children become more engaged with in-school literacy? In this article, I will explain some of the reasons why elementary-aged boys may appear less engaged with in-school literacy and give ideas about how to engage them more. Because this article is about engaging boys in literacy, I will be using the term boy and the pronoun he. But, many of these strategies will work for any students who may not be as engaged in class as you would like.

Why Focus on Boys?

On the 2019 ELA M-Step in Michigan, 42% of third-grade boys scored at the advanced or proficient level compared to 48.3% of girls. This discrepancy grew in fifth grade with only 42.3% of boys reaching the proficient and advanced level compared to 50.2% of girls, and again in eleventh grade, with 50.6% of boys scoring at or above the proficient level on the SAT-EBRW compared to 59.9% of girls (MI School Data, 2019). These findings mirror those of other states, such as New York (New York State Education Department, n.d.) and California (California Department of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, boys' grades in reading are often even worse than would be predicted by these standardized tests, unless they demonstrate engagement and self-control similar to girls in school (Cornwell, Mustad, & Van Parys, 2013).

Since the 1940s, girls have read more than boys (Coles & Hall, 2002) and the most recent Scholastic report (Scholastic, 2019) found this still to be true with girls reporting that they are more likely to be frequent readers and have a more positive attitude toward reading. Because people who read become better readers (Stanovich, 2009), girls reading more could contribute to a growing disparity between boys and girls.

Boys and Girls Are Different

Biologically, boys and girls are often different. Many parts of the female brain develop earlier than those in the male brain (Lenroot et al., 2007) and the female brain goes through the reorganization associated with normal development sooner than the male brain does (Lim, Han, Uhlhaas, & Kaiser, 2013).

When looking at other aspects of development, girls have been found to perform better, earlier on fine motor skills (such as those needed for handwriting), while boys achieve better on assessments of gross motor skills (Rodrigues, Ribeiro, Barros, Lopes, & Sousa, 2019). Girls tend to have better hearing and can hear softer sounds (Roche, Siervogel, & Himes, 1978), which may allow them to pay better attention in school. Also, many girls are able to sit longer and want to please the teacher more than boys (Sax, 2016).

Schools Aren't Designed for Boys

With the additional mandates on schools, many classes do not allow for developmentally appropriate practices, such as play, but instead require students to sit for long periods of time and do more rigorous academics (Sax, 2016). Between 1998 and 2010, teachers' beliefs that kids should learn to read in kindergarten rose from 31 to 80% and the idea that kids should start formal reading and math instruction in preschool rose from 34 to 64% (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). During this same time, the daily teaching of art and music in kindergarten dropped by 16% and 18% respectively; and the number of classes with art centers, block centers, dramatic play centers, and water/sand tables all dropped (Bassok et al., 2016). Furthermore, more kindergarten teachers report teaching conventional spelling, complete sentences, and stories with beginning, middle, and end, skills that used to be associated more with first grade (Bassok et al., 2016).

Schools have also increased their emphasis on book learning over hands-on-experiences. For boys, in particular, emphasizing Wissenchaft [book knowledge] while ignoring Kenntinis [experiential knowledge] may seriously impair development—not cognitive development, but the development of a lively and passionate curiosity...Boys who have been deprived of time outdoors, who have spent more time interacting with screens rather than with the real world, sometimes have trouble grasping concepts that seem simple to us. (Sax, 2016, p. 36)

When thinking about literacy, schools often privilege the reading and writing habits of girls. Coles and Hall

(2002) found that boys were more likely to read for “memorizing facts and figures, rehearsing arguments, comparing and ranking performances and identifying procedures. Boys’ vernacular literacies give greater emphasis on taking from the text, and to analysing information rather than analyzing motivation or characterization” (p. 105). Girls, on the other hand, tended to read books that they could share and talk about, much like what we ask them to do in school. When looking at genres, boys read more science fiction and fantasy, sports books, war and spy books, comics and joke books, and funny fiction (Coles & Hall, 2002). However, one study of classroom libraries found zero science fiction books, only a few graphic novels, and did not reference the other genre preferences of boys (Crisp et al., 2016).

Finally, boys are more likely to have female teachers (McFarland et al., 2019), which may contribute to their belief that literacy is more of a feminine activity (e.g., Newkirk, 2002). In fact, in the 2015-2016 school year, of the 1.9 million public school teachers, only 11% of those teachers were male (McFarland et al., 2019), which is actually a decline by 1% from the 1999-2000 school year.

So What Do We Do?

We can engage boys in literacy and school. First, we can show them that there are books out there that they will want to read, such as “everyone books,” series that are of particular interest to males, books that engage boys with their humor, and audiobooks. Second, we can show them that boys do read by inviting males to be guest readers in our classrooms. Third, we can create an environment conducive to learning, such as allowing them to choose whether they sit or stand while they read and taking them outside. In the next section, I will explain these ideas in more depth.

Hook Them with Books

Share “everyone books” (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). Many boys who struggle are too embarrassed to read the books that they can read because they are “baby” books. To help alleviate this stigma, teachers should include “everyone books,” or easy books that are accessible to everyone in the class, in their read aloud

rotations to show that they are blessing these books. They should also encourage all students to read them so as not to place a stigma on reading such books. One teacher found that when she included “everyone books” as one of her three read alouds each day, the books became popular choices, especially for boys who struggled with reading (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). Please see the books with an asterisk in Figure 2 for “everyone books” suggestions.

Share series books. Book series provide readers with familiar characters and formulaic plots that help readers develop “reading comprehension and decoding skills, develop stamina and focus, and increase pleasure in the act of reading. All of these are things we know growing readers must experience” (Killeen, 2013, p. 59). Sharing the first book in the series as part of your read aloud will encourage readers to read other books from the series. Please see Figure 2 (next page) for book suggestions.

Share humor. Many boys enjoy reading humor and joke books (Coles & Hall, 2002; Fletcher, 2006; Newkirk, 2002; Scholastic, 2019). Reading joke books aloud can demonstrate that these books are acceptable choices for reading time. Please see Figure 2 for book suggestions.

Embrace Audiobooks

If our goal is to encourage boys to gain a love of books, allowing them to listen instead of struggle through the act of decoding the book is a viable option. Unlike with traditional books and ebooks, they can listen to the book while also being active with their bodies. Also, it allows students who struggle with decoding access to more challenging, and at times more interesting, texts. Casbergue and Harris (1996) suggest that,

hearing literature read expertly not only enables them to absorb the story line, but offers examples of fluency. If the text is of sufficient interest, it may even be useful in transforming hostility to appreciation. Similarly, youth who exhibit print aversive behavior, may be more amenable to experiencing fiction in a format that is free of negative associations. (p. 54)

The Bad Guys series, by Aaron Blabey
Binky the Space Cat series, by Ashley Spires
Bone series, by Jeff Smith
Captain Underpants series, by Dav Pilkey
Dairy of a Wimpy Kid series, by Jeff Kinney
Elephant and Piggy series, by Mo Willems*
The Extincts, by Veronica Cossenteli
Fungus is Among Us!, by Joy Keller
Fly Guy series, by Tedd Arnold*
Henry and Mudge series, by Cynthia Rylant*
Hilo series, by Judd Winick
The Infamous Ratsos series, by Kara LaReau
Lunch Lady series, by Jarrett Krosoczka
Max Spaniel series, by David Catrow*
My Truck is Stuck!, by Kevin Lewis*
David Books series, by David Shannon*
Sidekicks, by Dan Santat

*These books are at a first-grade reading level, but would still be enjoyed as “everyone books” in older grades.

Figure 2. Book suggestions to hook boys.

Recently, brain scan research has found that the same parts of our brain are activated when we are listening to a book as when we are reading the book (Deniz, Nunez-Elizalde, Huth, & Gallant, 2019). In the end, readers of audiobooks still learn, comprehend, and enjoy the books, the goals of reading.

Invite Male Guest Readers

Many boys associate literacy with females (e.g., Newkirk, 2002). Their teachers are most often female (McFarland et al., 2019) and they see their mothers reading more than their fathers. They also view liking literacy as being unmanly (Newkirk, 2002). Therefore, we need to show boys that real men do read. One way to do this is through inviting male role models, such as fathers, men from the community (e.g., fireman, policeman, physical education teachers), and even male high school athletes, to read to and talk about books with your class. Schools that include male guest readers have found that students' motivation increased (Cunningham & Allington, 2016). It also has the added benefit of boosting the self-esteem of the guest readers (Visser, 1991).

