Colleagues

this issue:

LITERACY

Colleagues
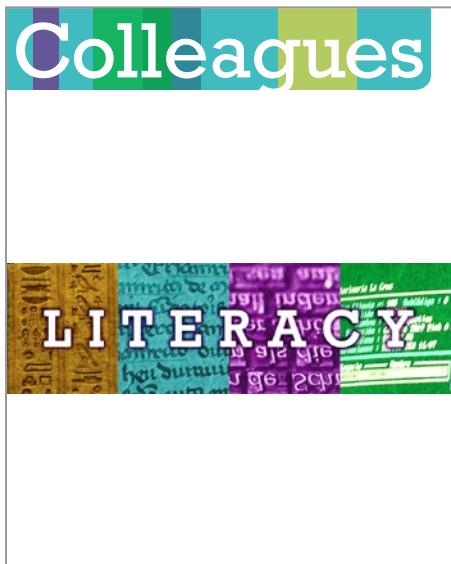
Cover Art: Various communication types and technologies through the ages

Written communication to capture stories and information has been around since the first cave drawings. The importance of keeping information alive and passed down through the generations has advanced and changed through culture and technology.

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Focus on Literacy

Dr. John Shinsky meets with the new dean of the COE, Dr. Barry Kanpol.

On behalf of Grand Valley State University's College of Education, welcome to our 2016 *Colleagues* magazine special feature issue on literacy. We are publishing this to highlight one of today's most critical issues in K-12 education. Literacy is such a high priority for the future of the state that Michigan's governor, Rick Snyder, created the Third-Grade Workgroup to analyze Michigan's reading proficiency at the third-grade level, and to suggest policies to improve reading proficiency across Michigan.

This bold action was the result of many factors. One being the 2013 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which stated that 69% of Michigan students are not proficient in reading at the beginning of fourth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In addition, when Michigan students are compared to students from other states, Michigan ranks 40th and continues to fall behind. In fact, Michigan was one of only five states to lose ground in reading proficiency from 2003-2013, while every other state improved (Third-Grade Reading Workgroup Report, 2015).

Although these standardized assessments represent a snapshot of student reading achievement, they reveal critical information that warrants consideration as we address the literacy needs of all students as a united community, specifically when given the strong connection between third-grade literacy and high school graduation (National Governors Association, 2013). It is essential that we respond to these challenges by using our collective exper-tise to improve children's reading proficiency. To begin a broader discussion, in this issue of *Colleagues* magazine you will find stories about teaching strategies across a spectrum of literacy education topics.

At this time I would like to introduce you to our new Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Barry Kanpol. He joins us from Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne and starts here in July.

Dr. Kanpol received a bachelor's degree in English literature in 1981 from Tel Aviv University. He taught in Israeli Public Schools before immigrating to the U.S. in 1983. He received his master's and doctoral degrees from The Ohio State University in 1984 and 1987, respectively. His academic work addresses issues of race, class and gender and he has written and presented extensively in the areas of federal educational policies and reforms, multicultural education, urban education and the role of popular culture.

I look forward to working with Dean Kanpol as we continue to address the challenging issues facing education in our region and throughout the state. Under his leadership, the COE will further expand its role and commitment to ensure every child in Michigan receives a quality education from well-trained teachers and administrators.

E. John Shinsky, Ph.D.
Interim Dean, College of Education
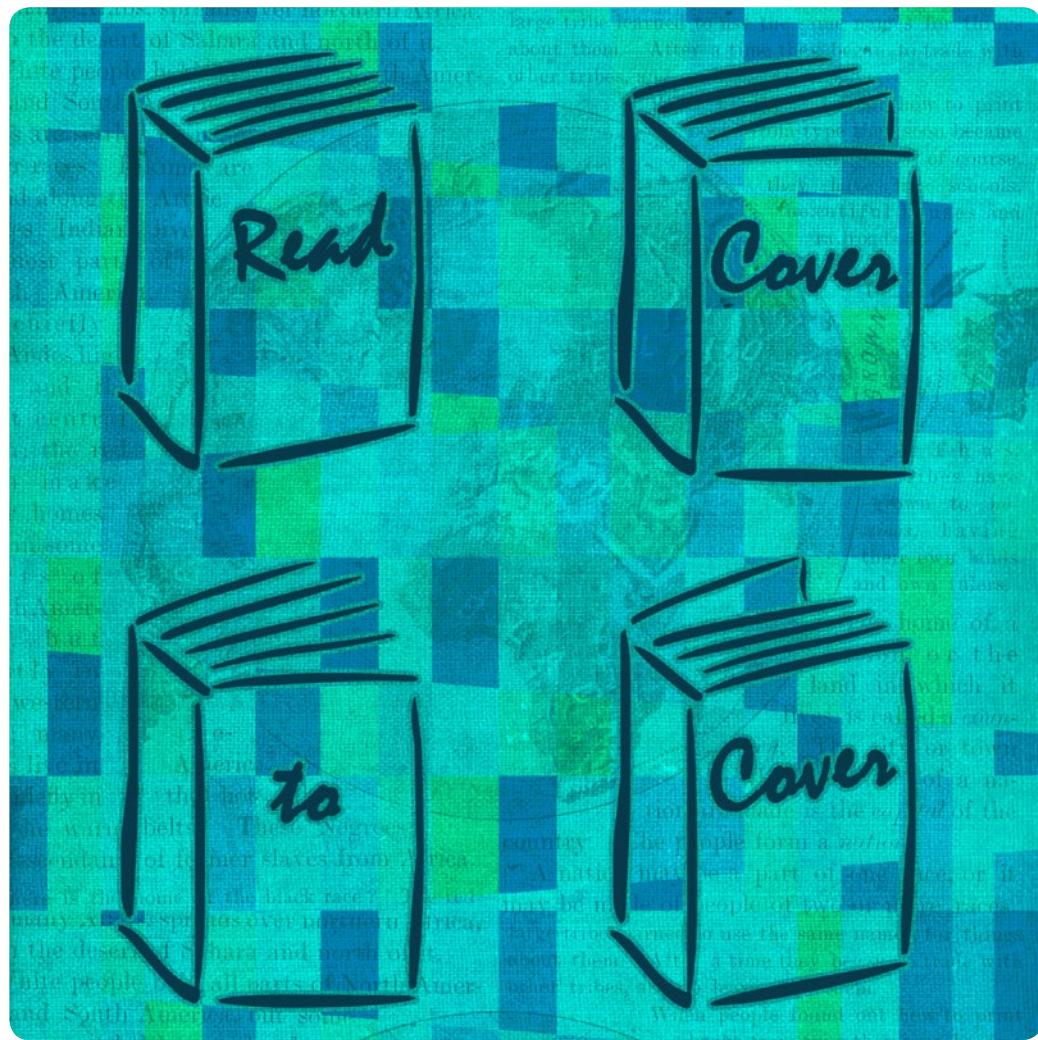
Illustration by Lisa R. Tennant

Reading: A Definition that Supports Instruction

By Nancy Patterson, GVSU Faculty

We lived in a tiny bungalow on a shady street in Flint, Michigan, a house with two bedrooms, a large room that served as a living room, dining room, and an old-fashioned kitchen that might be considered charming today, but back then was just out of style.

Mornings have never been the best time of day for me. That morning was no different. In front of me was a bowl of rapidly wilting cereal, a glass of orange juice made too sour by the sugary goop in my bowl, and a cereal box. On the back of the box were comic book characters playing. It was late fall and because we moved often that year, I was in my third consecutive first grade classroom. I knew my alphabet, and I knew the sounds of that alphabet. It was the 1950s and my current school district used the Dick and Jane reading series coupled with something called "whole word" (not to be confused with "whole language").

Understand that I was an offbeat kid fascinated by language. At the age of four I would talk to my playground

friends about the fact that some people said "in-ter-esting" and others said "in-chrest-ing." And sometimes I would say a word over and over so that it lost meaning, so I could focus on the sound of the word.

Suddenly, on that chilly morning in Flint, I was finally able to read what those characters on that cereal box were saying. One character was jumping and I realized that the bubble above another character's head said "JUMP!" The picture connected with the words and I had just read both and understood what was happening on that cereal box. I pulled the box closer to me and picked out the beginnings and endings of words and right there at that birch dining table that I am now sitting at as I write this article, I became a reader. I used my innate inferring skills, the context of the images, and read the short narrative contained in those comic book boxes.

I had just joined what Frank Smith (1987) calls the literacy club.

> "...reading relies on both cognitive and social processes and embraces a beautiful complexity, one that sometimes gets lost in our attempts to efficiently teach children to read."

The Michigan definition of reading

The state of Michigan, drawing from the International Literacy Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, defines reading as "the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation". (2002, Michigan Board of Education) This well-worded definition recognizes that the act of reading relies on both cognitive and social processes and embraces a beautiful complexity, one that sometimes gets lost in our attempts to efficiently teach children to read.

But what does Michigan's definition of reading mean for children, teachers, administrators, and policy makers?

The process of constructing meaning

Frank Smith, a cognitive psychologist who founded a new school of thought on reading, psycholinguistics, reminds us that human beings are driven to understand the world around them (2011). From the moment we are born we begin to feel, smell, see, hear, and taste the world; with these senses comes a lifelong quest to understand the world around us. We bring that same need to make sense, or construct meaning, to not only print text, but to the auditory and visual texts we encounter on a daily basis. The ability to understand is innate, yet the ability to read text is not. We have to be taught to read.

According to Smith, constructing meaning involves accessing what we already know, predicting what is to come, and adjusting our predictions based on new information.

When we read print text, we access what we know about phonics, vocabulary, and syntax. We also assess what we know about information organization, narrative structure, and other text structures. And, we access our knowledge about the topic of the text.

When we read something that we haven't predicted, we tend to back up and reread either a word or a phrase or whatever it takes to understand. This holds true for reading print text as well as reading other forms. The next time you go to a movie, notice how you cognitively anticipate the story. Chances are that if a couple falls in love at the beginning of a movie, something will go wrong. Your knowledge of the romantic genre tells you what's to come.

Furthermore, our knowledge of English syntax tells us that *"cat tree up is the the"* is not how English sentences work. Ironically, our syntactic knowledge also allows us to unravel those words and rearrange them into something that makes sense. By the age of five or six children are fluent in

their home language and able to use that language to make statements, ask questions, make demands, and provide exclamations (Bruner, 1996). Children infer what grammatical structure is necessary for

> *"When we read print text, we access what we know about phonics, vocabulary, and syntax. We also assess what we know about information organization, narrative structure, and other text structures."*

them to satisfy whatever their immediate need is. New studies conclude that children as young as four months are capable of inferring (Denison, Reed & Xu, 2013). This process involves prediction and happens in a cognitive environment of uncertainty. In other words, infants use their innate powers of prediction even when they do not have very much information.

Readers do the same thing.

The complexities of children's predictive and inferring processes have been explored by recent eye movement studies. Using computerized eye tracking devices, researchers discovered that reading does not happen in a linear, letter-by-letter, line-by-line progression, Instead, children's eyes travel across text, skipping letters, words, and sometimes lines. Their eyes move down to a lower line and then back and to the end of line back to the beginning. When pictures are available, readers' eyes travel to the picture and then to words that directly refer to the image. Readers use visual cues to predict and confirm the emerging meanings of the texts (Duckett, 2008; Kim, Duckett,& Brown, 2010).

Context and dynamic interaction

Remember when you had to read a novel in your English class and the teacher assigned a couple of chapters and announced there would be a quiz on those chapters the next day? How did you read those chapters? Did you read them thinking that you were being introduced to individuals who inhabited a different time and place? Or did you read in order to pick out concrete details that were likely to appear on the quiz?

Context plays a critical role in the meaning we construct.

The purpose for reading is part of the context we bring to the act of reading. If we are going to be quizzed on a piece

of text, we read it differently than if we are wading into a text—getting a feel for characters' lives, conflicts, and surroundings. The same is true for installing a new printer or assembling a model airplane. We don't read those instructions the same way we read a poem or a letter from a loved one living far away.

When we were assigned a chapter in a history book and asked to answer the questions at the end, most of us went straight to the questions and searched for the answers without reading the whole chapter. The context of the questions established the purpose for reading and we read the chapter differently.

I love to use Theodore Roethke's poem "My Papa's Waltz" to show how prior knowledge shapes the context of our reading. Most graduate students believe the poem is about a boy who is abused by his father. They interpret lines like "The whiskey on your breath" and "I hung on like death" as evidence of abuse. But scholar Karl Malkoff (1966) says the poem is simply about Roethke's father, whom young Ted adored, dancing him around the kitchen when he got home from working in the Saginaw, Michigan greenhouses the family owned. Teachers, however, trained to detect signs of child abuse, come from a different context and, therefore, create a different meaning for the poem. Teachers in my class are not wrong in their interpretation. They bring their own background knowledge to the poem and construct their own meaning.

We can simply look at the way people of faith all over the world interpret religious texts. Some interpret those texts one way, others interpret those same texts very differently. Though the meaning teachers construct isn't the same as the Roethke's, who was born in 1908. Literary critics today would affirm that the meaning and the processes that teachers used to arrive at that interpretation demon-

strated a rational conclusion to the evidence represented in the text (Auckerman, 2007). Once we have discussed the poem, and I have provided more information about Roethke, the meaning they constructed shifts a bit. This, too, is common among readers, even very young ones.

Lev Vygotsky (1980), the Russian linguist and psychologist who has greatly influenced how we think about language, culture, and their roles in learning, argues that it is our dynamic interactions with others that shape how we understand. Language, he says, is a catalyst for thought, which in turn urges us to represent emerging thoughts through language, which then becomes a catalyst for even more thought. It is a wonderfully complex cycle.

This is what "social process" means in Michigan's definition of reading. We bring our knowledge of how the world works to the act of reading. We bring our experience with other texts, including those that are oral and visual, to the act of meaning making (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). We bring to the act of reading, from the moment we first begin to realize that text has meaning, our oral language skills (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). It is why even our youngest readers need to share their emerging meanings through oral and written language.

That dining room table where I sat, wrapped in a flannel bathrobe and a cloak of sleepiness in front of a bowl of soggy cereal began more than 60 years of reading the word and the world. Yet, it wasn't an easy path; I didn't love reading until I bumped into my first Nancy Drew book in sixth grade, and school reading tasks were incredibly boring for me. Later in my graduate program, I experienced life as a struggling reader when I had to read the likes of Jacque Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Roland Barthe. But my brain always, always did what Michigan's definition of reading continues to describe. It brought all of my phonemic, syntactic, semantic, and world knowledge to the text at hand.

So, how does all this fit with Michigan's definition of reading? It all has to do with meaning. Reading is meaning. At the heart of every curriculum and literacy lesson there should be something full of meaning that connects to students' experiences with the language they speak and the experiences they have through that language. If the literacy tasks are not full of meaning, then it is difficult to truly join the literacy club. Membership in that club involves a lifelong journey. We can never truly master reading. We simply travel further along a continuum that involves our everyday lives, the texts we read, and the conversations we engage in.

Every day my own literacy club membership strengthens and rewards me. And it all started on a chilly November morning in Flint, Michigan.

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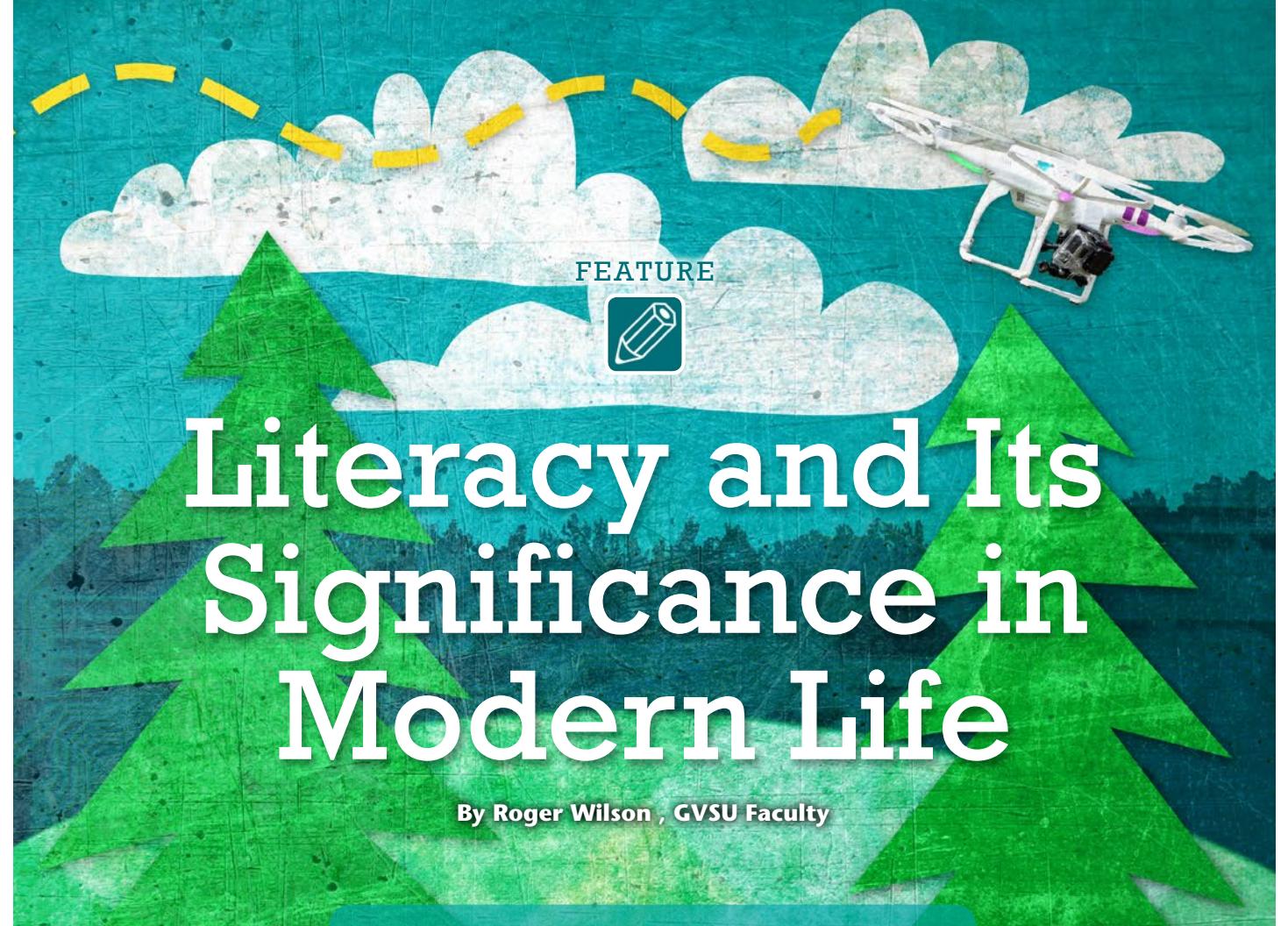
FEATURE

Literacy and Its Significance in Modern Life

By Roger Wilson , GVSU Faculty

No skill is more crucial to the future of a child, or to a democratic and prosperous society, than literacy.

~ Los Angeles Times, "A Child Literacy Initiative for the Greater Los Angeles Area"

The importance of literacy in modern society cannot be over-emphasized. The increasing need for all citizenry to acquire more than minimal basic literacy skills finds itself being played out in the struggle that is daily life. The significance of literacy in our lives, be it the ability to read or adequately interpret and comprehend the meaning of various levels of text for the purpose of being able to successfully participate in and navigate modern society is made ever more apparent through its demonstrated correlation with educational attainment (e.g., Figure 1A, Hyunjoon & Kyei, 2007). Through that attainment brings subsequent and meaningful employment. The failure to become sufficiently literate, however defined, invariably leaves the economic fate of many of those citizens in a precarious situation. And while some may argue that social class (SES) is the major factor in educational attainment, on average, SES is also associated with levels of literacy as a direct result of the impact that adequacy and stability of economic wealth can have on families.

Important to this discussion is the understanding that literacy is more than textual decoding and comprehension. Literacy can also impact other cognitive abilities. For example, Dotson et al. (2009) found that "the preponderance of studies that compare the test performance of literate and illiterate individuals or that use continuous measures of literacy have shown effects of reading ability on a range of cognitive tasks, including measures of orientation, visual and verbal memory, visuospatial ability, attention, language, calculation, and praxis" (p. 580).

Literacy and the Workforce

The lack of adequate literacy in our society, its association with subsequent educational attainment, and the implications for future employability are never more apparent than when the economy is in the throes of a recession. As Table 1 demonstrates, both before and after the last recession, the unemployment rate for adults 25 years of age and older was inversely related to their educational attainment. That is, the fewer years of formal education and corresponding lack of credentials, the higher the unemployment rate for those same individuals. The approximately 3:1 ratio of unemployed adults with no HS diploma compared to unemployed adults with a Bachelor degree and above was maintained throughout the recession, and essentially still continues today. At no time did those with higher educational attainment (i.e., some college and above) ever exceed the national unemployment rate, whereas those without a HS diploma experienced unemployment rates approximately 50%-60% above the national rate, and still do. For those with lower levels of educational attainment and its associated levels of literacy, the job market is not particularly forgiving and even less so when the economy is weak (Table 1).

Table 1

Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment for Adults 25 Years and Older, 2008-2014

Year	Less than a High School Diploma	High School Graduates, No College	Some College or Associates Degree	Bachelors Degree or Higher	Average Nationa
January 2008	7.7	4.7	3.7	2.1	5.0
January 2009	12.4	8.2	6.5	3.9	7.8
January 2010	15.3	10.2	8.6	4.9	9.8
January 2011	14.3	9.5	8.1	4.3	9.2
January 2012	13.0	8.5	7.2	4.3	8.3
January 2014	9.6	6.5	5.9	3.3	6.6

Department of Labor. (2015a)

Some may argue that the higher unemployment rates are due to the presence of older, less skilled Americans, but that same data paints a starker picture for young adults 20-24 years of age. While their unemployment rate for those possessing a Bachelor degree or higher was 6.7% in 2014, it jumped to nearly four times that level (25.3%) for those who had not completed high school (NCES, 2015). That very same 25.3% was over 2.5 times higher than the same unemployment rate for 25-64 year-olds who had not completed high school. Simply put, the employable, younger adults in our society with same or lower levels of educational attainment and associated literacy levels, on average, experience higher rates of unemployment and do so significantly more during economic downturns.

When examining younger adult employment rates without categorization by educational attainment, they generally earn less than their older counterparts (Table 2).

Table 2

Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-time Wage and Salary Workers by Age, 3rd Quarter 2015 Averages

	Age 16 +	Age 25 +	Age 16-24	Age 20-24	Age 25-35	Age 25-54
National Average	$803	$857	$491	$508	$739	$837

Department of Labor. (2015c)

Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-time Wage and Salary Workers by Educational Attainment, 3rd Quarter 2015 Averages

	Less Than a High School Diploma	High School Graduates, No College	Some College or Associates Degree	Bachelors Degree or Higher	Advance Degree	Average National
25 and over	$492	$672	$773	$1143	$1394	$857

Department of Labor. (2015b)

When levels of educational attainment are factored in for all age groups 25 and over, those workers without a HS diploma earn, on average, far less than what their degree bearing counterparts (Table 3). In the 3rd quarter of 2015, HS graduates earned, on average, 87% of the usual weekly wage and salary of full-time workers possessing some college or an associate's degree, but only 59% compared to those with a bachelor's degree.

The aftermath of the major recessions of the last few decades has witnessed a major corporate shift toward increased technology use and with it, the expectation for increased knowledge and expertise on the part of workers as each recession has seen an eventual return to pre-recession productivity levels but with less employment demand (i.e., less workers). Those same recessions have led to an industrial re-visioning and restructuring of the workplace that includes new technological skills expected of the nation's labor force. As industrialized nations continue their struggle to differentiate their workforce from the much cheaper manual or less skilled labor often associated with nations in the First World, increased skills by America's workers which are invariably associated with greater levels of education and certification which, in turn, imply heightened levels of literacy in all their forms have become the new reality.

The educational implications for the country's workers as well as those currently in the K12 system wrought by these global market forces are profound. For all intents and purposes, a minimal college education (i.e., community or four-year) has become the new HS diploma. Long gone are the days of underperforming in high school and then reasonably falling back on acquiring economically gainful employment that leads to a satisfactory middle class existence. And while there are those who do not think that college is necessary for everyone, that the young entrepreneurial spirit should be exercised through vehicles such as tech start-ups or participation in tech incubators (e.g., Weider, 2011), there is a significant difference between encouraging particularly capable individuals to explore that valuable path, and that course becoming the primary consideration for most workers, especially given that 9 out of 10 startups fail (Griffith, 2014). No, a significant majority of the population needs relatively stable and predictable employment circumstances.

As the economy evolves, what is required is an increasingly more educated and skilled population in order to maintain itself on a level comparable to previous generations, and that also necessitates higher degrees of literacy in the 21st century by Americans. Failure to acquire those requisite literacy skills frequently dooms those individuals to a

life of uncertainty and greater difficulty derived from the associated economic insecurity that will too often ensue, not to mention the correlates of poorer health and shorter life expectancy. "Poverty not only diminishes a person's life chances, it steals years from one's life" (Reisch cited in Lowrey, 2014).

Literacy and the Law

Illiteracy or insufficient literacy and educational attainment also tend to increase the likelihood of those same individuals, often males, interacting negatively with the legal system. For example, profiles of the prison population from a 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (Haigler, Harlow, O'Connor & Campbell, 1994) found that compared to general households, the prison population was less educated, with nearly 35% having 9-12 years of schooling and 14% having only 0-8 years. In fact, "dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates. Nationally, 68% of all males in prison do not have a high school diploma. Only 20% of California inmates demonstrate a basic level of literacy, and the average offender reads at an eighth grade level" (Hanson & Stipek, 2014). This should be of particular concern to all of us because with only 5% of the world's population, the U.S. is also in the unenviable position of possessing "more than 20% of the world's prison population" (ACLU, 2015). And, if lack of literacy and educational attainment has some small part to play in the decision-making that leads individuals down a path to eventual incarceration, then bolstering the skills of reading and writing at an early age would seem to take on heightened importance, for social if not economic reasons.

For instance, in California alone, the cost of housing a prisoner annually exceeds K12 per pupil funding by a factor of seven (Hanson & Stipek, 2014). And as the well-known HighScope-Perry study beginning in the 1960s demonstrated, the lifetime effects from involvement with a high quality preschool experience for those born into poverty and identified as being at risk of failing in school can be powerful. Decades later at age 40, the adults from the original program group (who were exposed to literacy and general school readiness skills) compared to those in the group who experienced no preschool were much more likely to have acquired basic achievement at age 14 (49% v 15%), graduate from high school (77% v 60%), earn a higher annual income and have been less involved with the law (36% v 55%). As early as age five, it was reported that students in the program cohort had even tested above an IQ of 90 more frequently than their non-program counterparts (69% v 28%) (Schweinhart et al., 2005). The validity issue of IQ for five-year-olds aside, the value of literacy skills and the early exposure to them cannot be overstated. In fact, 50 years later, both remain the foundation of the federal government's Head Start program.

Literacy and the Economically Disadvantaged

Never has one set of skills been so important in the lives of citizenry. And while being literate does not guarantee one's economic future, lack of literacy is a fairly strong predictor of the struggles that await those less literate. For example, in reviewing Michigan's final MEAP and MME/ACT reading data from 2013, the sheer number of students statewide in 3rd through 11th grades who are deemed economically disadvantaged—free lunch eligible (family of four with annual income less than $24,000) and reduced lunch eligible (family of four up to 185% of federal poverty level—approximately $44,000)—should alarm legislators (Table 4, page 14). And while their actual numbers decrease up into HS, that fact probably has less to do with movement out of poverty than it does with the likelihood of those students having dropped out.