Give Them Choice to Stand or Sit

Many boys want to be in charge of their environments (Sax, 2016), so being told to stand or sit triggers the child to want to do the other. Giving them choice allows them to have some power over their environment, and allows them to work as they feel comfortable, thus eliminating one obstacle that can stand between boys and reading. In the past few years, alternative seating has become more acceptable, but you don't have to buy fancy seats. Both teachers and students who had sit-to-stand desks found that the option allowed the students to focus more (Erwin, Beighle, Routen, & Montemayor, 2018), and Mehta, Shortz, & Benden (2016) reported that students who used standing desks had neurocognitive benefits.

Take them Outside

In an era of increased accountability, many schools have decreased the amount of time devoted to recess (McMurrer, 2007). Jarrett, an expert in recess research, posits that children in most other nations have more recess than those in the United States, with many

having recess every hour (Jarrett, 2019). Yet, children need unstructured recess time to learn social skills and receive needed physical activity (Jarrett, 2019). Additionally, researchers have found that recess improves behavior (Jarrett, 2019) and is important for academic growth as well (e.g., Lund, Brimo, Rhea, & Rivchun, 2017). In fact, Humble (2018) reported that kindergartners who participate in more recess showed a greater increase in reading levels than those who participated in less recess.

Some schools have introduced forest days, where students spend an entire day outside no matter the weather (listen to the podcast *Out of the Classroom and into the Woods* [Hanford, 2015] for one example of a public school in Vermont or watch the short film *Schools Out: Lessons from a Forest Kindergarten* [Molomot & Richter, 2013] for an example of a full-time outdoor school in Switzerland). Bowdridge (2010) reported that children who attended outdoor school in the early years had an increased ability to learn. In Sweeney's (2018) survey of parents and teachers, one teacher stated that, because outdoor education provided children with hands-on learning, they were able "...to make connections that are far too abstract when presented through books [ex. Food/water supply]" (p. 32). Even if you cannot spend the whole day outside, taking the children out for listening walks (Heard & McDonough, 2009) can assist students in their observational and writings skills. (See *A Walking Curriculum: Evoking Wonder and Developing Sense of Place (K-12)* [Judson, 2018] for ideas to incorporate other walks into the curriculum, and visit Michigan's Department of Natural Resources [<https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79135---,00.html>] for other activities.)

Conclusion

All children can become engaged in literacy. Sharing books that they can access and that will interest them and creating an environment that promotes learning will encourage this engagement and allow boys to see themselves as readers and writers.

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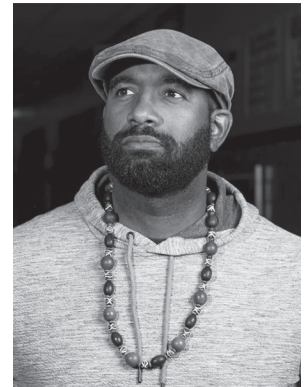
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In Demand: The Education Cypher

by quan neloms



Photo credit: kieferpix



quan neloms

I came of age during the 90s in the city of Detroit during a time that was affectionately known as the “golden age” of hip hop. I was of course very interested in the cultural engagement and excitement going on in my city. My friends and I would frequently visit the Hip Hop Shop, Café Mahogany, and countless open mic spots. Being thoroughly engaged with all that was going on, I went from being a spectator to picking up a pen and pad and becoming a full participant in the art and expression of hip hop. And, I was not the only teenager at the time who decided to expand my vocabulary and lift my voice to join the cypher, which was ever present at school lunch tables, at the mall, onboard buses, at the neighborhood community center, etcetera.

A cypher is defined as a gathering of people, usually

in a circle, for the purpose of rapping, beatboxing, or breakdancing. The cypher is a place to display talent but also a place to be heard, for ideas to be spread, and for spectators to be called out to become participants.

Currently, Black men constitute only 2% of America’s teaching force. Although research has proven that the overall achievement of students, especially Black male students, increases every school year in which they are enrolled in classes taught by Black male teachers, the shortage still remains.

With that said, earlier this summer I designed an initiative known as In Demand that seeks to uplift Black men who are already involved in education. This initiative also seeks to recruit Black men as educators,

mentors, and volunteers within schools. Men respond to being challenged and called to act. Knowing this, I wanted to use the cypher concept to put out a call for Black men. And, not just any cypher but an education cypher—an edu-cypher.



Photo credit: Jared Davis

The purpose of the edu-cypher is to be heard and to call those who are spectators to education to become participants. Since the summer, *In Demand* created two edu-cyphers: “In Demand” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvOIUckAN0&t=240s>) and “The Call” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD_s4rZI-x0) The lyrics of my verse “In Demand” really get to the heart of what I hope to achieve through this work.

As an educator, I find annotating rap lyrics to be an important tool for engaging students as well as promoting critical thought and collaboration. Also, the aforementioned skills can be applied to passages from books, speeches, magazine articles, journal entries, etcetera. A helpful website for educators interested in utilizing the analyzation and annotation of rap lyrics, and other literary works, is www.genius.com. Annotating lyrics allows students, as well as adults, to have their voices clearly heard and understood. Below you will find my annotated verse from “In Demand.”

“In Demand”

“Indeed I’m that 2 percent,”

The current percentage of Black male teachers nationwide. This is the reason for the In Demand movement: to increase the number of Black men involved in education.

“16 years of impacting students”

Since 2003 I have been an educator within Detroit’s public-school system. Despite our numbers being small, Black men are in the profession and are making a major impact on students and on the profession as a whole.

“For this decision they said that I was foolish”

Many laughed, and some literally said the decision was foolish when I informed those around me that I was leaving my college engineering program to pursue a degree and subsequent career in education. But my time as a volunteer and mentor in a community school after my freshman year showed me a way forward in serving my community unlike anything I’d ever experienced.

“If not us then who else is going to do this”

No one else can have an impact on the profession like Black male educators. The talent, skill, intellect,

ingenuity, and concern we bring to classrooms is necessary and needed.

“Teach ‘em life, teach them right, what the truth is”

As a teacher, I consistently advocated for and created culturally relevant lessons. As experts we know how to take curriculum and make it culturally relevant. As Black people are consistently misrepresented and overlooked in media and textbooks, I always made sure that the culture of my students was not overlooked or minimized.

“SMD, Brightmoor is the blueprint”

I was a volunteer at a local church within the Brightmoor community of Detroit—Rosedale Park Baptist Church—and it had a tremendous presence in the community due in large part to its relationships with local schools and residents. I was able to volunteer at one of those schools where I worked closely with middle school students. Because I volunteered in the school and in the community, I was able to interact with students in both settings. This community approach to student engagement became my professional blueprint.

“Project A.D.A.P.T., Mama Rush was the blueprint”

As a teenager I was involved in an afterschool program known as Project A.D.A.P.T. (Awareness, Development, Achievement, Pride, and Teamwork). The program was led by the phenomenal Ms. Yvonne Rush, rest in peace. Mama Rush’s stated mission was to create a global mindset in Detroit’s youth. One way in which she accomplished this was through exposure to the arts, travel, lectures, etcetera. Needless to say, my life was forever changed by this program and the development of a global mindset within Detroit’s youth is another important aspect of my blueprint as an educator.

“Now here we stand on the cusp of a movement”

In Demand seeks to significantly increase the number of Black men involved in education in the Detroit area. Although the process has begun, we will be having an official launch for this initiative in January of 2020. Stay tuned to www.Iamindemand.com.

“That’s education verses schooling”

Schooling is learning that prepares you for work but

doesn't necessarily prepare you for life. W.E.B. DuBois said, "Education must not simply teach work—it must teach life." Therefore, education goes beyond the school walls and impacts the lives of educators, students, families, and the community as a whole. The education that Dubois referenced has serious ripple effects and Black men must be included in significant numbers in order for true education to occur.

"Recruiting legacy, heart, intelligence, integrity"

It is not enough to be an educator who is a Black man. You have to have the heart to drive you, the intelligence that makes you thrive, and the integrity that allows you to build trust and relationships with students and families.

"Wherever it be, whenever we see men on the front lines the better we'll be"

Raising the percentage of Black men in education not only benefits Black children but benefits all children. Diversity in education promotes diversity throughout life.

"Psalms eighty-two verse three: The whole hood is waiting on you, achi"

This scripture from the Bible admonishes leaders to defend and advocate for those who are in need. For me, becoming an educator was not just a career path but a calling placed on my life by God—a ministry and a divine purpose. Throughout American history, Black culture has set trends that the nation and the world have followed. What better trend to set then uplifting the importance of solving issues in education? Not only is the hood waiting, but the nation is waiting for the answer.

"When the elephants return, their relevance returns, their presence is affirmed"

I love animals and as a young man I spent countless hours watching programs about nature on public television and the elephant always stood out to me. Survival habits and skills are not instinctual for young male elephants. Instead they learn to survive by watching older elephants as they go about their daily routines. Obviously, we are not elephants, but their example applies. It is important for our young men to see Black men portrayed in a positive light rather than constantly being bombarded with negative images. The Black male presence in education assists in changing the narrative and image of Black men.