Michigan students identified as being economically disadvantaged underperformed their non-economically disadvantaged peers on reading and writing in 2010 and

	2013			2010		
Grades	All Students	ED Students	% ED	All Students	ED Students	% ED
3rd	105,010	54,557	52%	109,935	55,825	51%
4th	106,654	53,759	50%	112,549	56,305	50%
7th	110,379	52,513	48%	115,696	54,160	47%
8th	111,879	51,579	46%	115,551	52,068	45%
11th	105,329	40,806	39%	109,617	38,072	35%

(MDE, 2013a; 2014b)

2013 (Tables 5 and 6). In fact, the gap in proficiency levels was considerable at every grade, nowhere more so than Writing at 11th grade. In reading, economically disadvantaged students begin their state testing in 3rd grade 28 percentage points behind their non-economically disadvantaged counterparts. Up through 11th grade, that gap varies slightly, ranging in difference from 23-29 percentage points. The gap in writing is likewise maintained at 26 percentage points through middle school, but escalates significantly in HS to a difference of 46 percentage points, and this with a comparatively smaller percentage of the students in 11th grade being identified as economically disadvantaged.

Important to note in this discussion was the trend line of proficiency levels between those in 7th and 8th grades in writing and reading, and those in 11th grade. In both subject areas, the line was downward with the exception of the writing score for non-economically disadvantaged students; 11th grade students achieved higher relative proficiency levels than their middle school counterparts. Unlike many states, Michigan and a handful of others designates that all students take the national ACT in 11th grade. There is any number of possible reasons for that downward trend between 7th or 8th grade and 11th grade including the fact that the MEAP test administered in grades 3-8 is state-created, whereas the ACT is a nationally developed test that has been designed to generally address

the breadth of state curricula across the country. While the authors of the ACT claim its general alignment with Michigan's curriculum standards, whatever lack of fidelity may exist, all students in the state would have been similarly confronted in 11th grade. Some would simply have been better-prepared and better able to respond. The results of that performance for the economically disadvantaged and the size of the proficiency gap with their non-economically disadvantaged peers does not bode well for their HS graduation prospects nor does it portend well for their likelihood of success in college if they do graduate.

The proficiency gap in reading and writing between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students remains an important issue because it identifies the static, if not growing, differences between the performance results of typical middle and upper class students, and those from lower SES groupings. That difference is important because in an evolving and advanced industrialized economy such as ours, literacy and schooling and the associated educational credentials matter (e.g., HS diploma; college diploma/degree; various certificates and so forth). Credentials or the lack of them matter because of what they infer about each of us and what that means about the potential for economic participation and success in the adult world: gainful employment and all of its implications in our society. Understanding not only the plight of those economically disadvantaged, but develop-

ing a greater appreciation for the daily circumstances of their lives and the resulting impact on their potential for success in school and in economic life are very important. Social class inarguably remains a powerful influence upon individuals' life trajectories, from birth and early childhood experiences through to adulthood. Evidence of that can be seen, on average, in school readiness, literacy levels, and the general academic performance of the young who have been raised in disadvantaged circumstances. And, of course, whether they even graduate from HS or are eligible for, let alone successful in, college is also related to that. But the focus upon schools as the primary institutional mediator between those circumstances and more meaning-

ful participation in economic life is wrongheaded. We live in a class-based society, and so how can schools, as microcosms of the larger society, reflect anything other than the circumstances of their students, notwithstanding all the well-intentioned and difficult work done by educators to overcome those circumstances. "No society can realistically expect schools alone to abolish inequality. If students come to school in unequal circumstances, they will largely, though not entirely, leave schools with unequal skills and abilities, in both cognitive and non-cognitive domains" (Rothstein, 2004, p. 129). Schools can only do so much. More is required from society.

Table 5

MEAP/ACT-MME Reading—Comparison of Proficiency Percentages for Economically Disadvantaged and Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students in Select Grades, 2010 & 2013

Grades	2013			2010		
	All Students	ED Students	Non-ED	All Students	ED Students	Non-ED
3rd	61%	48%	76%	63%	50%	77%
4th	70%	57%	83%	64%	50%	77%
7th	60%	45%	74%	56%	40%	69%
8th	73%	60%	83%	56%	41%	68%
11th	54%	38%	63%	54%	36%	63%

(MDE, 2013a; 2014b)

Table 6

MEAP/ACT-MME Writing—Comparison of Proficiency Percentages for Economically Disadvantaged and Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students, 2010 & 2013

Grades	2013			2010		
	All Students	ED Students	Non-ED	All Students	ED Students	Non-ED
4th	51%	37%	63%	47%	33%	65%
7th	53%	39%	65%	48%	34%	67%
11th	49%	30%	76%	44%	25%	80%

(MDE, 2013a; 2014b). State testing of writing only occurs in these grades
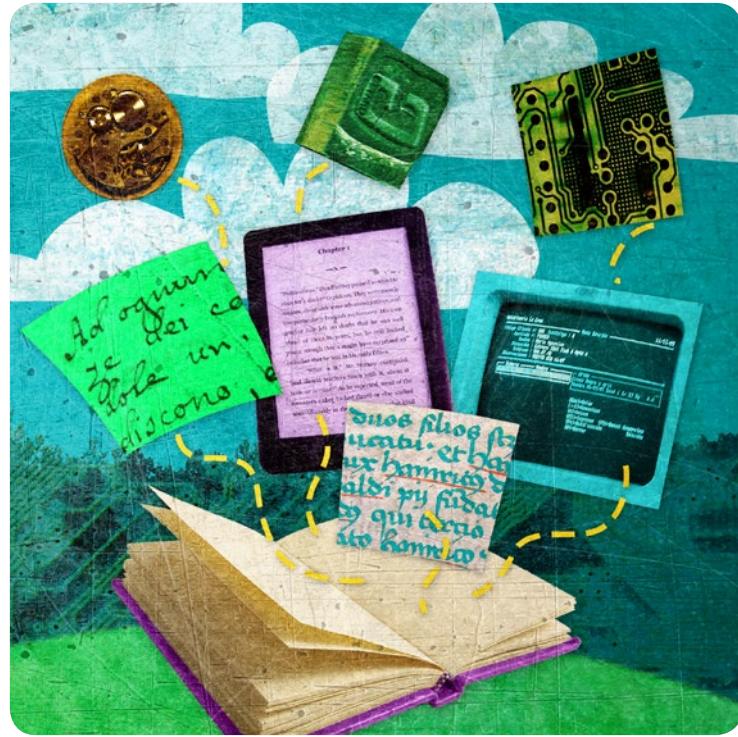
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Becoming Reflective Practitioners through Learning Labs

Illustration by Lisa R. Tennant

By Nancy DeFrance, Nancy Broadwell, and Teresa McDougall, GVSU Faculty

It has long been the practice in clinical professions such as medicine, law, ministry, social work, and education, to engage novices who are studying to enter the profession by involving them in an apprenticeship—a field-based opportunity to refine their skills with the support of a seasoned mentor. Authenticity is key. It is important that novices experience similar conditions to be encountered on the job, so that the understandings and skills developed in training are readily transferred to the workplace.

In response to the evolving and expanding roles of reading specialists, the faculty in the Reading/Language Arts Program at Grand Valley State University has recently reimagined the field-based experience for teachers seeking a master's degree with an endorsement as a reading specialist. Reading specialists now serve as literacy coaches who focus

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on facilitating the professional growth of teachers in addition to working in their traditional role as interventionists who focus on struggling readers.

We asked, as have other programs that prepare reading professionals (Quatroche & Wepner, 2008; Wepner & Quatroche 2011): How can we develop and strengthen fieldwork to provide authentic, sustainable, and worthwhile experiences that prepare candidates to teach, coach, lead and grow? We pooled our own experiences and understandings of the literature to establish the following criteria for field experiences for reading specialist graduate candidates.

Criteria

First, candidates would **form communities of peers** who both challenge and support them. People tend to learn when they explore phenomena in environments that pique their interest (Cambourne, 2002; 2011; Hatano, 1993). Interactions with peers and experts provide additional information which, when integrated with current knowledge, fosters understanding. Interaction with peers, whose perspectives are valued, is more likely to facilitate a collaborative exchange of ideas; peers' ideas are less likely to be ignored than the ideas of experts.

Second, candidates would **engage with their peers in frequent and extended opportunities for reflection**. Reflection is deliberate inquiry into actions that we perform in our daily work with little conscious deliberation (Schön,

1983). Reflective teachers are deliberate in making sense of their own interactions with learners by identifying the knowledge, assumptions, and decision-making processes behind their actions—and the outcomes of those actions. Teachers often rely on other teachers to supply perspectives and information that serve as a catalyst for reflection, as well as the opportunity for dialogue that transforms multiple perspectives into new understandings (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Moll, 2000; Wells, 2000).

Third, candidates would **focus their inquiry on student learning**. We adopted a student-centered framework (Sweeney, 2011) for coaching in which the coach foregrounds student learning (rather than teacher actions), asking teachers to critically examine student talk, actions, and artifacts to discover qualities of student responses to instruction with respect to objectives for learning. The coach leads teachers in thinking about multiple factors that either facilitate or constrain learning. Only then does conversation lead to teacher actions that are relevant to specific decisions for supporting students to meet worthwhile objectives.

Approach

These criteria represent an updated approach to university fieldwork. The 'traditional' model for field experience called for faculty to make several visits to candidates at work in a K-12 setting to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback. This updated model is grounded in developing relationships among peers rather than between expert and novice. Setting direction for candidate reflection and growth is shifted from faculty to the candidates. This shift focuses their attention on student learning more than candidate performance.

The updated approach is the product of a K-12/university partnership. Authors Broadwell and McDougall brought experiences as K-12 literacy coaches and classroom teachers to the role of adjunct instructors for the GVSU reading specialist practicum. DeFrance brought experiences of teaching at the graduate level, conducting research, and

providing clinical instruction to the role of coordinating the practicum. This partnership allowed us to draw on the best of what each had to offer. Thus, we integrated the practices of the classroom learning lab, from the K-12 setting, with the affordances of video records of teaching, often used in university settings.

In the classroom learning lab (Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, 2012; Houk, 2010; Ruskowski, Jackson & VanStratt, 2014), a host teacher with expertise invites guest teachers to observe a lesson in the host's classroom. Host and guests subsequently engage in a facilitated conversation about teaching and learning, featuring the content and context of the host's lesson. In the K-12 environment, small groups of teachers typically build collaborative relationships, becoming increasingly reflective, and growing in expertise.

In order to use, what is in K-12 contexts, a long-term, job-embedded professional development, we adopted review of video-recordings of lessons to facilitate reflection on teaching and learning. In their work with 'video clubs,' Sherin and vanEs (2009) (also vanEs & Sherin, 2010) demonstrated that with practice, teachers who studied video of their own and peers' instruction moved along a developmental trajectory of 'noticing' or discovering relationships between teaching and learning. It was this specific progress in teacher noticing that we sought to foster in the learning labs.

The Learning Labs

Reading specialist candidates each hosted a lab in his or her own classroom once and served as a guest in others' labs several times. Day one of each learning lab was a series of pre-brief, observation of lesson, and immediate de-brief—all facilitated by a coach. In the pre-brief the host prepared guests to observe the host's lesson by stating the objectives for instruction, describing the instructional activity, and offering an example of what learning would look like. Then, guests observed instruction with an eye to evaluating student progress toward the learning objectives. In the debrief that followed the lesson, host and guests reflected on (1) evidence of student learning, (2) factors that likely interacted to affect student learning, and (3) perennial questions and 'tensions' that teachers often must balance when making instructional decisions.

On day two of each learning lab, host and guests met for a video-mediated conversation. The host nominated several, relatively brief segments of video, stating the purpose or question that should drive the discussion. The coach facilitated this discussion, prompting participants to (1) identify and grapple with issues 'at the heart' of the host's video segments and (2) apply their thinking around the content and context of the host's lesson to their *own* content and context.

In evaluating our updated approach to an apprenticeship for reading specialist candidates, we ask if we are meeting the criteria initially established. Are candidates forming communities of peers who support each other's professional growth, reflecting deliberately on their own and other's lessons, and keeping student learning as the focus of conversations about teaching? Our initial data analysis in

This updated model is grounded in developing relationships among peers rather than between expert and novice.

the form of case studies and feedback from candidate focus groups following the fieldwork is most encouraging.

Case Studies

Case studies reveal communities of peers in which hosts have the full attention and support of guests. This may be attributed to a protocol that established some expectations for the language of learning lab conversations and directed the group's focus. However, an immediate consensus emerged among candidates: inviting others into their classroom was risky business. Indeed, in focus groups, candidates consistently reported that this initial worry dissipated once they experienced the learning lab environment.

Case studies also provide evidence of the candidates' reflective thinking. They began to ask themselves and

In order to use, what is in K-12 contexts, a long-term, job-embedded professional development, we adopted review of video-recordings of lessons to facilitate reflection on teaching and learning.

others meaningful questions about their goals for the lesson, the outcome of the lesson, and the factors that contributed. Giving candidates the opportunity to nominate for discussion the video segments of their own lesson seemed to enable each host to ask reflective questions. The coach further facilitates reflection by asking the group to focus on the "heart" of the lesson by identifying issues faced by all teachers. In focus groups, candidates frequently referred to these discussions as their 'take-aways' from the learning labs.

Most encouraging of all is the evidence of candidates' evolving focus on student learning. Initially, candidates foregrounded their own actions, perhaps in response to frequent emphasis on 'best' or 'evidence-based' practices in educational settings—developing examples of student learning that were specific and well-aligned with objectives that articulated learning, rather than an activity, demanding work. By the end of the fieldwork, all candidates led their reflections with student learning and began to identify some of the factors in the instructional environment that likely interacted to affect learning. This perspective potentially gave candidates much more agency as many of these were factors within the teacher's control.

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Behind the Numbers

How Are English Language Development, Mainstream Teachers', and School Districts' Needs Met?