Stand up it's our turn

This is the call and the challenge to all Black men to join the cypher, the edu-cypher, and get involved in the field of education.

Author Biography

quan neloms is a 17-year educator whose work focuses primarily on boys and men of color and community partnerships. quan is the founder of Lyricist Society, a program that uses creative mediums to uplift student voice, and In Demand, an initiative with the goal of attracting more Black men to education as volunteers, mentors, and teachers. He can be reached at info@iamindemand.com.



Photo credit: kieferpix

“¿Y Que?”: Diverse Literacy Experiences within a pre-College High School Program

by Sandra M. Gonzales, Ph.D., Jonelle Lopez, Laura Torres, and Ana Calandrino



The challenges faced by children in American schools are significant. These challenges are further exacerbated when issues of race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, social class, and language minority status are factored into the equation. In this article, four Latina staff members from a college access program in Michigan examine the literacy practices of the emergent bilingual Spanish/English-speaking high school students they assist. Their college access program serves students in grades 9–12. Services are provided daily during the academic school year and over a six-week period each summer.

Many of the students enrolled in the program have recently immigrated from Guatemala. In many cases, the language spoken at home is neither English nor Spanish, but an Indigenous Guatemalan language. In addition, these students are often the first generation in their homes to receive any formal education and many are the first in their families to learn to read and write. Nevertheless, the authors remind us that the parents of these students still demonstrate different forms of literacy—literacies which have a long history of being discounted and marginalized within our traditional schooling structures.

In this article, the authors explore these various challenges and ponder ways in which Western standards of teaching and learning can be bridged with culturally



**Sandra M.
Gonzales, Ph.D.**



Jonelle Lopez



Laura Torres



Ana Calandrino

sustaining practices, as they prepare their students for post-secondary education. To produce this article, the authors recorded, transcribed, and thematically organized their conversation around various themes. Structured in a question-and-answer format, this article will explore the following four contrasting themes:

- Western vs. Indigenous Forms of Literacy
- Linear vs. Circular Ways of Knowing and Teaching
- Bilingual vs. Monolingual Brains
- School-based vs. Summer Literacy Enrichment Activities

While we hope the resources and information provided will be helpful to our colleagues in the field of education, it is also important to note that each Latina/o/x and/or Indigenous community is unique and varied and therefore, the experiences shared in this article are not meant to be generalized.

Western vs. Indigenous Forms of Literacy

Q. Many of your students' parents cannot read or write—in any language. Does this mean that they are “illiterate”?

A. Many of our students come from Guatemala, Mexico, and other parts of Latin America. For most families, Spanish is the dominant language. However, we also have students who speak an Indigenous Mayan language. In our program, it is not uncommon to serve parents who do not read or write. We are often asked if we see a relationship between low parent literacy and student struggles: 1) in reading and writing, 2) on standardized tests, and 3) with low English Language Arts grades. The simple answer is, “Yes, we do.” But, for us, the answer is much more complex than that.

We would like to take this opportunity to disrupt the “low literacy/illiterate” trope and provide an alternative way of understanding literacy. Though not all of our families speak an Indigenous language, many observe traditions and practices that are deeply rooted in their Indigenous culture (Batalla, 1996). Therefore, many of the practices we use are informed by this history and the rich cultural traditions that shape our students' identities.

According to Hernandez-Zamora (2010), for many Indigenous people in Latin America, literacy is not just “the simple acquisition of a technical ability” (p. 9). It is not just the ability of a person to decode a script. Literacy is socially and culturally constructed. It is an important part of one's identity. It is a way to deepen one's relationship with the earth. Literacy provides the context for how one reads, understands, and responds to the world around them. It provides the context for how people understand each other and themselves.

In an Indigenous tradition, literacy can be taught by teachers and elders as well as by the earth: so, the trees teach; the water teaches; as does the wind and the rain. Literacy is how people share their experiences. Literacy is not about establishing a truth (Gonzales & Rodriguez, 2017).

On the contrary, most literacy practices in U.S. schools are anchored in the positivistic tradition which centers accuracy, logic, and truth (Green, 2017). Educational institutions privilege and routinize ways of organizing, analyzing, summarizing, documenting, talking, and knowing that are Western in orientation. It is often implied that literacy is a “neutral, transferable and measurable skill” (Hernandez-Zamora, 2010, p. 8). Yet, we must recognize that a wide variety of discursive practices exist, each with their own framework for reading and writing their world.

For example, in an Indigenous literacy tradition, one learns how to read basket-weaving patterns. Patterns can recount creation stories, denote one's historical lineage, or remind us of important values. The colors used can express the philosophical perspectives of a family or a community. The type of material used can denote purpose. If it is a sweetgrass basket, it can be used for ceremonial medicines. If it is a reed mat, it exemplifies the ways in which we each are a part of the woven fabric of our community. When we sit on this mat, we are reminded that the community can hold us and support us wherever we are (Gonzales & Rodriguez, 2017). Ojibwa scholars Christenson and Poupart (2013) called these elder epistemologies. They are literacies passed down by one's ancestors. Many Latina/o/x students are still oriented around these paradigms.

The literacy discourse of schools has more of a Western orientation. Literacy in schools is to support students in having access, ownership, and power (Gee, 1998). Thus, we feel that our families are not illiterate, but rather they are being asked to appropriate Westernized discourse practices, because those are the practices at the top of the global food chain: these are the practices that will determine their level of access to not only postsecondary education, but also to the skilled and

unskilled labor opportunities they may seek. We are not arguing for one way over another, but rather that diverse literacies should have parity in our classrooms. Moje and her colleagues (2004) argue that, in addition to the Indigenous and the Western, a third space is needed where these two orientations can coalesce and where students can engage in safe ways around language, culture and literacy.

It is critical that our students know that their literacies matter. According to Hernandez-Zamora (2010), literacy is not just about decoding words and texts in measurable ways. It is also about using their words and texts alongside their traditional literacies to decode their world in ways that are dynamic and unique to who they are and where they come from.

Linear vs. Circular Ways of Knowing and Teaching

Q. As a college access program, how does the way that you teach literacy differ from the traditional school setting?

A. Traditional classrooms are often organized in ways that are Western and linear. In a linear and Western framework, knowledge is removed from the natural world, packaged and examined as a series of methodical steps (Smith, 2012). There is a pre-determined or standardized “right” or “correct” way to do things. There is an emphasis on time on task and there is a designated timeframe in which mastery must occur. One step must be completed before going on to the next step. One must master first grade before moving on to second grade; master high school before having access to college. Math must be completed from 8:00 am to 9:00 am, Science from 9:00 am to 10:00 am, and English from 10:00 am to 11:00 am.

Many Indigenous cultures, on the other hand, are organized in ways that are more circular and relational. Students learn in time or with time, but learning is not bound by time. Core concepts are learned according to and alongside the natural cycles of the earth, rather than in a classroom and through a book which can rupture and displace one’s connection to the land

(Smith, 2012). In the circular way of thinking, things are also methodical but in a different way. For example, one might not break a story into separate parts for the purpose of analyzing or labeling in a stand-alone and pre-determined way that is separate from the whole and graded for accuracy. Rather, the point of a story might be the moral, values, or intention, or the ways in which a story speaks to each unique student and deepens their understanding of self and their relationship with creation. When asked, “How do you know?” students’ responses might not be about “how I know” or “what I know.” Rather, using circular thinking, they might more naturally consider what they should do with the information in-context. Again, they may be oriented by their cultural experiences to cue in to different kinds of information. It can take students twice as much time to complete an assignment, because they have to try and translate words and context, mediate cultural experiences and ways of knowing and then navigate between two distinct literacy frameworks.

Our program is sensitive to these diverse ways of knowing and expressing knowledge. We look for culturally responsive ways to scaffold for students to make meaning. As an afterschool program, we are able to create that third space (Moje et al., 2004) described above, where students are invited to display their cultural literacies. We do this by showing images of murals and cultural symbols and objects, as well as historical iconography from our students’ community and inviting them to read their world by telling us what they see, what they know and what it means. Then, we look for ways to scaffold and connect to Western literacy practices. Some literacies have to be translated and mediated across cultures. For example, the Virgin Guadalupe painted in a local mural, hovering over a cornfield, might also be recognized as the earth mother, Tonatzin in the Indigenous Mexicatl tradition (for context see this article in *Indian Country News*—a Native news source: <https://www.indiancountrynews.com/index.php/news/education-life/6538-a-short-history-of-tonantzin-our-lady-of-guadalupe>). One student might say the corn is sick and asking for our prayers; another might say the virgin is telling us that she is with us while we work in the fields; a third response might be,

Tonatzin is reminding us that we are the People of the Corn. This kind of contribution invites rich dialogue from which we can scaffold to a variety of Western terminology and concepts, such as, the elements of a story or writing for different purposes. Sometimes, cultural practices and orientations are difficult to translate. For example, in the Indigenous world, the water is alive and has a spirit, though in a Western framework, students are taught that the water is “abiotic” and non-living. When these differences arise, we teach students how to:

- 1) mediate language and meaning (This is one way of understanding the world, but it does not mean that other ways do not exist.)
- 2) make their cultural concepts relevant (Students can speak up or speak with the teacher, bring in artifacts, or invite a speaker to supplement the curriculum.), and
- 3) create a space for their values, traditions and/or beliefs when these orientations are not reflected by the curriculum. To do so, we teach sentence stems so students can “honor and add” to the curriculum, such as: “This (Western concept) is important for me to know, *and* in my culture, we do/we believe/ we create/we honor/we celebrate . . .”