By Nagnon Diarrassouba, GVSU Faculty
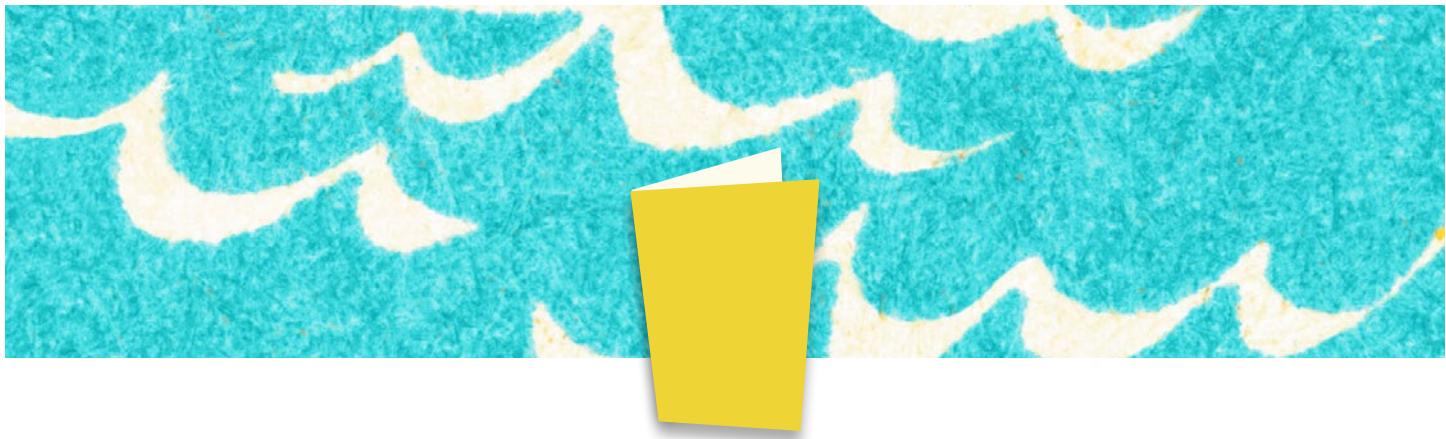
Many researchers and practitioners in English language development (ELD) cite the increasing number of English learners (ELs) in US schools to justify their studies and works. The number of English learners has increased dramatically in the last two decades. Beyond using the increasing numbers to rationalize research, the production of professional documents, and the use of instructional and learning materials, very few researchers and practitioners have analyzed these numbers at local levels and the implications for teacher preparation programs. This article examines the US national, the state of Michigan, and the Grand Rapids metropolitan area English learner populations to demonstrate that national, state, and local decision makers and teacher training programs need to develop professional workshops and curricula for in-service and pre-service classroom practitioners.

Analysis of the English Learner Demographic Data

The number of English learners in the US has been steadily increasing. The increasing attention to services for ELs, along with the increasingly diverse language backgrounds of this population today, presents a decidedly more challenging educational context for teachers.

The United States Department of Education (2014) shows that, over the last decade, approximately 8% of the student population has been receiving English language development services. Eight states have a percentage that approximates or is higher than that national mean, including California (30%), Texas (15%), Colorado (11.4%), and Florida (8.8%) (Wright, 2015, pp. 7-8). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) also reveals

that most ELs are concentrated in urban centers, where they constitute 16.7% of the population. Suburban and rural school districts have substantially smaller percentages; 5.9% and 3.5%, respectively. This disparity is demonstrated in the particular case of the state of Michigan and the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

The Cases of Michigan and of the Grand Rapids Public Metropolitan School Districts

Michigan represents a case that is interesting in that nationally it is not a state that is recognized with significant EL population. As a matter of fact, Michigan is far from the national mean percentage, which is 10%. As shown in Table 1 below, the EL population in Michigan revolves around 3% and 4%.

Table 1

Michigan ELD Population, 2002-2013

Year	Percent
2002-03	3.2
2007-08	3.00
2008-09	3.6
2009-10	3.5
2010-11	3.5
2011-2012	3.7
2012-2013	4.1

Source: National Center of Education Statistics, 2014

However, the national percentages overshadow the influx of population in particular regions in various parts of the state, particularly in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. As shown in Table 2 on page 23, it appears that the

demographics for English learners, along with students known as culturally and linguistically different (CLD) or ethnolinguistic students (Pérez & Guzman (2002), has been steadily increasing. Even rural districts such as Caledonia, where the population was seemingly homogenous, the number of CLD has risen from 0 in 2001-2002 to 8% in 2011- 2012. Conversely, the largest enrollments of ELs and CLDs remain an urban and suburban phenomena. For instance, Grand Rapids Public Schools has witnessed an unprecedented soar in its EL and CLD demographics between 2001-2002 and 2011-2011, rising from 15% of ELs and 72% CLDs to 20.5% and 79%. In the suburbs of Grand Rapids, Kentwood has had an unprecedented growth in the EL population, going from 2% in 2001-2002 to 15% in 2011-2012. Similar percentages have been shown in districts such as Godwin Heights and Wyoming. Table 2 also indicates that suburbs that are perceived as inhabited by upper middle class, such as East Grand Rapids, enroll less ELs and CLD students.

...many states have recognized the need to provide regular classroom teachers with adequate training allowing them to not only comply with federal mandates but also to integrate ELs in instructional and learning processes.

National, State, and Programmatic Endeavors Addressing Teacher Training for English Learners

Given the growth of ELs, reforms and even transformations of teacher preparation programs in colleges, universities, and professional development workshops at state and school district levels need to be reinforced and implemented.   In this section, I briefly focus on endeavors at the national and state levels with the passing of laws and the production of teacher preparation materials (essentially textbooks), and end with reforms led in teacher preparation programs at the college level with the case of the TESOL program at Grand Valley State University.

National Endeavors

At the national level, the Lau vs. Nichols Supreme Court ruling of 1974 constitutes the landmark for the official creation of bilingual and ELD programs together with districts attempts to accommodate ELs. The court ruling was interpreted in various ways and for the most

Table 2

Diversity Comparison: Grand Rapids and Neighboring Districts' School Demographic Percentages

School District	School Year 2001-2002	School Year 2011-2012	School Year 2001-2002	School Year 2011-2012
	ELs*	ELs*	CLDs**	CLDs**
Caledonia Community	0	0.07	3	8
East Grand Rapids Public	1	0.04	6	9
Forest Hills Public	2	0.01	6	15
Godfrey Lee Public	24	32.4	58	89
Godwin Heights Public	n/d	13	n/d	73
Grand Rapids Public	15	20.3	72	79
Kentwood Public	2	15	37	58
Wyoming Public	8	14.3	28	59

* English learners   ** Culturally and/or linguistically different students

Source: IJELP, 2014 Volume 9

part ELS did not partake in mainstream instructional processes, but were secluded in self-contained rooms until they became proficient in English (Curtin, 2009). For many, particularly those in upper high school grades, that seclusion meant inability to graduate with a regular high school diploma. Conversely, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, mandates that all schools receiving federal funding implement high quality education to all students allowing them to pass state proficiency tests. In the same vein, Title III, Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) aims at ensuring that "English learners and immigrant students who are non-native speakers of English achieve language proficiency and meet the same standards as their English-speaking peers in content areas" (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014, p. 46). As many states receive funding from the federal government and given that they have significant numbers of ELs, they were left with little to no choice but to ascertain that this specific category of students receive adequate instruction. Publishers and other experts also started producing materials and arguing for the need to provide regular teachers with adequate professional training.

State and Publisher Endeavors

Following federal government efforts to provide all students with equal opportunity to become proficient in English and in academic disciplines, publishers and experts in the area of ELD started producing materials. For the most part, recent efforts have focused on sheltered English instruction programs in which ELD specialists and regular teachers receive training allowing them to teach not only English learners but also native English speaking students. Some of the most well-known teaching approaches

Teacher preparation programs need to embrace interdisciplinary or cross disciplinary approaches, if they want to educate their candidates to be adaptable to various teaching and learning contexts.

developed over the last two decades are the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), and the Differentiated Learning or Instruction. All of these approaches claim to focus on providing teachers, particularly the regular and disciplinary teachers, with the knowledge and skills allowing them to teach not only content but academic English in a heterogeneous classroom setting. Recently, the proponents of a number of these teaching methods have recognized the complex nature of English learners, who may not only be challenged with academic contents but also be experiencing some developmental issues. For instance, Echevarria, Voght, and Short (2012) in the fourth edition of Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model have written a chapter that deals with how to teach English learners that may be identified as special needs students, thus making their approach interdisciplinary or cross disciplinary. Researchers have also been giving attention to that issue and making recommendations for improving teacher training (Reed, 2013; Rodriguez, 2009.)

By the same token, many states have recognized the need to provide regular classroom teachers with adequate training allowing them to not only comply with federal mandates but also to integrate ELs in instructional and learning processes. Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008) divide states into five major categories in relation to professional preparation and continuous training required of regular teachers. These states rank from those who have specific course or certification requirements to those that have no obligations. Only seven states require that regular teachers be certified or have completed significant amount of coursework dealing with sheltered instruction. Seven-

teen states expect their teachers to have graduated from, or taken courses from, an approved teacher preparation program. Michigan belongs to that category. As a matter of fact, Michigan asks that teachers fulfill the requirements of a reading diagnostic course to maintain their current (or renew their) teaching certificate.
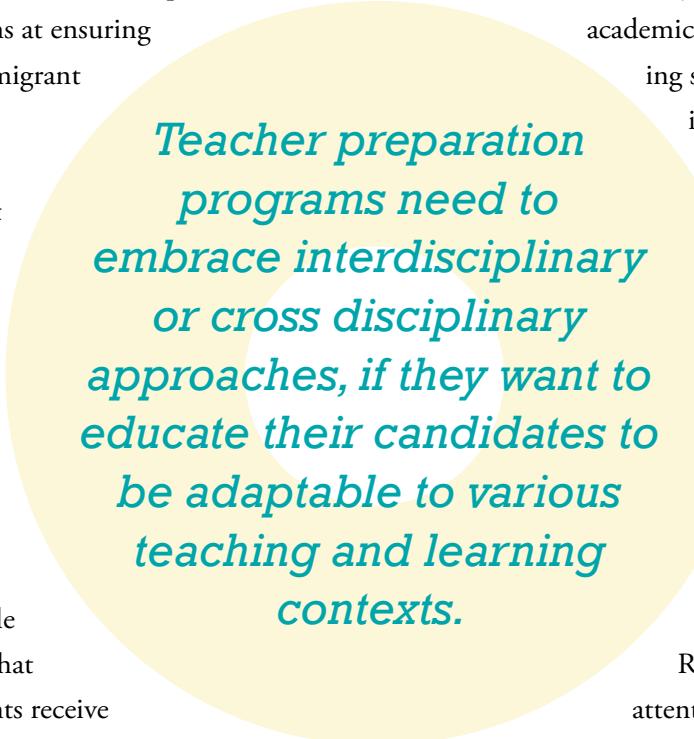
Programmatic Endeavors: The Case of the Grand Valley State University TESOL Program

Teacher preparation colleges have been meeting the requirements of their states in various ways. While some have included specific courses dealing with ELD issues, others have developed entire programs. This is the case of the College of Education (COE) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), where undergraduate as well as graduate programs are specifically designed to meet the needs of pre-service and in-service teachers. The Differentiated Learning, the Reading, and the Teaching of English to Speakers or Other Languages (TESOL) are such programs. The latter constitutes the subject of this discussion.

Given districts' and teachers' needs, the (COE) at GVSU has reformed its existing TESOL program and has obtained the approval to create an undergraduate minor. In reforming the program, a number of considerations were taken into account including the interdisciplinary aspect of courses offered and school districts' needs. In addition to linguistics courses, which are tailored to meet practitioner needs, the program has moved to integrate second language theory and special needs population issues into one class. In a similar vein, the assessment course has been modified to include ELs' testing and evaluation issues. The program did not have a course that dealt with technology integration and usage. Existing technology courses geared toward elementary and secondary school teachers have

been adapted to meet the needs of classroom practitioners who are, or would be, teaching not only English learners, but also native speakers of English. Contributing to its commitment to satisfy the requirements of school districts and of practitioners providing services to ELs, two new courses have been developed: one that deals with teaching content in a heterogeneous learning context, and the other focusing on bilingualism and the development of bi-literacy. While these courses can be offered on campus and/or hybrid format, they are usually delivered on site either at the district main offices or at a school. In spite of these various efforts to meet teacher professional needs, improvements are needed to provide practitioners with knowledge and tools to be effective in a heterogeneous professional context.

Recommendations

Given the increasing number of English learners, even in areas that once were ethnically homogenous, there is a pressing need to train in-service as well as pre-service teachers to provide adequate support to English learners. The federal government has set the frame to integrate ELs in the mainstream classroom with two important laws: Titles I and III. States like Michigan, which are refugee and immigrant friendly, should focus on providing their teachers with the knowledge and tools allowing them to be effective in heterogeneous classroom contexts. Though Michigan has required reading diagnostic courses to teachers as part of the renewal for their professional certificates, that effort remains insufficient. The state needs to require significant course work from its teachers in the areas of ELD or TESOL. School districts have been requiring a number of their teachers to train in sheltered instructional methods. However, for the most part, that professional development has focused on only one teaching method: the SIOP. Additionally, there are no follow ups to ensure

that teachers truly implement that teaching method and do not experience difficulties in its implementation in their daily instructional processes (Hilliker, 2015). Furthermore, the SIOP is limited on a number of aspects. Although its proponents have integrated special education issues in their most popular textbook entitled Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model, that text does not take into consideration parameters such as culture and other external factors that may affect learning. Besides, focusing training on just one method does not appear to be inclusive of various teaching approaches. Districts with high concentration of ELs need to go beyond the one teaching method model to require that their teachers be conversant in a number of instructional, materials, and curricula development approaches.

Teacher preparation programs need to embrace interdisciplinary or cross disciplinary approaches if they want to educate their candidates to be adaptable to various teaching and learning contexts. Specifically, they need to develop inter or cross disciplinary certificates. The GVSU–COE model may be a good starting point, but it too has limitations that may need to be corrected. For example, many courses need to be offered either online or in hybrid format, as many teachers are in remote areas and experience difficulties attending face-to-face classes. The College of Education needs to further develop endeavors that aim at providing teachers with inter or cross disciplinary academic and professional training. The efforts to create inter or cross disciplinary certificates must be encouraged while strongly promoting existing programs. While further discussion is needed in ways to meet training needs of teachers who serve English learners, implementing the few recommendations in this article could assist in fulfilling the requirements of states and school districts.

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Beyond the Basics: Information Literacy

By Sean Lancaster, GVSU Faculty

Reading and writing certainly get the most focus on the topic of literacy, but most students advance beyond the basic reading and writing literacy skills and become ready for more advanced instruction. In this article, I explore an important aspect of literacy that is often an afterthought in many schools: information literacy.

In 1983, the seminal report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" brought forth shockwaves in educational circles. This report, along with others that followed, provided the impetus for the American Library Association (ALA) to create the, "ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy." This blue ribbon panel produced a report in 1989 that defined information literacy, in part, as being able to, "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (retrieved from *http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential*).
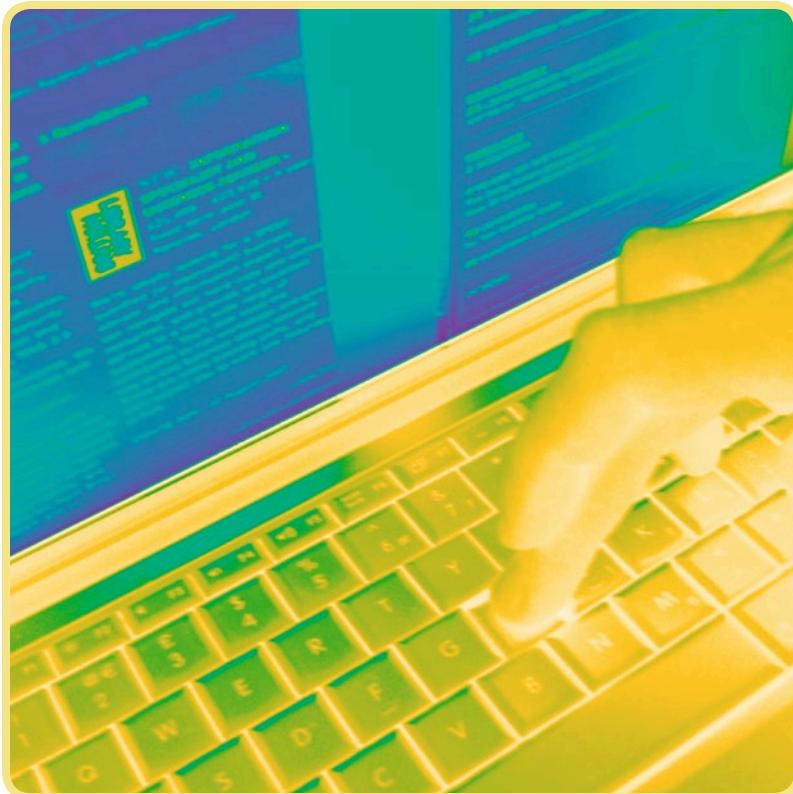
Following the Industrial Age, the Digital Revolution has shifted the first world into the Information Age. The Information Age is characterized by computerized access to massive amounts of information. The ALA report touted the importance of being information literate in a time before the internet was widely used. And, the ubiquitous access to so much information is what now makes information literacy even more critical.

An easy way to illustrate the importance of information literacy begins by imagining a student conducting an internet search. Perhaps the student is writing a paper

about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Information literacy is the ability of the student to find related material and determine the validity and reliability of the material that is being sought. After finding the material, or in some cases, evidence, an information literate student can use that material in the product being produced (e.g., a research paper).

I teach an undergraduate course for students who are becoming teachers where I have used an activity that asked my students to evaluate a website about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Specifically, they were asked to follow a link to the website, analyze it, and complete a survey about the credibility of the site. A surprisingly small percentage of the students were able to determine that the first website was created by a white supremacist group that was purposefully trying to discredit MLK Jr. I asked my students to evaluate five websites in this activity. Three of the sites were fairly credible. Two were not, including the MLK Jr. site in question. Many of the students would quickly scan the headlines, see the photos of MLK Jr., and then in the follow up survey, explain to me that the site was worthwhile for writing a report on MLK Jr. Not many students investigated deeply and examined content enough to ascertain that the site was heavily biased and erroneous. The URL for the site featured MLK Jr.'s name, so it could easily look legitimate from a quick glance. This activity demonstrated the importance of teaching information literacy to these future teachers. If they were easily tricked by a site with a legitimate looking URL, then how are K-12 students going to stand a chance? The media and politicians are often quick to note that students should be learning how to think critically. Information literacy skills are critical thinking skills, and they need to be emphasized and taught in schools.

Unfortunately, information literacy skills create a paradox in education where nearly all stakeholders would agree that the skills are necessary and critical for students to learn; however, our standardized testing in the state and nation do not assess information literacy skills. This lack of accountability can easily result in schools failing to put forth an effort to teach these skills.
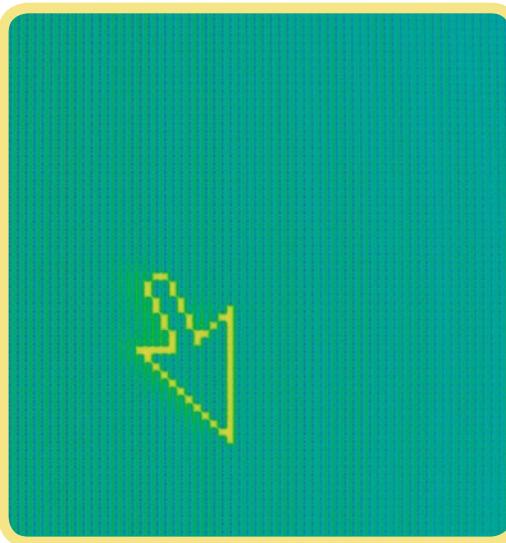
One organization trying to address the call for teaching information literacy skills is the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). ISTE is the preeminent professional organization and learned society for technology in education. ISTE produces standards related to teaching technology and most recently produced standards for students in 2007/2008. These standards serve as the model for states, including Michigan, who produce their own standards. In 2009, Michigan adopted the Michigan Educational Technology Standards for Students, which are closely aligned to the ISTE Standards. The standards are being updated and refreshed, but the current standards clearly require the teaching of information literacy skills to students. For example, the 6th-8th grade standards in Michigan require schools to teach, "6-8.CT.3. gather data, examine patterns, and apply information for decision making using available digital resources." A teacher trying to meet this standard could create an activity about doing a careful and meaningful internet search for evidence on a topic of interest. An activity like this could address multiple standards and still prepare students for a test on content as well. It's up to the teachers to be creative in order to address the vast number of standards.

I described how my own students have struggled with using information literacy skills at the undergraduate level. These students grew up in a time when information literacy skills were not valued enough to be taught. Society cannot afford an entire generation of students entering the Information age unable to critically analyze the constant stream of media and content entering their social media feeds. Schools need to prioritize these skills. Information Literacy must be a new imperative for education reform: A Nation At Risk 2.0.

Illustration by Lisa R. Tennant

The Importance of Disciplinary Literacy

Erica R. Hamilton & Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle, GVSU Faculty

What does it mean to read, write, think, and communicate like a scientist? What about as a historian, writer, musician, artist, engineer, or mathematician? In today's diverse and global world, these are questions secondary teachers and their students should be considering. Doing so supports students' literacy, learning, and ability to more readily engage in the disciplines they study

(Moje, 2008). These considerations also serve to develop teachers' instruction so they can apprentice students to negotiate and create texts in discipline-specific ways (Brozo, Moorman, Meyer, & Stewart, 2013).

Within the traditional, silo-structure of secondary schools, students navigate hour-by-hour a curriculum featuring dis-

tinct texts from varying disciplines. This requires students to become a variety of readers, writers, and performers (Gee, 2000). For example, within an English classroom, students will read and write narratives, poetry, and play scripts, be expected to read and perform musical scores in their orchestra classroom, and understand and generate art in their art class. Additionally, secondary students will read and write about scientifically-based phenomena in their science classroom, navigate primary and secondary sources in their history classroom, and perform and explain mathematical computations in their math classroom.

Disciplinary literacy requires students to read and write in specialized ways for specialized purposes determined by the discipline (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Each discipline requires students to employ particular knowledge, tools, and abilities to communicate, create, and use information within that discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Teachers must apprentice students through scaffolded instruction and guided practice, helping students "develop the capacity to read disciplinary-specific texts through an insider perspective" (Buehl, 2011, p. 10).

So, what are the broader implications of disciplinary literacy? Disciplinary literacy pushes students to move beyond reading, writing, listening, and viewing solely for academic purposes, namely to complete school-based homework and pass tests. Instead, instruction framed around disciplinary literacy illustrates to students the authentic ways to engage within the disciplines—generating, communicating, and applying knowledge in the field (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

> *"Students learn to identify and consider the perspectives, privilege, message, and source of the texts they consume."*

> *"Disciplinary literacy pushes students to move beyond reading, writing, listening, and viewing solely for academic purposes."*

When teachers shift student learning towards disciplinary literacy, they encourage students to think, read, and act as scientists, artists, musicians, mathematicians, authors, and historians (Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2011).

To illustrate, students in social studies classes must learn how to understand, read, and interpret primary and secondary source documents within context (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015). Disciplinary literacy challenges these students to move beyond reading a historical text solely for information. Students learn to identify and consider the perspective, privilege, message, and source of the texts they consume. Doing so affords students opportunities to critically analyze and assess the ways they consume texts in order to understand the world in which they live. Furthermore, they can then understand the world(s) in which the *original* audience members lived. As students practice these important aspects of historical inquiry, they move beyond learning history for history's sake. Instead, students begin to emulate the work of modern-day historians, who seek to frame and deepen the understandings of the past and present.

As another example, in secondary biological science courses students learn to consume and produce scientific texts. Different from what they might do in a history course, students who are being apprenticed into the scientific community mimic the communicative and engagement practices of professionals in their field. That is, students studying biological science have opportunities to learn, reflect upon, and communicate their understandings of conceptual change through interpretation, observation,

analysis, and data representation (Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, 2015). In the same way, professional scientists engage in similar practices not only as they conduct research but also as they disseminate findings to others—findings that have the potential to inform local, national, and international policies and practices. Therefore, it is important to consider the specific literacy practices necessary for full engagement in a given discipline, not only to apprentice novices but also to enable students to more deeply understand the discipline itself, thus inviting them to engage in the disciplinary discourse and culture (Moje, 2008).

Each discipline has specific ways and means of knowing and communicating, and when adolescents have opportunities to engage in these discipline-specific practices, they begin to see themselves as historians, musicians, scientists, artists, writers, mathematicians, among other professionals

> *"Professional scientists engage in similar practices not only as they conduct research but also as they disseminate findings to others—findings that have the potential to inform local, national, and international policies and practices."*

(Moje, 2008). To that end, secondary teachers who understand what it means to learn in a particular discipline, and what counts as knowledge in that discipline, offer their students opportunities to engage in specific literacy practices (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015). In doing so, the cultivation of the next generation of scientists, historians, musicians, artists, writers, engineers, mathematicians begins well before they enter the profession.

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Five, *Oops*, I Mean Six Big Ideas of Literacy

James O. Grant, GVSU Faculty, Heather M. Pauly, Guest Contributor, Cardinal Stritch University

Literacy continues to be an elusive goal for all students in the United States. If one traces the history of our current quest for all children to be literate by the end of third grade, one finds that this discussion in modern times has come from many different fields. In the early 20th century, Dr. Hinshelwood, an ophthalmologist, and Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a neuropathologist, were both interested in understanding why some individuals had significant struggles learning to read. Psychologists and educators such as William Gray, Marianne Monroe, and Jeanne Chall developed theories for how students learn to read as well as developed diagnostic tools to assess children who struggled in learning to read. Helmer Myklebust and Hollis Scarborough, both psychologists, theorized and described multiple processes and pathways to skilled reading. It is important to acknowledge the contributions from many different

fields of study in regards to the understanding of literacy development. Our goal in this article is to highlight the importance of oral language as the foundation for the "Five Big Ideas of Reading" as laid out in the National Reading Panel Report (2000).

Five Big Ideas of Reading

As part of this debate about how students become literate citizens, volumes have been written. In the 1990s, the National Institute of Health commissioned a panel of experts in the field of literacy to conduct a meta-analysis of the literature on how students become literate. This report known as the National Reading Panel Report was published in 2000. Based on the meta-analysis of the empirical literacy literature, the major findings of this report were "Five Big Ideas of Reading". These five big ideas were phonological awareness, alphabetic-phonetic principles of decoding, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. These five Big Ideas were culled from the literature based on each big idea being predictive of a more advanced literacy skill; also, each big idea had to be teachable. The review of literature revealed that when classroom instructional time was devoted to the five big ideas, reading achievement increased.

The Forgotten Big Idea

While we agree that these "5 Big Ideas" are supported in the literature, we would contend that the first "big idea" is missing from the report of the National Reading Panel. That "big idea" is oral language. Oral language serves as the foundation for all other forms of language, and we would contend that read language, written language, and even mathematics is dependent
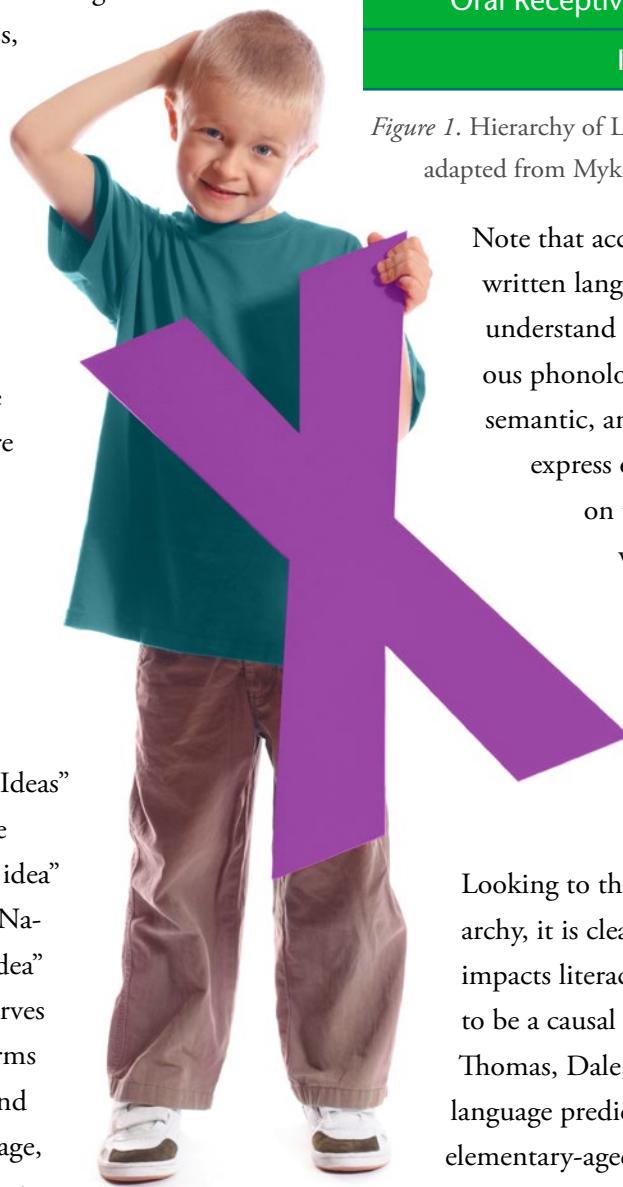
on the development of oral language. To substantiate this claim, we would site Myklebust (1965) and his hierarchy of language development. In this hierarchy, Myklebust posits that human beings develop language in a hierarchy that starts with what he termed Inner Language. Inner language is the development of thoughts that begin in the womb. This level is certainly theoretical in that it cannot be tested nor can it be taught. However, the next four levels on the hierarchy can be assessed and taught. These levels are as follows (see Figure 1).

| Written Language |
| Read Language |
| Oral Expressive (Speaking) |
| Oral Receptive (Listening/Understanding) |
| Inner Language |

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Language Development, adapted from Myklebust (1965).