Additional strategies we use to teach students to align their circular ways of thinking with linear ways of writing or storytelling are:

- 1) Engaging in backward mapping. After completing the body of a paper and possibly even the conclusion, the student can then go back and review what they wrote to pinpoint what to write about in the introduction. This method seems to resonate culturally with the students, as opposed to forcing them to complete the first paragraph first, before being able to move on—in linear fashion—to the next paragraph. In fact, insisting on conforming to this linear writing structure can cause anxiety in our students, leading to writer’s block.
- 2) Creating voice recordings, on their cell phones, in their own language, can provide a safe space for students to think through an assignment or a response. After completing the recording, students

can go back, hear the recording and listen for the main points and translate to English.

- 3) Metacognition can be used as tool to increase student awareness and understanding of their own thought processes. This concept could also potentially be a good way to increase our students’ reading comprehension by having them map out what they are thinking while posing questions for them, such as: “What are you trying to say?” or “What thought process led you to get there?”
- 4) Minimizing the emphasis on standardized assessment. We don’t want students to be constrained by their test scores or literacy levels. These frameworks can invalidate critical knowledge constellations that are needed for student achievement (Hernandez-Zamora, 2010).

Since we are not under the same kinds of standardization and assessment pressures as today’s teachers and administrators, we have the flexibility and privilege to operate at the periphery of traditional schooling structures. Today’s classroom moves so quickly that teachers may not get to spend the time they would like going through the curriculum at the pace needed for ESL students. Likewise, our students may lack the confidence, the comfort-level or the language to ask questions; and they get frustrated when they do not understand content and have limited classroom resources to help bridge the circular with the linear. This is why the third space is important. In the third space, we can work to support both teacher and student success and to honor all these diverse skill sets and ways knowing.

Bilingual vs. Monolingual Brains

Q. What is a bilingual brain and how is it related to literacy?

A. Examining the research on bilingual brains has been critical to our work, especially with regards to literacy. We learned that most of the early research that supports classroom literacy theory was developed based on how language functions within the brain of monolingual English speakers.

However, subsequent research developed out of a need to understand how language functions within the

bilingual brain. According to Kokkola (2013), literacy development occurs differently for monolingual English speakers than Spanish-speakers learning English. This is because bilinguals tend to activate both sides of their brains to perform linguistic functions like code-switching. Code-switching, where a bilingual or multilingual speaker shifts between languages and dialects within an utterance, is a healthy way for Spanish speakers to use both English and Spanish together while learning (Kracht & Klein, 2014). This can help with reading comprehension, language proficiency and concept development (Escamilla & Coady, 2000; Ramirez, 2000). For example, bilingual brains can start sentences in Spanish and finish them in English; or, they can use cue words, such as cognates, that help develop connections to what they may miss in their second language.

Thus, bilingual learners can use their first language to develop concepts and connections in the second language. For example, with our Spanish speaking students, cue words such as “Y que?” which roughly translates to “so what” or “and why,” are a way to help them write a thesis and organize their thoughts. “Y que?” is a way of getting them to think: “Why does your thesis matter?” “Why should a reader take the time to read the rest of your essay?” “Does your essay answer the ‘so what?’” This is also a way of helping our students move past their opinions and more towards providing textual evidence in their writing.

We also encourage what García and Wei (2014) call “translanguaging” which is a pedagogical practice that embraces the use of diverse linguistic skill sets. According to García and Wei, we need to move beyond educational policies that promote the idea of bounded languages and allow students to utilize their full repertoire of resources that better reflect their realities.

For example, we encourage students to write freely, in whatever way comes most naturally to them. This means that we have to move away from standardized English writing practices such as recognizing and correcting conventional expressions that are taught and assessed in classrooms and on standardized tests. These practices can be disruptive to a student’s thinking

process as they have to translate meaning and context across cultures, worry about rules, and stylistic differences in formality, etcetera. This is an example of bounded language expectations. It can stifle student creativity, process, and—in the end—success. We do not want our students to worry about these things. We do not want them to have to stop what they are doing midstream because they might lose what they want to say and the motivation to say it.

An example of this comes from one of our students who has low English Language Arts scores in school as well as on standardized tests. However, he is able to stylistically and creatively use his language to rap. Both summers he has been with us he has showcased his rapping talent in his own language. He is able to make connections in his native tongue but still struggles to transcribe his message into his second language. We celebrate our students at each stage of their process and do not stigmatize or shame them when they choose to not use the English language. Additionally, we recognize that the work he does when creating songs will build confidence and easily translate into his second language as he develops his bilingual brain capacities. Translanguaging is another tool that can be used to engage this student in all his linguistic skill sets.

School-based vs. Summer Literacy Enrichment Practices

Q. Is there a difference in the literacy practices used by schools in comparison to the practices used in your summer program?

A. During the academic school year, we find that—regardless of book type—students read to complete an assignment, not necessarily because they are motivated to read on their own. For example, some teachers incorporate books related to a students’ cultures. Others incorporate trending or popular young adult literature. Assignments we have seen include reading and writing in relation to book prompts/reports; workbook writing that includes designing paragraphs, reading and responding to short stories, identifying the components of an essay, completing fill-in-the-blanks with the correct word usage; etcetera. When students read for school

assignments, we find that they can often say the words on the page, but comprehension might be missing. By the time students reflect and translate to build meaning, the rest of the classroom is already two steps ahead, and they fall behind. Oftentimes our students need more time and context than they are given to engage with all the various facets of a book or a story. However, in a fast-paced classroom environment, it is easy to understand how assignment points can take precedence over comprehension.

Sometimes, during the school year, students will be given reading comprehension worksheets where they are asked to read a passage and respond to a series of questions about the passage. To complete these kinds of tasks, we find that students seek out cognates, or words that may be etymologically related. Students will respond to assigned questions, such as, “What is the main idea of the passage?”, based on the one or two cognate words they recognize. For example, students may read a passage and see the word “surprise” in English, which is the cognate of “sorpresa” in Spanish, and think that the passage must be about a surprise of some sort. They may also make this mistake with false cognates or words that seem related but are not. For example, they may see the word “embarrassed” used in the passage and make a connection to the Spanish word “embarazada,” which means to be pregnant, and think that a character in the passage is pregnant rather than embarrassed.

Sometimes their cognate connections are accurate and can be a helpful scaffold that leads to greater meaning making. However, sometimes, cognate connections, even when accurate, can lead to the wrong answers, as in the case of “surprise/sorpresa.” Nonetheless, cognate connections may be the only contextual cue students have for completing a task or assignment. For example, students may rely on cognate cues when following directions or answering comprehension or vocabulary-oriented questions. A Google image search for cognates and false cognates representing various languages groups is a good place to start for teachers who want to learn more.

What we notice is that students engage differently with

these school-based literature assignments during the academic year versus the literacy activities we engage them in during our summer program. In the summer, we work in the third space where translanguaging is embraced and where these same students have time to reflect and respond to content. The books we choose for the summer contain readings in both Spanish and English from authors who represent different locations throughout Latin America and the U.S., such as *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas, *Peluda* by Melissa Lozada-Olivia, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez, and *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros.

Reading comprehension for the summer program was assessed by having students relate their life experiences to themes in the literature. Simply providing access and time to do this work was not enough to get them motivated to read. Discussion groups with peer mentors prompted and gave students a space where their thoughts could be shared and their voices heard around topics such as immigration, assimilation, belonging, citizenship, and navigating between two different cultural worlds. Students were keener to complete the activities in an intentional way when they could relate the content to their own lives, rather than hunting and pecking for answers to themes unrelated to their experiences and for which they had little or comprehensible input, such as stories about baseball or libraries or the circus when students had no exposure to these referents.

The student’s comprehension of context is key to a positive learning outcome. Oftentimes students will recognize words but are not sure of their correct meaning or usage because they lack context. This can make messaging confusing and inappropriately altered, depending on the contextual reference.