Note that according to Myklebust, read and written language involves the ability to first understand and use oral language in its various phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic patterns and then to express or use these various patterns. Layered on top of oral language is read language which is the ability to understand or comprehend the written symbols of the language. The most complex step in the development of literacy is the ability to write or express ideas using the symbols of the written language.

Looking to the foundational levels of the hierarchy, it is clear that oral language acquisition impacts literacy development, and has been found to be a causal relationship (Harlaar, Hayiou-Thomas, Dale, & Plomin, 2008). In fact, oral language predicts reading comprehension in early elementary-aged children, and predicts both decoding and reading comprehension in middle and

high-school aged children (Skebo, Lewis, Free-balm, Tag, Ciesla, & Stein, 2013). The crucial role of oral language in reading is highlighted more recently by Scarborough (2002) through the use of an illustrated rope made of multiple strands. With this illustration, one strand of the rope encompasses language comprehension which includes background knowledge (i.e., knowledge of facts and concepts), vocabulary knowledge, the understanding and use of a variety of syntactical structures, the ability to verbally reason, and knowledge of basic concepts of print and different types of text. Another strand in Scarborough's rope is a word recognition strand wherein one has an understanding of phonological awareness, an understanding of decoding (which includes being able to apply alphabetic-phonetic principles to read words and to apply phoneme-grapheme correspondences to spell), and the ability to read words automatically or by sight. Over time these two strands merge to create a skilled reader who can read text fluently and comprehend what is read.

What Does this Mean for Teachers?

For teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers, understanding Myklebust's Hierarchy of Language Development (1965) and Scarborough's rope (2002)

has the potential to improve literacy instruction for all students. While it is easy to write about this topic, teaching to the needs of the variety of students that one finds in today's classrooms presents a difficult challenge. Children who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), may need instruction in understanding and using the five parameters of language as they relate to Standard American English (i.e., phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics).

The key for educators is to first have a knowledge base of these six big ideas; if we never address oral language, we are doing a disservice to those students who require instruction in that area. Secondly, a knowledge base is not enough. Educators need explicit, systematic, research-based strategies and routines to be effective in teaching their students using these six big ideas. Several literacy experts have shown that differences in teacher knowledge about reading can lead to differences in student development of reading and writing skills (McCutchen, Abbott, Green, Beretvas, Cox, Potter, Quiroga, & Gray, 2002; Moats, & Foorman, 2003). Specifically, Moats (1994) showed that even veteran teachers had limited knowledge about the structure of spoken and written language. Moats pointed out that just because teachers can read and spell does not mean that they these same teachers possess explicit knowledge of phonemes. The point is that teacher educators and teachers could be more effective in teaching all students if their knowledge base about the structure of the English language was increased. We are not advocating that every school aged child be explicitly taught this structure as it is clear that a majority of

"Oral language serves as the foundation for all other forms of language, and we would contend that read language, written language, and even mathematics is dependent on the development of oral language."

K-12 students do develop literacy skills without some of this direct and explicit instruction. However, if our goal is to increase the percentage of students who are literate by the end of third grade, we would suggest, as Moats (1994) did, that both teacher educators and K-12 teachers increase their knowledge of the structure of the oral and written language. It is difficult to teach what one does not know.

Recommendations for the Classroom

Oral language is the system through which we understand and use spoken words. Oral language can be broken down into five areas: phonology (the study of sounds; /p/, /th/), morphology (the study of meaning units; pre-, -ing, slip), syntax (rules that govern word

Intentionally Planned, Modeled, and Scaffolded Dramatic Play

Peer modeled phonology.

Variety of morphological structures.

Modeled syntactic structures.

Intentionally designated vocabulary.

Variety of pragmatic language use dependent upon scene.

Discussing a Story or Book

Peer and teacher modeled phonology.

Teacher modeled and scaffolded prefixes and suffixes.

Modeled syntactic structures.

Intentional application of story vocabulary.

Application of pragmatic rules (i.e. turn taking, adding information, disagreeing, etc.)

Discussing Results of a Research Exploration

Peer and teacher modeled phonology.

Teacher modeled and scaffolded prefixes and suffixes.

Modeled syntactic structures.

Intentional application of disciplinary vocabulary.

Application of pragmatic rules (i.e. turn taking, interrupting, etc.)

Figure 2. Suggested opportunities for facilitation of five parameters of language in classrooms.

order in language; S+V+O), semantics (vocabulary), and pragmatics (rules that govern supralinguistic interaction, or social interaction). To begin, educators need an awareness and understanding of the different parts of oral language. Once an understanding is reached, there are many different strategies, methods, and tools available for addressing all five areas. The most efficient way to address oral language in the classroom is through intentional talk. Teachers can act as facilitators of child and adolescent language by creating opportunities in the classroom for certain types of language to occur (see Figure 2).

In sum, teachers can facilitate oral language development in the classroom by allowing students to talk and express themselves. Language develops through interaction and use. Children need to learn how to understand and use language so that they may use it as a foundation to support and advance their literacy skills.

Phonological Awareness is the awareness that words are made up of sounds. This skill involves the ability to detect and produce rhyme, isolate the segments and sounds in an orally dictated word, blend orally presented individual segments and sounds to pronounce a word, to segment or separate sounds in an orally dictated word, and to delete sounds in different positions from orally dictated words.

Detect Rhyme: "Which two words rhyme?" Rug, Bat, Mug

Produce Rhyme: "Tell me a word that rhymes with bat."

First Sound: "Tell me the first sound in the cap, chin, rat, etc."

Blending: "Put the following sounds together to pronounce a whole word. /p/ /a/ /t/."

Segmenting: "Say the sounds in this word. sat, ship, blue, etc."

Deleting: "Say the word bake, now say it again, but don't say /b/. Say the word tease, now say it again but don't say /z/."

Please note that the above examples of phonological/phonemic awareness tasks are assessment items. Teachers need to describe and model these activities for the students who are not independently successful.

Phonics is the visual representation of sound. There are many programs that teachers may use to teach the alphabetic phonetic principles of English. Some programs are classified as synthetic approaches and others are classified as analytic. The synthetic approaches to

> *"Educators need explicit, systematic, research-based strategies and routines to be effective in teaching their students using these six big ideas."*

teaching phonics begin with instruction in letter-sound or grapheme-phoneme relationships. Elements included in synthetic programs include, consonant sounds, onsets

and rimes, syllable types, and multisyllabic word analysis, When teaching these elements, teachers should emphasize orthographic patterns (i.e., vowel and letter patterns). Analytic approaches to teaching phonics or decoding typically begin with a word that the student already knows. The teacher then isolates a sound in the known word such as a vowel or consonant sound and asks that student to pronounce the new word. This may be followed by pronouncing other unknown words and asking the student if that sound is heard in the new word. The teaching of phonics is an essential element of a balanced literacy approach. Explicit and systematic instruction in the code is imperative for students who struggle in learning to read.

Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency is an indicator of comprehension. As illustrated by Scarborough (2002), addressing linguistic components in combination with components of word recognition will lead to comprehension as observed through fluent reading. Wide and varied reading experiences and repeated reading can increase fluency discretely, but the ultimate goal of reading is to create meaning; therefore, the components of word reading and language comprehension (Scarborough, 2002) should carry more weight in the effort to increase fluent reading.

Vocabulary is the knowledge of the meaning of words and concepts across contexts. To deepen teacher-knowledge regarding vocabulary learning, we recommend the work of Nagy & Scott (2000) as well as the work of Pearson (2014). Instructional guidance can be gleaned from Beck, McKeown, & Kucan's (2013) work. They suggest using student friendly definitions, and that not all words are created equally. Specific vocabulary should be chosen for instruction based on the utility of the vocabulary; the most frequently appearing cross-disciplinary words should be chosen for instruction (i.e., Tier 2 words such as energy). To learn Tier 2 words, students need many exposures to each word in multiple contexts and time to assimilate these words into their long-term memory. It is important to note that vocabulary instruction can and should begin before children are readers. Vocabulary development and instruction begins at the oral language level, as previously noted.
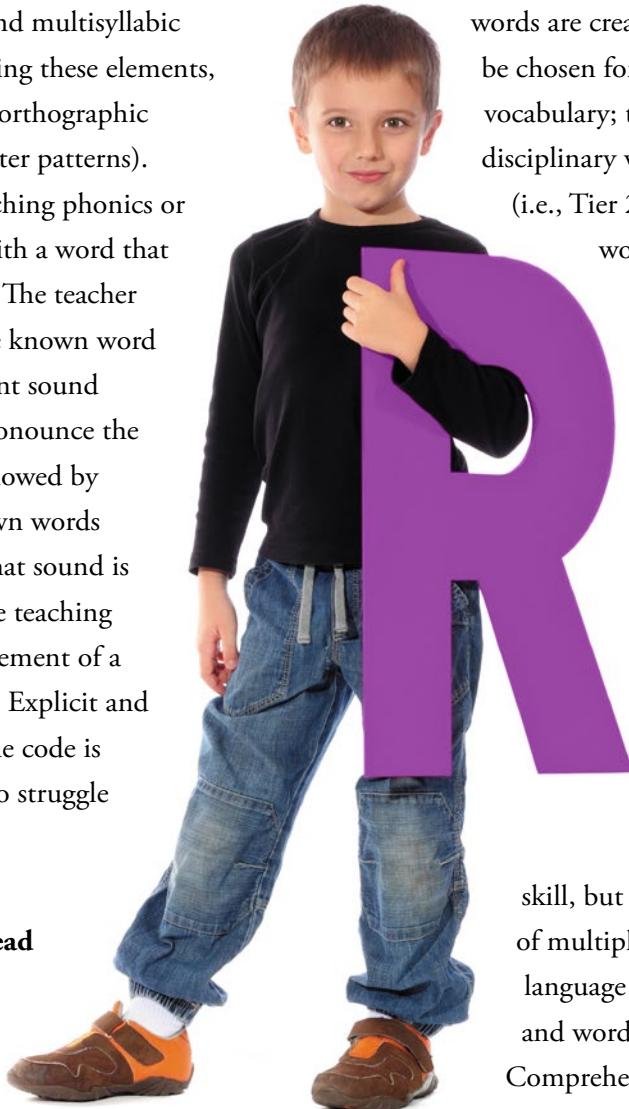
Comprehension is the ability of an individual to discern meaning from text and is the purpose of reading. Teaching comprehension is extremely difficult in part because it is not a skill, but a process that involves the application of multiple skills and strategies. All levels of oral language combined with phonological awareness and word reading are involved in comprehension. Comprehension instruction should begin as early as possible; instruction does not have to wait until students become fluent decoders. Comprehension

> *"Children need to learn how to understand and use language so that they may use it as a foundation to support and advance their literacy skills"*

instruction should be purposeful and strategic in that teachers should explicitly describe and model their own mental processes for students. Discussion is also a key element in comprehension instruction. Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), Paraphrasing Strategy (Schumaker, Denton, & Deschler, 1984), Strategies for Interactive Reading (Buehl, 2009), Text Based Discussions (Kucan & Palinscar, 2013), Multimedia Text Sets (Strop & Carlson, 2010), and use of graphic organizers to support text interaction and discussion are all examples of effective instructional methods and strategies for teaching comprehension,

Conclusion

This article alone cannot provide the knowledge that educators need in order to integrate, teach, and facilitate all aspects of the six big ideas of reading. It is our hope that teacher educators and educators become inspired to develop their knowledge of oral language development as well as continue to develop knowledge in the other five areas of reading. When educators at all levels have a secure knowledge base of the structures of oral and written language as well as the tools and strategies for instruction, reading achievement for all students should increase.

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Old Mother Hubbard

Images of Literacy

By Mary Shelton, GVSU Faculty

Illustrations from Reading and Literature First Reader (1911), Published by Row, Peterson & Company; Chicago

In my second classroom many years ago, near the end of the day, students arrived from their gym class tired and sweaty and began to search for bags filled with Easter goodies. As students ate treats from the bags filled with plastic eggs they became... a little silly. Some sat on the eggs, cackled, and pretended to lay them. Others devised a way to thread grass through pencil toppers. Among the chaos of the egg-laying laughter and the swinging pencil toppers, there sat one boy with his fingers on his bottom lip as he read Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Summer approached and the tables and chairs lined the halls, empty classrooms were being cleaned, and kids solemnly attended summer school. A young boy read a short text to his teacher. When the teacher told him the number of words he read in one minute, he hung his head and said, "That's less than I read the first time."

The first scenario demonstrates choice, motivation, and engagement, while the second reduces reading to the number of words a student can read in a minute. The first student chooses to read when it is not required. How likely is the second student to do that? I remember from

the days of completing my master's degree at Michigan State University (MSU), Steven Tchudi, longtime editor of English Journal and past president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), told us that students should experience the joy of language in our classrooms. Teachers create environments where students can experience that joy, where students not only enjoy reading and writing, but leave those classrooms on their way to becoming lifelong readers and writers. In a time when we hear weekly, if not daily, reports of how schools are failing our students when it comes to literacy, perhaps it is time to recall some of the best practices for nurturing readers and writers.