In the summer, when students were prompted to answer questions, they would say “the problem is this” or, “the answer is this”—as if completing a worksheet, reciting words from the text without demonstrating comprehension. They wanted to make the teacher happy, so they answered what they thought the teacher wanted to hear, not fully incorporating their own

interpretations or their own ways of thinking. We find that students do not know what they know but if a question is broken down for them, they realize they know more than they thought about the subject, despite low word knowledge. Students need help getting there; they need help navigating from one way of thinking to another. A simple turn-and-talk to prompt self-reflection and the space to debrief their thoughts and opinions in a way that invites translanguaging can go a long way in confidence building. All of these various processes were addressed during our summer program.

Conclusion

After working in schools with newly arrived Spanish and Indigenous language speakers as well as ESL and bilingual high school students, who are first generation students in the United States, we feel it is important that educators expand understanding of diverse literacies and give them an equal space in the classroom. Doing so will move classrooms beyond dualistic frameworks of right/wrong, good/bad, and literate/illiterate, and toward more dynamic and multimodal ways of thinking, being, and engaging. Toward this end, we recommend the following:

- 1) Leverage the diverse literacies practiced by the students' families, and create bridges to help students code-switch or translanguage when needing to conform to more Western literary conventions in their classrooms.
- 2) Recognize circular and non-linear ways of knowing and learning and utilize these in addition to Western, linear conventions to encourage increased engagement and creativity, while decreasing anxiety and writer's block among learners.
- 3) Harness the power of the bilingual brain to encourage a diversity of thought and to teach students how to be effective code-switchers and translators of different languages, cultures, and perspectives.
- 4) Build knowledge with regards to cognates and false cognates and look for ways to utilize this resource with students in the classroom.
- 5) Utilize multicultural literary texts to help increase student engagement and support positive classroom

climates where students see themselves and their experiences reflected in the texts that they read for school.

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A Teacher's Guide to Getting Started with Beginning Writers: Grades K-2

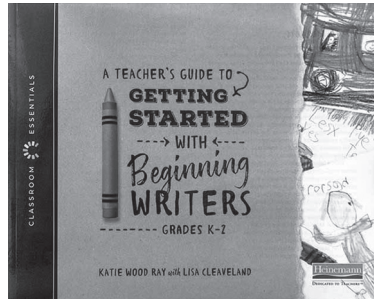
by Meghan K. Block, Ph.D.

Ray, K. W. &
Cleaveland L. (2018)

*A teacher's guide to
getting started with
beginning writers:
Grades K-2.*

Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann.

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**Meghan K.
Block, Ph.D.**

Many teachers identify writing instruction as an area they want to know more about—especially in the early elementary grades. In my experience, many teachers simply want to know where to begin and report feeling underprepared to establish a classroom culture of writing. Katie Wood Ray and Lisa Cleaveland address this concern in their book, *A Teacher's Guide to Getting Started with Beginning Writers: K-2*. They use the book to recount the process they used to establish an effective writers' workshop in which young children were working to compose books while learning about language and writing. Through their explanations, they offer readers useful strategies to organize instruction and thereby to inspire young writers.

The authors begin their book by addressing the importance of children learning through language and children learning about language in the early elementary years. They suggest that the writing workshop allows children to learn through language, and to be successful, teachers must also thoughtfully provide opportunities for children to learn about language throughout their day. As such, though the book focuses on the writers' workshop, the authors also include recommendations for infusing language-learning throughout the day and for supporting important literacy skills (e.g., letter-sound knowledge, print concepts, etc.) throughout the writing workshop.



The book is organized into chapters thoroughly explaining five days of setting up the workshop at the very beginning of the school year. Though they describe five days, the authors also acknowledge that readers should use this book and their suggestions as a guide to the process—a process that could take any number of days. Throughout the book, there are useful examples and sample language to use with children to support their writing development. In fact, one of the most useful aspects of the book is that the authors provide sample language to use with children and then annotate the ways in which that language supports writing development. For example, the book suggests that telling a child they will get their book back the next day to continue writing helps the child understand that writing is an extended process that evolves over time. In addition to the helpful tips throughout the book, Ray and Cleaveland have also included video clips to

support teachers. Finally, the authors also provide space in the book to write notes and brainstorm ideas. In general, the book would be very useful for new teachers and teachers who are looking to facilitate more writing in their K-2 classroom.

Overall, this book serves as a useful resource for teachers who are looking to add more writing into their literacy instruction. Teachers will appreciate the accessible language and the reader-friendly layout. Upon reading this book, teachers will likely feel supported and inspired to establish meaningful writing experiences into their early elementary classrooms.

Author Biography

Dr. Meghan K. Block is an Associate Professor of Elementary Literacy in the Teacher Education and Professional Development Department at Central Michigan University. Her teaching and research interests focus on early literacy development and instruction. She can be reached at block1m@cmich.edu.

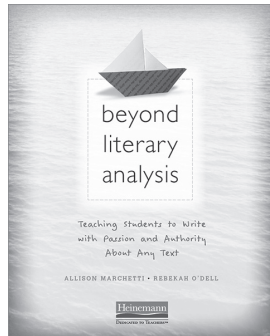


Beyond Literary Analysis: Teaching Students to Write with Passion and Authority about Any Text

by Gina DeBlase, Ph.D.



Marchetti, A. & O'Dell, R. (2018). *Beyond literary analysis: Teaching students to write with passion and authority about any text*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN 978-0-325-09249-2



In *Beyond Literary Analysis*, high-school English teachers Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell take the reader on a journey away from formulaic writing that centers on literary texts and into what's possible when students write about the real world. This text is a wonderful resource for middle- and secondary-school teachers who are looking for new and interesting methods for teaching analytic writing. The lament of many language arts and English teachers is that students' writing is often dry and formulaic. How, we wonder, can we support students and their writing in ways that assist them to better produce a compelling piece of written analysis?

The authors of this book contend that one very good approach is for teachers to broaden the definitions of both what counts as analysis and what counts as text. Incorporating 21st century understanding of texts enables students to write about and analyze movies, television, music, sports, and video games (to name but a few), as well as literature. In the first section, the authors explore how textual analysis has traditionally been taught in classrooms as almost exclusively literary analysis and they make a case for "broaden[ing] the definition of analysis for the 21st century classroom, so that it is, at once, deeper and richer but also incredibly simple: *Authentic analysis is a piece of writing that explores a text*" (p. 13).

With this broadened definition, the first part of the

book makes a case for analysis as a genre of writing that includes the kinds of texts that students love. For instance, music analysis might include how Lady Gaga has revolutionized pop music. A student who is a fan of *Game of Thrones* might write a television analysis of one episode of the series. Interesting and engaging writing may include fashion analysis, sports analysis (e.g., analysis of a particular sports team or player), video game analysis, political analysis, dance analysis, etcetera, as well as analysis of literature.

However, it's the second section of this book that many readers will find invaluable. In this section, Marchetti and O'Dell provide a wealth of classroom activities and strategies for assisting students to uncover and explore those passions that can be leveraged into fertile writing territory. They also provide annotated lists of strategies for potential solutions to common writing problems, such as writing that lacks focus or includes unoriginal ideas. There are a wealth of writing strategies that include use of model texts, mini-lessons, and conferring points to help students craft titles, home in on claims, gather evidence, etcetera. These strategies are engaging and doable, but even more, they appeal to students because they are designed to explore students' original thoughts about a topic or an idea. The examples provided make a compelling case that allowing students to write from their own experiences and to write about those things for which they have knowledge and passion enables students to write authentic analysis—a skill they will need for the rest of their lives.

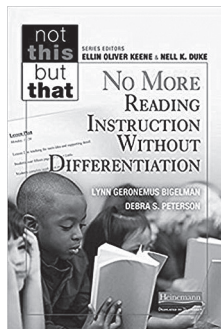
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No More Reading Instruction without Differentiation

by Kathleen Plond

Bigelman, L. G. & Peterson, D. S. (2017). *No more reading instruction without differentiation*. N. K. Duke & E. O. Keene (Series Eds). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishers. ISBN 978-0-325-07435-1



Kathleen Plond

In *No More Reading Instruction Without Differentiation*, authors Lynn Geronemus Bigelman and Debra S. Peterson take on differentiated instruction. The book is divided into three sections: sections one and three are written by Bigelman, section two by Peterson. The first section clarifies why instruction without differentiation is not an effective approach. The last two sections provide readers with concrete and effective strategies for differentiating instruction.

In section one, entitled “Not This,” Bigelman compares a “one size fits all” tag on a sweater at the shopping mall to how we often see classroom instruction. She describes a couple of students and how the one size fits all instruction will not fit them. She argues that activities such as a whole-class reading the same novel does not meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. Instead, Bigelman suggests that we need an instructional framework that will help to provide a variety of scaffolds so that all children can meet the same goals.

In section two, Peterson talks about this instructional framework, which provides a structure that allows the teacher to work with small groups while the other students remain engaged in reading and writing activities. She explains that effective teachers differentiate their instruction, and provides a table describing the research-based practices that they employ. Also in this chapter, Peterson explains how rigor, motivation, and engagement increase when students are involved in the types of higher-order thinking advocated for in the

practices described in this chapter. Additionally, she stresses that observation and assessment should be used to inform differentiation and grouping because grouping patterns affect learning. Peterson ends the section with encouraging readers to consider how they are currently differentiating instruction by responding to a series of reflective questions.

In the final section, Bigelman discusses some of the many ways in which teachers can differentiate their instruction, with particular attention to the role of formative assessment. She also discusses learning targets and states that when students know what the learning target for a lesson is, they are much more likely to be successful. This discussion is supported with examples of how the teachers she works with use learning targets to differentiate instruction. In addition, she gives examples of how students may self-assess and share their learning related to those targets. To support the latter, she provides a table that shows different ways to scaffold student talk.

Although differentiation is important and beneficial regardless of the curriculum in place, Bigelman suggests that both reading workshop and project-based learning lend themselves particularly well to differentiated learning. As she explains, reading workshop provides a structure to the day, opportunities for independent student work, and time for the teacher to work with small groups. Project-based learning provides for authentic learning and supports literacy development. This type of learning leads to a deeper understanding of the topic

Must Read Texts

being studied and students often can choose what they are studying and if they are working independently or in a small group. The final section concludes with a clear description of how to coordinate whole- and small-group lessons and independent learning.

Finally, the book concludes with two appendices. The first details ways to think about a book in the context of writing instruction, including ways to share thinking about a book in writing and orally; the second gives readers a template to use for project-based learning. This template allows the planner to think in advance about texts being used, whole group lessons, small-group, partner and individual work, how the class will wrap-up for the session, and which standards are being addressed.

I recommend this book if you have been wanting to include more differentiation in your reading instruction but aren't sure where to start.

Author Biography

Kathleen Plond is a District Literacy Coach for Cornerstone Education Group and a doctoral student in Reading, Language, and Literature at Wayne State University. She has presented at several area conferences including MRA, MiAEYC, and MCTE. When not working or studying, Kathleen enjoys spending time with her family. She can be reached at kathleen.plond@wayne.edu.



A Closer Look: Children's and Young Adult Literature

by Elena

We are pleased to introduce our readers to a very special guest columnist this issue, Elena, of Elena Reads and Reviews (www.elenareads.com). Elena is a Michigan student who has been blogging about books and authors for the last two years. In this column, we share an interview with Elena about her work and then share several of the reviews she has published on her blog.



Elena

MRJ Editors: Your blog is impressive! Can tell us a little about how you got started and why you are so passionate about sharing your book love?

Elena: I've always loved reading, even as a little kid. I started reading my first books at around age two or three and read my first chapter books at four. It was actually author and teacher Lisa Rose's idea for me to start a book blog once she saw how much I loved reading. I love reading and want to show others that reading is awesome, and there is a book for everyone.

MRJ Editors: There are so many good and not-so-good books out there. How do you choose which books to review?

Elena: I rarely give up on books. Even if they're not the best, I try to read the whole thing. I choose the books I review mostly based on whether they look diverse, because my blog is mostly for diverse books. If I find a book that catches my eye (it might be a cool cover, interesting title, or author I know), I will read the back or inside where the summary of the story is. If it seems good, I will read it and review it.

MRJ Editors: You've had the opportunity to interview some great authors. What was that like?

Elena: I get super excited to interview some authors because it's like talking to a celebrity. It's cool because they're doing something that is my dream—to publish a book. Learning more about them helps me gain more confidence about writing a book and it's also just awesome to be able to talk to authors.

MRJ Editors: A lot of teachers read this journal. What would you want to tell them about your blog?

Elena: I have a big selection of reviews for almost every age. I mostly review books with diverse topics and strong girl characters. Also stories that include people of different races, religions, and abilities can be found on my blog. I specifically point out what books are good for classrooms, but really they all are.

MRJ Editors: What advice do you have for other students that might want to read and review books?

Elena: Read it. Tell people what you liked about the book and what it was about. Express your love to read and write by not only writing reviews but having fun with it because reading is fun. Enjoy blogging and make it a priority so that it is constantly updated.

MRJ Editors: Is there anything else you would like us to tell our readers?

Elena: Read. Read. Read some more. And follow Elena Reads on social media so you can learn about diverse books from a kid's point of view.

Instagram: @elenareads_, Twitter: @elena_reads, Facebook: @elenareads.co

What follows are a selection of some of Elena's favorite book reviews. Elena has written far more reviews than we can share in this format, and we encourage readers to check out her blog for more, as well as to read some great interviews with authors.

Must Read Texts

Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library

by Chris Grabenstein
Random House Books for Young Readers
2013 ISBN13: 9780375870897
304 pages, Grade 3-7



You're locked in a library for 24 hours. You need to find your way out using only resources from the library. Fire exits and windows are not permitted. What do you do? In *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library* by Chris Grabenstein, you may find the answer.

This book is a Willy-Wonka-meets-the-Terces-Society kind of story. If you like mysteries and nail-biting books, check this one out.

The book's main character 12-year-old Kyle Keeley, has lived his whole life without a library. So when world-famous game maker Mr. Lemoncello decides to open a library, he invites a dozen kids to come check it out, including Kyle.

But when the so-called library lock-in turns into an escape game, Kyle must use his cleverness and wits to find an escape route before anyone else to win a big prize. But in the end, Kyle discovers the importance of working together as a team.

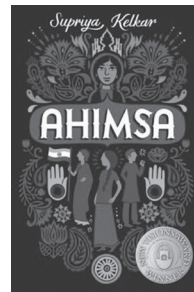
This book was enjoyable because it had me anticipating the next scene. For example, during Kyle's Extreme Challenge, I stayed up all night, jittery about what was going to happen. Also, Mr. Lemoncello is a really charming character. He has good taste in books and a very vivid imagination. I wouldn't mind spending a whole week with him! Some of the clues for escaping the library had to do with reading, so you learned a little bit of trivia from some books.

If you like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Secret Series*, and/or *The Magic Misfits*, you will like this book. Also, readers ages eight to 12 will enjoy this.

This book was great! I rate it four out of four roses!

Abimsa

by Supriya Kelkar
Tu Books
2017 ISBN-10: 1620143569
304 pages, Grade 4-6



Abimsa, by Supriya Kelkar, is a book about a 10-year-old girl named Anjali living in the 1940s in India, when the British were ruling the country. A freedom fighter named Gandhi wants a member from each family to help fight against the British, using ahimsa, or nonviolence.

Anjali hopes her father does not join because she knows how dangerous it could be. But it turns out her mother will be helping Gandhi, not Anjali's dad. While Anjali's mother is helping to stop the British, Anjali has to learn how to be brave during hard times, especially when her mother goes to jail.

I really enjoyed this book because I liked Anjali's character. She is outgoing, kind, and empathetic. I also liked the messages in the book: Never be afraid to stand up for what you believe in, always be brave, and that you can fight for something without violence.

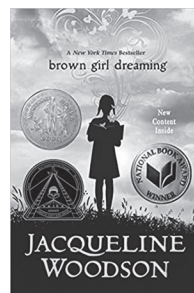
I also learned a few things about India's movement against the British, and about the Hindu and Muslim war that followed.

This book is for people who like stories about strong girl characters like Anjali and her mother. Also, I recommend this book to readers who like a story with a good message.

It gets four out of four roses!

Brown Girl Dreaming

by Jacqueline Woodson
Puffin Books
2016 ISBN-10: 9780147515827
368 pages, Grade 5-6



It's the last day of National Poetry Month, so I wanted to make sure I reviewed this book.

It's called *Brown Girl Dreaming*, by Jacqueline Woodson. It is an autobiography about, of course, Jacqueline Woodson. The book is all free verse poetry. I never knew you could make a story out of a whole bunch of poems.

Brown Girl Dreaming is about the author's life—how her dad left the family and how she loves poetry. It also is about the hardships she faces in her childhood, including being one of the only students growing up as a Jehovah's Witness. Her classmates didn't understand why she couldn't go to birthday parties, say the Pledge of Allegiance, or do some of the other things they did.

In this book, Jacqueline Woodson is growing up during the Civil Rights Movement. She learns about Black people who aren't afraid to die for what they believed in, heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Angela Davis. There is a poem called *Power to the People* that explains it.