Effective Literacy Practices

In the article entitled *Every Child Every Day*, Allington, former president of IRA and widely published educator, discusses several elements of effective literacy instruction, and while it may not have been his intent, these strategies also serve to help students experience that joy of language or joyful literacy. Allington emphasizes the need for students to experience certain activities and strategies daily. One strategy, teacher read-alouds, benefit students by developing a sense of story, providing an enriched vocabulary, and improving comprehension and fluency (Allington, 2012). As any elementary school teacher will tell you, the most popular book in the classroom is the one he/she just read orally among their classmates. As teachers read the picture books of Polacco, Van Allsburg, Bunting, the poetry of Silverstein, Prelutsky, the intermediate novels of White, Curtis, Giff, and the informational texts of Lauber, Simon, Gibbons, they are filling their classrooms with the joy of language—for every child on every day.

Once the students are motivated to read and have structured times for independent reading, the next element for developing literacy is providing students with necessity of choice. According to Allington, providing choice improves

> *"Go home now, said the fish. You will find your wife in her hut. The fisherman went home, and there sat his wife in the little hut. And there they live to this very day."*
>
> — German Folk Tale

comprehension and motivation to read. Given text choice and an independent reading time, students engage in reading for their own pleasure. Students have the option to read picture books, poetry, informational texts, magazines and student-written texts. In my classroom, once everyone had their reading materials, the room was quiet, filled with engaged readers. Watching them make use of independent reading was one of my favorite times of the day—despite how hectic the first few minutes were. I remember how students often tried to locate specific materials at the beginning of our independent reading times. An incident that really stands out in my memory is the day that I heard two boys arguing. When I asked what was going on Jason said that Andy had all the Little Critter books in his desk and was charging other students with tickets to check them out! Arguments over books—as a teacher I loved it! Every student deserves to choose their own reading materials every day.

One day on the playground, I did a double-take when I saw Melissa twirling a jump-rope with one hand and holding the book she was reading in another, or Nick and a full set of encyclopedias. He brought them to school, requiring the help of two students to get them into our classroom. You could hardly see the boys behind the monstrous stacks of books. As he and the others set the books on a table, other students gathered 'round. "Do you guys know about encyclopedias? Did you ever hear of atoms? That's all in here," he told them pointing to the A volume. To a classroom of avid readers, what he brought was nothing less than a treasure.

Turning his attention towards effective writing instruction, Allington states that students should write daily about something personally meaningful. He laments that in his travels across the country writing in classrooms is so often reduced to short responses to what is read, writing to teacher-selected prompts, or writing with strict formulas that "turn even paragraphs and essays into fill-in-the-blank

exercises" (Allington, 2012). During my daughter's schooling I have seen all of these examples repeated each year. Early on she was given the writing prompt: write about what you like about snow. When I asked my daughter what she wrote, since she hated snow, she said that she just made stuff up. Prompts like this one turn writing into a task that is not meaningful. Over the years, the paragraphs and essays that turn into "fill-in-the blank exercises" have become the status quo.

But it can be different. In classrooms where students have some choice over what they write and where some of their writing is published, students tend to write what is personally meaningful. Once when our writing time was cancelled because of an assembly, one of my students said, "Hey, don't take away my writing time!" Some

The Fisherman and His Wife

students even told their moms not to schedule appointments during this time. Trying to understand her son's excitement, one mom stopped to ask what we did during writing time. She was surprised that my answer was simply, "We write and share our writing." The mom's face seemed to say, "That's it?" And I explained that when the writing was personally meaningful, and students were allowed to actually compose, instead of filling in forms, they really enjoyed the work. We also take time in the classroom where students can share their writings with each other when we published a book or class collection.

In addition to these published forms, we also wrote to pen pals. Usually we wrote to another second or third grade class, but during Desert Storm we also wrote to soldiers. We began writing to only four soldiers, but by the time we were done, we were writing to over thirty. Many students wrote to two or more soldiers. Students not only found this personally meaningful, but we had a classroom visit from one of the soldiers on leave, and we heard from many other soldiers and their wives about how meaningful the letters were to them. Students simply need to write what is personally meaningful every day.

Eventually these writing practices went beyond the classroom and students found themselves writing in their personal time. One day Luke asked if scrap paper could be used to write stories. We had been reading fractured fairy tales, and in only a few minutes he returned with one:

> *Once there was a witch who made brooms. Her mom and dad thought making brooms was her job, her life, her destiny. Okay, cut that out! One day she was making brooms but she had an evil plan up her sleeve. She took out some magic dust. Put it on the broom and POOF! She was gone. The End*

Students often brought in stories and poems written at home as well. One of my favorites was an illustrated poem that read: I am a flower with rainbows all around me. We

can observe that students find literacy meaningful when they choose to read and write during times when they could be doing anything else.

Adding to the effective literacy spectrum, Allington emphasizes class discussions. He cites multiple studies and research that illuminate the benefits of daily talk about books, including improved comprehension, engagement, and improved standardized test scores (Allington, 2012). This talk is usually informal, with one student telling another about what they are reading and what it means to them. Times for daily sharing were structured into our classroom reading and writing times. While often students shared with partners, writers had one specific day that they could share with the whole class. Students loved the author's chair experience, of reading their writing to their classmates and receiving feedback. Every morning as students came into class they checked the special schedule (gym, art, music, recess) and then the writing-sharing schedule. A student might say, "All right, it's a gym day and my group gets to share!"

Old Woman in a Basket

Sometimes field trips were arranged near the end of the year. Once when we hosted our pen pals from the other classes, we had a picnic and some organized games, and then returned to our classroom. I told my students to find a spot where they could talk with their pen pal. Somewhat surprised, yet mostly proud, I watched as one girl showed her pen pal the books she published. Another showed his pen pal our class publications. It was literacy in motion.

Final Thoughts

During summer 2015 I heard Donalyn Miller, author of *The Book Whisperer and Reading in the Wild*, speak about engaging readers with books. She spoke for over an hour describing some of the best books of 2015. After her presentation I thanked her for the huge contribution she was making to the field. She said, "You know, I have to do this. Our kids don't have that much time to begin to engage in books. We need to hook them with good books now."

It's true; we don't have much time. We know how to create readers and writers, but unfortunately we often engage in practices that will turn students away from reading and writing. I think back to that little boy, sad and dejected because he could not read enough words per minute. I think about the students in classrooms across our state and nation who write endlessly to prompts and formulated essays. I think of the countless practices which result in student avoidance of any literate activity. Teaching literacy can be so much more than that. By using effective strategies we can create classrooms where students not only learn to read and write, but classrooms where every child, every day, experiences joyful literacy.

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Photography by Clayton Pelon

Alumni Looking Back; Looking Forward: A Chat with COE Alumn

By: Austin Keith, GVSU Alumnus

It's 2002. A young fourth grader sits in his blue plastic chair with his elbows up on the desk with the cheap wood finish. Hardened gum sticks to the underside as *Charlotte's Web* rests on top between his arms. The ceiling fan turns at its usual pace while the clock hands inch slowly towards recess. His classmate, Rachel B., the curly-haired girl who laughs at his antics, reads aloud as the rest of the class listens. He taps his knuckles on the desk in waves, trying to keep his eyes on the book, while hearing her voice but not listening to a word she's saying.

Their fourth grade classroom is playing the reading game of Popcorn: a game where a student reads one paragraph and then "popcorns" (chooses) someone else to read after them.

Do I look cool? Will she pick me? He notices she has one more sentence left before her paragraph is over. His leg bounces. His heart beats faster. She stumbles over the word "certainly" and this last sentence drags on, but eventually ends. *This is it.* Rachel B. closes out the last few words and clears her throat as she raises her head to look at the class. *This is it.* Make eye contact. She taps on the desk with her pen and eventually spits out, "Popcorn, John."

Popcorn, John? John R.? Really?

Youthfully heart-broken, he slumps back in his chair while watching the pages of *Charlotte's Web* slowly close on the desk in front of him. John R. sits with his back straight, high and mighty, and begins his paragraph with an accomplished charm. Luckily it's a short paragraph to end the chapter.

Ms. Shelton gets up from her desk with a stack of papers in hand. "Here's the comprehension questions for chapter fourteen. Due at the end of class." The papers are passed, shoulder over shoulder, down the row of desks.

The young fourth grader grabs the paper with the reflection questions.

Wait. Who's Dr. Dorian?

Reading games such as Popcorn seem appropriate in theory; it's meant to engage the students, involve everyone in reading, and allow the class to self-automate. Yet in reality it is *only* effective *in theory.* The game potentially does more harm when it comes to literacy and reading comprehension. A student becomes preoccupied with the game itself, how they're sounding rather than comprehending the reading, and more concerned with being picked or not being picked. In honesty, those who weren't chosen might've benefitted the most—not being absorbed into the fruitless game.

As we know, education is constantly evolving, adapting to new technologies, practices, and generations. Grand Valley State University graduates, who are now educators, had the opportunity to reflect on their own educational history with literacy and share their own ideas about the current literacy atmosphere. Annemarie Sikora, a 3rd grade teacher at Campbell Elementary, recalled her own reading experience when she was in 3rd grade. "There was no library in the classroom, we only read what we were told to read, and there was rarely class discussion." Looking back, if only a few decades, literacy standards have changed remarkably, and we can sometimes see a borderline-comical element in the faults of our own education in literacy. Thinking back on your own reading classroom in elementary school, the defective nature of certain reading strategies might be much more apparent when compared to the standards of a reading classroom in 2015. You might reflect on games such as popcorn: the educational equivalent of a mullet—a

trend that we should've realized was a mistake before full-blown implementation.

So what makes a high quality literacy program today? Erica Beaton, a history and english teacher at Cedar Springs High School, put an emphasis on choice. "Not only choosing your text, but learning *how* to choose your own text," she added. For students to be interested in reading, they need to have the opportunity to indulge in readings that they thoroughly enjoy. Amanda Roper, a 2nd Grade teacher at Pinewood Elementary with ten years of teaching under her belt, explained that "quality literature with a diverse range of genres" is the catalyst for successful readers and writers in and out of the classroom. The library must reflect the student's diversity in today's classroom. Autumn Hart, a reading specialist at Detroit Merit Charter Academy, reminds us of the adage that literature is a series of windows and mirrors, where a student can experience the unfamiliar as well as the familiar. This holds true even stronger today, yet we can still push diversity in literature even further. Students need access to a variety of texts to cater to individual interests and cultures while simultaneously building habits on how to choose adequate texts.

Ms. Beaton said she takes the studies of Dr. Jeff McQuillan to heart in her classrooms. Dr. McQuillan is mostly known for his *English as a Second Language Podcast* which has over 1,000 episodes since its launch in 2005. He enforces the importance of students having access to a multitude of texts within each classroom and teachers having at least 1,000 books on the top of their head to recommend to students at any given time. While 1,000 books may seem excessive, it's more likely a goal than a standard. Yet, the point is clear: reading can't simply be confined to the Library of America and the standard canonical athenaeum (yet of course they have their advantages). With the vast range of diversity (cultural, economical, and social) of students in any given classroom, a teacher must be prepared

> "Students need access to a variety of texts to cater to individual interests and cultures while simultaneously building habits on how to choose adequate texts"

to administer the necessary literature in order to invigorate prosperous literacy. Students might struggle, even fail, if only given a few paths, but give them 1,000 paths and they'll surely find one where they can succeed.

Yet, despite the advantages of choice, there is a continuous need for a cooperative balance between assigned readings and chosen readings. If classroom reading strategies were solely based on student choice, they might never escape easy, fun reading. Assigned readings will always serve their purpose. As Ms. Beaton put it, "Students don't always know how to push themselves, so assigned readings give them that push. And if they're struggling with the text, they have their teacher and classmates to help guide them through it." It's understood that the intricacies of To *Kill a Mockingbird* might be beyond the average capacity of a twelve year old, yet with discussion and a guiding hand, it can open a student to new concepts thorough analysis and critical thinking. Assigned readings create a shared experience—an experience beyond the page. Reading isn't and shouldn't necessarily be a secluded practice, but something to be shared with others, especially when it's a literary challenge. Yet, in education, finding this balance and executing these strategies are often much easier said than done.

This challenge when it comes to reading, where students can push themselves, is also a strong component in a quality literacy program. Amanda Roper suggests that books in a classroom library should not be categorized by reading level, rather they should be categorized by genre. This way, if a student is more inclined to read science fiction, they'd be willing to challenge themselves more within that genre as compared to a genre they don't enjoy as much. It's a way for students to access their reading potential. Yet, this is assuming that these students have access to a classroom library in the first place. For we know that economic disparity, a lack of focus

on quality literacy, and a multitude of other factors render inadequate reading experiences among students.

Aside from the obstacles of reading games such as Popcorn, there are other serious challenges, (sometimes unintentionally) attempting to sink the vessel of literacy in the classroom. In the age of technology comes different approaches of literacy. With new generations of students being exponentially more tech-comprehensive than the last, educators are constantly having to re-evaluate what literacy actually means. "We need to be technologically proficient," Autumn Hart stated with a quick, bold tone, "Teachers need to get with the times." Texts no longer come in dense walls of words on paper; they come in a legion of assorted modes. Visual, Aural, Gestural, Spatial, and Linguistic modes are all used in various combinations on numerous technological platforms. Students are becoming familiar with these modes and technologies at an early age as "native speakers," if you will; where educators are often "second language speakers," resulting in a disconnect with how students see and partake in literacy; this is simply

> "With new generations of students being exponentially more tech-comprehensive than the last, educators are constantly having to re-evaluate what literacy actually means."

the nature of how technology progresses. Therefore, educators constantly need to make an effort in becoming familiar with new technologies and text-consumption in order to bridge the gap.

Another difficulty on the list of literacy challenges is the unavoidable testing. Common Core State Standards, which set the bar for mathematics and English language arts/literacy across 42 states, are constantly under heavy hawk-eyed inspection. Autumn Hart stated that "Common Core is effective in theory, yet there's still too much focus on testing. It's difficult to see literacy depth in a test." The focus on the technical aspects pull down one side of the scale of literacy, where critical thinking, comprehension, and the less tangible yet equally important, aspects of literacy are lost between the bubbles of a multiple choice test. "It's about building a community of

readers," Ms. Beaton captured the bigger image. Literacy is much more than understanding phonics, syntax, or things that can be measured on a multiple choice quiz; it's about self-reflection, application, and absorption of cultural and social experiences. "Even if the standards are on the right track, people freak out because control is being taken out of the hands of the teachers. Teachers know what's best," Ms. Beaton commented. "But as long as you can get your students to read, write, speak, and think everyday, you're on the right track."