I liked how the author expressed herself in poetry. I could actually visualize the story really vividly, like I was there. In the book, she writes a lot about writing. I could imagine everything she says in *First Book* because it is a poem about how she wrote and stapled together her first book. I guess a lot of people who want to be authors do stuff like that. I remember writing books and stapling them together when I was younger. *Brown Girl Dreaming* has dozens of poems in it. My favorites are *What I Believe* and *Each World*.

When my friend Christian let me borrow it, I guessed *Brown Girl Dreaming* would be a good book because it won so many awards, but I was wrong. It was a great book! That's why I am giving it four out of four roses.

I would recommend this book to people who like Jacqueline Woodson's other poetry books. If you like diversity books like me, you should definitely read this. It won many awards, including the Newbery Honor Medal, Coretta Scott King Award, and it also is a National Book Award Winner.

I think this book inspires mostly writers, but also

anyone who wants to reach their goal. I know it says "brown girl" on the cover, but this is a book for every girl or boy (or adult) who would like to read this book! (My mom is reading this book right now).

Jacqueline Woodson has also written *After Tupac and D Foster*, *Feathers*, *Locomotion*, and many, many others.

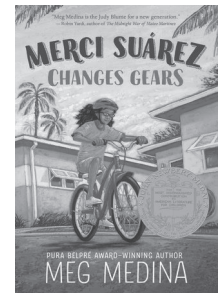
Merci Suárez Changes Gears

by Meg Medina

Candlewick

2018 ISBN-10: 076369049X

368 pages, Grade 4-7



Through a young and witty 11-year-old, *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, by Meg Medina, is a book that shows how we can accept change even when things are really hard. And, this is a good book for Hispanic Heritage Month because the main character is from a Cuban American family. I won the audiobook through a contest by the author and I listen to it almost every night, memorizing sections and imagining the backstories of each character.

I can relate to a lot of what Merci was feeling because a lot of change was coming at her. Going into sixth grade, she has lockers and switches classes. But at home, it's worse. Her grandfather Lolo is acting differently. Things like falling off his bike and forgetting Merci's name are getting her worried. But her family won't tell her what's going on! Then a major catastrophe sends her family into a panic, and Merci must learn to adjust to change and fight through tough times with bravery.

Author Meg Medina is awesome at portraying protagonists. Because of her, I found many characters loveable. She is also great at forming emotions. When Merci was sad, I felt like crying. When Merci was about to do something very risky, it felt like my stomach had bats flying around in it. I think this book should become a movie. If so, I'll gladly play the character of Lena!

I recommend this book to readers who like books that have a lot of ups and downs. Merci accomplished many things, but along the way discouraging events also

Must Read Texts

occurred. This book is perfect for book lovers ages 9+, and it is a great read aloud for classrooms!

It is now on my favorite books list. Even adults liked it: they gave the book a Newberry Medal! It gets four out of four roses!!!!!!

The Magic of Melwick Orchard

by Rebecca Caprara

Carolrhoda Books

2018 ISBN-10: 1512466875

376 pages, Grade 4-8



I usually read books on paperback or hardcover, but Rebecca Caprara, the author of *The Magic of Melwick Orchard* sent me a digital copy of her book, which is going to be released next month.

She said the book has “strong female characters” and it “explores socio-economic diversity” because the main character’s family struggles with money problems because of medical bills. I promised Rebecca Caprara an honest review. This is it:

The Magic of Melwick Orchard is about a girl named Isabel who finds a magical tree in her backyard. The tree helps her learn life lessons, like not to be greedy, and to take care of all living things. This book is also about Isabel’s relationship with her sister named Junie. Isabel and Junie love each other so much and, in the book, Isabel once skipped school and instead went to the hospital to see her sister, who has been diagnosed with cancer. It made me wonder what it would be like to have a sister.

I loved this book because it was very descriptive. The author described the scenery so well, I could believe I was there if I had my eyes closed. I also liked the book because of all of the morals and meaningful messages. The author did a good job making up morals to the story and making them in a creative kind of way. When I found out the secret of the tree, I started reading this book slower because I wanted to savor it, and for it never to end.

I recommend this book to readers who like fantasy and adventure. This book is basically all that. It is also good for readers who like a book that will take them off into a new world, a magical one. I am taken into a different world lots of times reading books.

You really have to get this book. It is really good!

I give *The Magic of Melwick Orchard* four out of four roses!

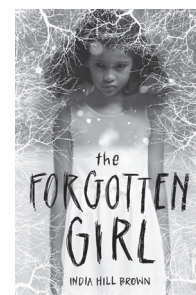
The Forgotten Girl

by India Hill Brown

Scholastic Press

2019 ISBN-10: 1338317245

256 pages, Grade 3-7



It’s almost Halloween, and if you like scary stories this is a story for you. A few days ago I was running down the stairs scared that a ghost was following me, because after reading *The Forgotten Girl* by India Hill Brown, I’ve gotten spooked about ghosts.

In this story, two friends sneak out to play in the snow. But when Iris mistakenly makes a snow angel on a grave, she might have summoned a ghost of a Black girl who had integrated a school, yet isn’t recognized for it. Now, she wants Iris to be her friend... *forever*.

I enjoyed this book because of the detail the author put in this book. I could truly see what the ghost looked like, and how the snow felt. Also, the characters were very understandable. Almost everyone knows what it’s like to be left out, and so does the ghost. Not only was it scary, but it explored diversity. I learned that there used to be such thing as a segregated graveyard. The people that made the graves even gave White people the better care.

If you like ghost stories, you will like this book. Also, if you like the Goosebumps series, this is a good story to read. This book is for readers ages 9 and up. I rate this book three out of four roses! This was a great treat for Halloween!

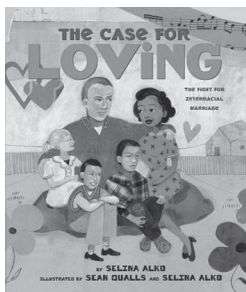
The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage

by Selina Alko

Arthur A. Levine Books

2015 ISBN-10: 0545478537

40 pages, Grade PK-3



I read *The Case For Loving: The Fight For Interracial Marriage*, by Selina Alko. It is about the right to marry someone from a different race.

A long time ago, people weren't allowed to marry people who were a different race than them. But thanks to a Supreme Court case, anyone can now marry anyone they want!

In the book, Richard and Mildred were not allowed to marry each other in Virginia where they lived because he was white and she was Black, so they married in Washington, D.C. Even when they were married, they were sent to jail for living together in Virginia. So they moved to Washington, D.C. and had a family. But they did not like it in their new home, and they didn't think it was fair that they couldn't be together in the place they wanted. So the couple made a court case that people should be able to marry whomever they wanted, no matter the race.

Today is the anniversary of the court decision. People recognize this day as Loving Day. I thought it was because of "love" but it is actually because the couple's last name was Loving. I thought they chose their last name, but no. The man was born with the name.

I am glad their case won because, if it didn't, I would either not be born or have a different dad or look differently than I do. I am biracial. That means I have more than one race in my family. A couple years ago my family attended a Loving Day celebration with a lot of people who were married to someone of a different race. This book made me think that the law allowing interracial marriage helped there to be more diversity in families.

I liked this book because it makes me happy that now

anyone can marry anyone. I also liked it because it proves that people can fight for change.

The author, Selina Alko, also is one of the illustrators of the book. The other is Sean Qualls, who illustrated *Emmanuel's Dream*, that I recently reviewed. The illustrators are married and also interracial, just like the Loving family. I think they wrote and illustrated this book because they believe what the Lovings believed: People should be able to marry anyone they choose.

I give this book four out of four roses.

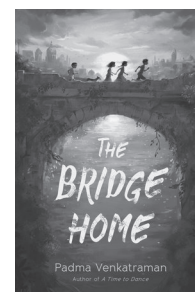
The Bridge Home

by Padma Venkatraman

Nancy Paulsen Books

2019 ISBN-10: 1524738115

208 pages, Grade 5-6



Viji and her older sister Rukku run away from their abusive father and have to make it on their own in the streets of India, where they meet new friends and enemies. As they progress through their journey of finding their true home, they learn about companionship and what it really means to be fortunate.

On the start of the girls' journey, there were only two of them, but at the end of the story they had "brothers", a dog, and even a kind adult as their friends. There are a lot of diverse themes in the book, like strong girl characters, homelessness, the caste system, people with special needs, and different religions.

I liked *The Bridge Home* by Padma Venkatraman because of the plot twists and turns. The plot had a lot of these (which were mostly sad but made the book interesting). I also loved the name of the book. It literally means a bridge home, because they lived under a bridge, but it could also be like their journey in finding the metaphorical "bridge" to their true home.

The author did a great job describing the characters and their personalities so that we could fall in love with them. My favorite character was Kutti the dog,

Must Read Texts

because he was so energetic and gave the girls hope and happiness.

I recommend this book to readers who like touching stories. The book had a lot of important lessons and a bittersweet ending.

This book is super good! It gets four out of four roses!

Author Biography

Elena is a sixth-grade Michigan student who has taken her passion for reading and turned it into a fantastic blog. You can find her at elenareads.com, @elenareads on Instagram, @elena_reads on Twitter, and [elenareads.co](https://www.facebook.com/elenareads) on Facebook, where she shares book reviews, author interviews, and her love of diverse books.



Great Lakes, Great Books

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette
Marten Suckow**

Books about diverse learners come in all genres, fonts, and forms of illustration, just as diversity shows itself in a variety of learning styles, ethnicities, genetics, cultures, and geographic locations. The following books from the Great Lakes Great Books Award list reveal several types of diverse students who are—or could become—part of your classroom. Maybe you recognize some of them.

The Great Lakes Great Books committee selects 40 new books, annually, to introduce K-12 classrooms to some of the best new literature being published. Teachers and librarians provide students with books from their grade-level lists and allow them to vote on their favorites, promoting student participation in the reading process. This year's ballot is closed, but be on the lookout for a new classroom ballot, student certificate, and promotional bookmarks at www.michiganreading.org under the Awards and Grants tab. There's sure to be something on the list for every reading style.

WE DON'T EAT OUR CLASSMATES by Ryan T. Higgins leaves no doubt about how hard it is for young children to behave well when they start school. There are so many new rules to follow. Teachers can be heard repeating, "We don't hit our classmates," or variations of that statement for the first few weeks of class. The author finds it much more fun to exaggerate the issue by introducing Penelope Rex, a T-rex dinosaur, who must be reminded not to eat her delicious classmates. Eating classmates is not tolerated by her teacher, parents, or the other students, who quickly learn to avoid Penelope. Breaking bad habits proves difficult, until the classroom pet goldfish gives Penelope a fright by biting



her, instead. Penelope decides to stick to the rules and make friends with her classmates instead of eating them. The clever text is supported by colorful illustrations that make readers laugh out loud. Don't miss the page showing Penelope in the cafeteria, tapping her plate and telling a classmate "You can sit here," in a speech bubble outside the regular text. This book is pure fun.

ISLANDBORN by Junot Diaz begins with a class assignment to "draw a picture of the country you are originally from," which seems appropriate in Lola's class of first-generation immigrants. Lola was born on "the Island," but soon left in the arms of her mother when a hurricane destroyed their home. Without memories of her birthplace, Lola finds herself at a loss. She decides to talk to her neighbors, who all originate from the same Caribbean region. The local empanada merchant tells Lola about the island's music; her older brother remembers drinking milk straight from coconuts; a classmate's mother recollects the colorful clothing and brightly painted buildings; and her grandmother lovingly recalls the island's sandy beaches. Although the island is not specifically named, the author infers that many other people left because of a repressive political regime. Illustrator, Leo Espinosa, leaves visual clues in

Must Read Texts

the illustrations that could lead to the island's identity, for those readers familiar with the area and its history. Back in class, Lola's teacher hangs all the drawings on the wall and describes them as windows looking at "one another's first homes." Lola's classmates find her drawing missing from the wall because she has learned so much from the project, it takes an entire book to contain her drawings. This strikingly colorful book about social justice received the 2019 Pura Belpre Honor Illustrator Award, and will delight readers from all countries.

HARBOR ME by Jacqueline Woodson features six diverse sixth graders who share the experience of having been the targets of school bullies, while also dealing with social issues at home. They find themselves in a weekly ARTT (a room to talk) session by themselves, without the usual guidance of their teacher. After an uncomfortable first session, Haley comes up with an idea to record the individual stories of the group. Everyone will have a chance to share their personal history and problems at their own pace. Amari is from a caring African-American family who wants to protect him, but knows they must teach him about the dangers of being Black in America—regardless of education or social status. Esteban is under extreme stress because his Dominican father has been detained by ICE and could be sent back to his homeland any day. Ashton is White, but his family is without economic or educational advantages. Tiago and his family of Puerto Rican immigrants is often harassed and belittled because they converse in Spanish as much as they speak English. Holly has always been Haley's best friend because their mothers were friends before them. Since Haley's mom died, Holly's mother has included Haley in family activities and filled a void with stories about her mom. Holly has willingly shared her many economic privileges with Haley, but can't sit still in class and has a hard time learning academic subjects. Haley's story is told in bits and pieces throughout the book, but comes to crisis as the uncle who raised her is ready to move on to a life his own. He is actually making way for Haley's dad, incarcerated for the past decade, to step up to his role as a father. It's time for Haley to accept this change and grow with her new community of friends.

Woodson tackles several social and political issues in this timely story, showing how children are also affected by prejudice and injustice.

ILLEGAL by Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin, is a harrowing tale of 12-year-old Ebo's quest to leave his poverty stricken village in Ghana in search of his family. The story flips back and forth between present day and two years ago when Ebo left his village to catch up to his brother, who was looking for their sister, who was on her way to Europe. The flashbacks track the brothers north across the arid terrain of the Sahara Desert in Africa, amid dangerous confrontations with police, soldiers, and criminals. The story taking place in present day is the last leg of the journey across the water, presumably the Mediterranean Sea. Ebo and his brother, Kwame, start out on a raft, get picked up by a freighter, and use their kindness and problem solving skills to stay out of harm's way. Ebo is full of optimism and readily shares his gift of song, despite the hardships he's faced on this arduous trek. As readers share the injustice, heartbreak, and physical challenges faced by Ebo and Kwame, they cannot help but feel empathy for all who are forced from their homes into unfamiliar surroundings and dangerous situations. The graphic-novel style of storytelling by illustrator, Giovanni Rigano, highlights the plight of immigrants with unforgettable images.

DON'T CALL ME CRAZY: 33 Voices Start the Conversation About Mental Health, edited by Kelly Jensen, has an interesting anthology of personal essays from people who experience mental health issues every day of their lives. The book is divided into five chapters that begin with a definition of "What's Crazy?" and then work through "Where Crazy Meets Culture," "The Mind-Body Connection," and "Beyond Stress and Sadness," before reaching equilibrium with "To Be Okay." Adam Silvera and Shawn David Hutchinson, both authors of young adult fiction, suffer from depression and share how they incorporate some of those feelings and experiences into their own writing. The dynamic resources section includes books, films, and websites. Jensen encourages readers to start talking and understanding the myriad ways mental health affects

the lives of our family, our friends, and ourselves. She then reminds readers to “keep the conversation going.”

Author Biography

Lynette Marten Suckow works at the Peter White Public Library’s reference desk in Marquette, MI where she provides assistance with library resources and digital technology. She holds a master’s degree in education from Northern Michigan University, is actively involved with the Marquette-Alger Reading Council, and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member since 2006. She can be reached at lynette.suckow@gmail.com.



Michigan Reading Journal

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 6,000 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.).

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*.

New this year! 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.

Review of Manuscripts

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, etcetera, 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*.

Part I: Guiding Questions

1. Does the article address an important or compelling topic for reading practitioners in Michigan? Why or why not?
2. Does the manuscript contain an appropriate blend of theory, research and practice? Are there ways to improve this balance?
3. 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?
4. 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?)?
5. Will the article appeal to *MRJ*'s diverse audience? What can be improved?
6. What are the revisions that you would recommend to improve this manuscript for our practitioner audience?

Part II: Recommendation Regarding Publication: Reviewers mark recommendations by placing an X in the appropriate box below. Reviewer recommendations are not disclosed directly to the authors.

☐Accept ☐Accept with Minor Revisions ☐Revise Substantially and Resubmit ☐Reject

Submitting Your Work

All submissions should represent the author's original work, not be submitted for publication elsewhere, and follow guidelines as described above. All submissions should be sent electronically as e-mail attachments to the journal's editorial team at MRJ@wayne.edu. Manuscript submissions should be sent as Microsoft Word documents, and graphic submissions should be sent in black and white as jpeg or tiff files. Abstracts are not required. Due to the blind review process, manuscripts should not include the author's name. A separate cover letter should be submitted as a Word document and should provide: a) title of submission, b) a brief narrative describing the article and its fit with the journal audience, c) the type of article you are submitting (see article types, above), d) author's name, e) author's title/position, f) school/district affiliation, g) telephone number, h) e-mail address, i) mailing address, and j) up to 75 words of biographical information the author would like to share with readers regarding his/her professional work or background.

Deadlines: The *Michigan Reading Journal* is published three times yearly—fall, winter, and spring. Manuscripts are reviewed on a rolling basis.



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