Every educator has their own ideas of what a successful literacy program consists of, and this simple idea of being able to read and write becomes complicated through politics, econom-

> **"Common Core is effective in theory, yet there's still too much focus on testing. It's difficult to see literacy depth in a test."**

ics, culture, class, social status, and community. Even with the purest intentions, due to these complications, our education system can fumble the foundations of a student's literacy. Yet understanding this fallibility, teachers such as our Grand Valley Alumni can consistently work on improving reading and writing within the classroom. There seems to be common connections among the alumns ideas on what educators should work towards in order to create effective literacy practices. Literacy is a dynamic concept, constantly changing with every school semester, and the teachers and curriculum alike will change along with it. And some day, we'll look back at 2015 and ask ourselves, "what were we thinking?"

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Next Chapter

The COE has had a year of success and transition. For *Colleagues*, this has meant new ideas from leadership and a move to a longer length format. This issue reflects the combined efforts of faculty, staff, and students that came together to examine literacy education.

After working with our dedicated faculty, I can tell you that their energy and commitment to children and teachers has not wavered. With all that is swirling about in the education realm, I hope you see reflected in these pages the efforts and thoughts that have gone into the COE's work in literacy education.

By now, a lot of you have seen the report from The Education Trust—Midwest and the bleak prediction, without change, it has for Michigan (*https://midwest.edtrust.org/ michiganachieves/*). In particular, the news of the reading skills of Michigan youth is very troubling. This information reinforces the need for research-based approaches to

solve the problem. The COE's faculty, staff, students, and alumni are creating and implementing dynamic and sound strategies to turn the tide.

The past couple of years has seen the college adopt innovative approaches that directly assist in the field. We have a vibrant team that is committed to responding to needs in the field. While this *Colleagues* is a snapshot of the efforts and thoughts of the COE, I encourage readers to communicate directly with the authors and consider partnering with the COE. As always, you can call the COE's Center for Educational Partnerships as a first contact at 616-331-6240 for any inquiry into possible collaborations.

The College of Education and the *Colleagues* magazine will continue to provide thought provoking information and direct assistance to the profession. This coming year we will introduce you to our new dean, Dr. Barry Kanpol, and present another informative issue.

If you are interested in writing a piece, please email me at *pelonc@gvsu.edu* with your proposal.

Clayton Pelon
Editor-in-Chief
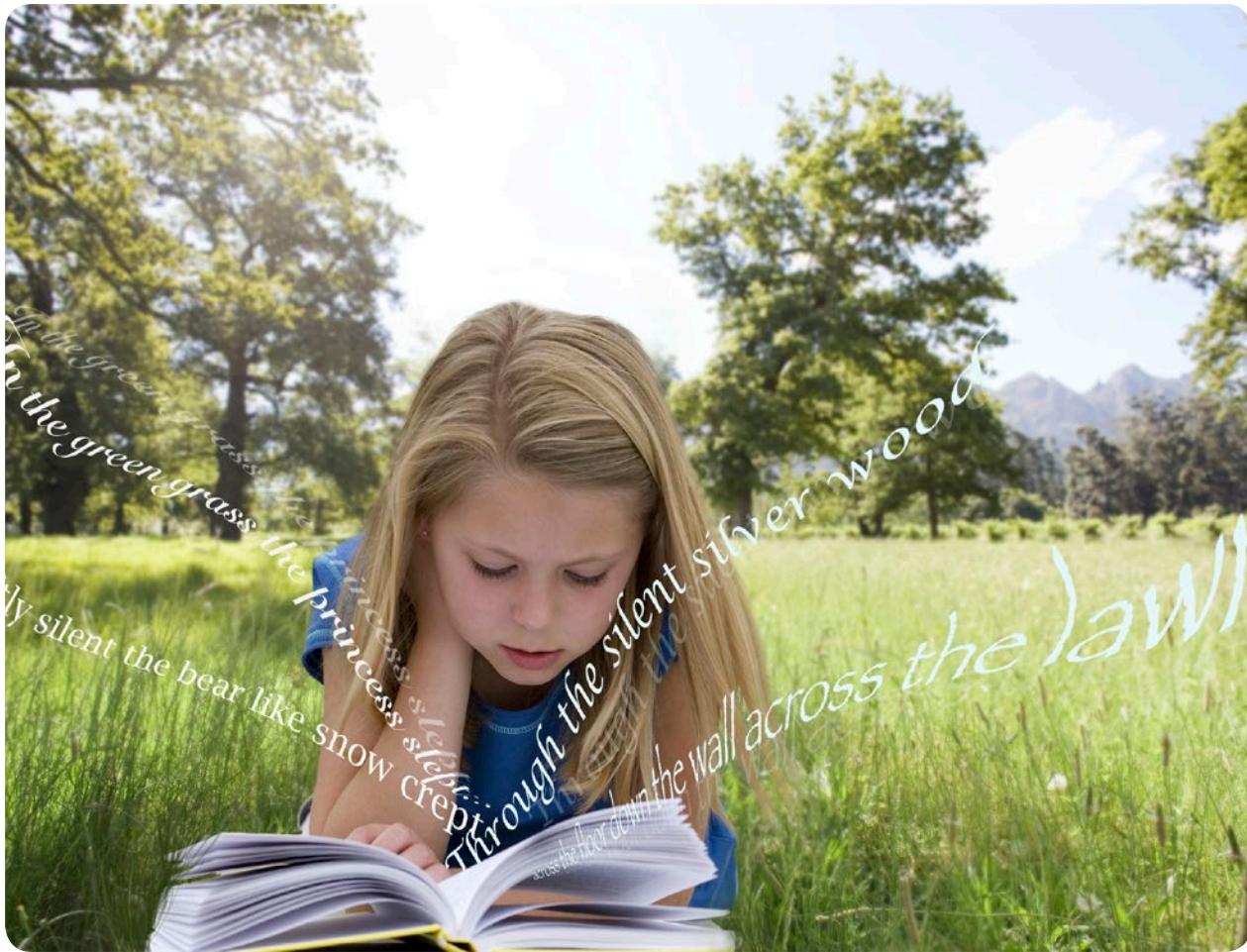
Story Time in the Heights

By Barbara Lubic, GVSU Faculty

"Every week my kids are so excited to come to Story Time! They love the books and the ice cream, but what makes me the most excited is that they look forward to the books the most!"

"This program is the highlight of our summers! While summer reading loss is a real thing, books and ice cream helps maintain an enthusiasm and desire to read more often with new material. It also connects the community and demonstrates to our children the joy and support of literacy for all ages. This program builds our home library so books are an everyday part of living."

These are two of the over 300 comments that were written about our sixth summer of Story Time in the Heights reading program.

Story Time began in 2008 as a simple idea. My 4 year old daughter and I enjoyed going to our neighborhood ice cream shop, Sundaes in the Heights. During our many visits we got to know the owner, Barbara Bush, well. At that time, Barbara wanted to provide some fun promotional events at her shop. Being a lover of books and reading, I suggested the concept of story time and I offered to read one night a week.

That summer, many negative things began to happen in our community. Statewide unemployment was the highest in the country and our neighborhood was greatly impacted by this. Many families in our neighborhood were struggling financially. Crime was also increasing in our area and

the green grass the princess slept, and in her dreams she was

"*The Grand Rapids Public Schools enrollment was at a record low and the reported tests scores were bleak.*"

"*The first year we grew to over 250 kids per night.*"

breaking and entering and shootings were at an all-time high. The Grand Rapids Public Schools enrollment was at a record low and the reported tests scores were bleak. Reading scores were falling rather than increasing. Our community as a whole was suffering.

I approached Barbara and asked what she thought about hosting a family friendly literacy night: an event that would bring our neighborhood together to celebrate the positives within our community. This idea quickly turned into a plan that included free ice cream and a free book for any child age 0-12. Included in the evening would be readers to engage children in a variety of family friendly stories. The goal was to provide a way for families who were struggling to attend a fun event together. Our hope was that bringing people together from the various areas of our neighborhood would help the crime in our vicinity to decrease. In addition, getting books in children's hands would help promote family reading, encourage kids to read and work to prevent the summer slide of reading abilities in school aged kids. Having readers for the kids would increase their interest in reading and encourage families to read together at home.

To turn this plan into a reality, I approached Dean Collins, the Grand Valley State University College of Education Dean at the time. I inquired whether the College of Education might be interested in sponsoring this community event. Dean Collins agreed and I put together a budget for the summer. It was decided that we would host this event every Tuesday in June, July and August. When creating the initial budget, I aimed high to make sure we could cover our expenses. In that budget, I planned on 50 kids per night.

> *"Results overwhelmingly indicate that we have created a family tradition in the Alger Heights neighborhood that has promoted the joy of reading and increased community connections through the years!"*

On our first night, June 3, 2009 we had 32 families for a total of 51 kids. We continued to grow every week! The first year we grew to over 250 kids per night. By our 5th year, the summer of 2014, we averaged 400 kids per night! Since that first night we have given away just under 27,000 books in our 6 years of story time. Although the ice cream shop has changed ownership four times in six years, this summer we had 37 families who participated for the sixth straight year.

At the beginning of each summer we have every family register. We ask them to complete a survey at summer's end. Results overwhelmingly indicate that we have created a family tradition in the Alger Heights neighborhood that has promoted the joy of reading and increased community connections through the years!

The goal is to continue Story Time in the Heights for many years to come. As is typical for many neighborhood projects, funding is the largest challenge. We are always working on means to fund this event.

"Our children look forward to this all week and were super excited at the beginning of the summer to be able to do this again, my nine-year-old has had difficulty with focusing on reading and this has kept him interested while school was out. He has read over 100 books! Our four-year-old has now moved from singing her ABC's to recognizing letters and some words this is all thanks to you and Story Time in the Heights. Thank you!"

"What a wonderful way to bring people in the community together! Kids interact with each other and are always excited to get a new book and be read to. We love supporting local businesses and enjoy meeting new people in our community."

If you are interested in participating as a volunteer or donating to Story Time in the Heights, visit the College of Education website at *www.gvsu.edu/coe* for more information.

A Grand Vision for Early Literacy Preparation

By Paula Lancaster, GVSU Faculty

In January of 2015, Grand Valley State University College of Education faculty members Paula Lancaster, Barbara Lubic, Cathy Meyer-Looze, and Elizabeth Stolle joined forces with the Michigan Department of Education and three other Universities* to realize a grand vision for the State of Michigan:

> Michigan will implement an aligned, seamless, and responsive system that empowers professional educators with knowledge and skills to implement evidence-based practices and interventions to improve the achievement and college and career readiness of the lowest performing students, K-12.

Work towards fulfilling this vision is being supported by a grant from the Center for Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center (CEEDAR) at the University of Florida, and is one of the many examples of the unprecedented collaborative efforts toward improving education for Michigan's children, adolescents, and young adults that educators are undertaking across the state.

CEEDAR has worked successfully with many states and institutes of higher education (IHE) to reform teacher and leader preparation programs. In order to receive a CEEDAR grant, the state education agency must work with four IHEs and each IHE must, in turn, have at least one general education, special education, and educational leadership faculty member on its team. These unique configurations enhance the likelihood that resulting initiatives will be well-aligned and reflect the differing expertise that individuals bring to the table.

In Michigan, the focus of our CEEDAR work is on preparing teachers and leaders to provide highly-effective, early literacy instruction and support for struggling learners. In part, the work assumes that the process of ensuring that all students will acquire strong, early literacy skills is a vexing challenge. Overcoming this challenge is complicated work, and no single organization, instructional methodology, or literacy-based approach is likely to meet the challenge. If the work was easy, it would have been accomplished long ago. What is needed is an all hands on deck approach in which educators at every level and of every theoretical orientation work together to compliment and support each other's collective efforts.

"Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved."
—Mattie Stepanek
www.mattieonline.com/

In the College of Education at Grand Valley State University, our focus is on ensuring that graduates of our teacher and leader preparation programs are well equipped to meet the varying literacy needs of all students. We recognize that teachers are better able to accomplish this goal if they are prepared with a range of skills and knowledge and have multiple opportunities to practice implementing these approaches with feedback prior to becoming professional educators.

A first step in this process is to align our goals with the goals of the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). One MDE goal addresses disseminating information about the literacy needs of struggling students, and creating recommendations for meeting those needs. The second goal focuses on defining evidence-based practices in literacy instruction within a multi-tiered systems of support model and providing educators with access to resources on these topics. A third goal will prompt review of certification structures and standards in both general and special education for early literacy, and a fourth goal focuses on alignment with State Board and CAEP standards.

The CEEDAR team in the COE has been working to create our aligned goals and include all relevant stakeholders in the work. As part of the second step in this process we have joined with our colleagues in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in both the English and Psychology Departments all of whom are committed to the project. For the first time in our collective memories, all faculty from the College of Education (general and special education and educational leadership) and from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences who teach an early literacy-related teacher/leader education course gathered to analyze our curriculum and coursework. We identified gaps and redundancies while working towards ensuring that key critical components of literacy instruction are taught and practiced within our programs.

Third, we are surveying our current student teachers and recent graduates of our teacher and leader preparation programs regarding their literacy preparation to add a level of validation to our curriculum analysis. Survey results will provide valuable insights into what knowledge and skills our students have learned and feel prepared to teach and support. We will continue to survey, monitor the results, and adjust our programs over the coming years. Fourth, we will ask our community partners in K-3 classrooms to review our curriculum, provide input, and potentially house field-based courses during which our teacher candidates can practice what they have learned.

Our goal is an aligned, seamless, and responsive preparation program that prepares professional educators with knowledge and skills to implement evidence-based practices and interventions to improve college and career readiness for all students. The work is daunting but critically important. Students in Michigan deserve nothing less than our best collective efforts.

*We are privileged to be working with dedicated colleagues from Northern Michigan University, Sienna Heights University, Western Michigan University, and the Michigan Department of Education.
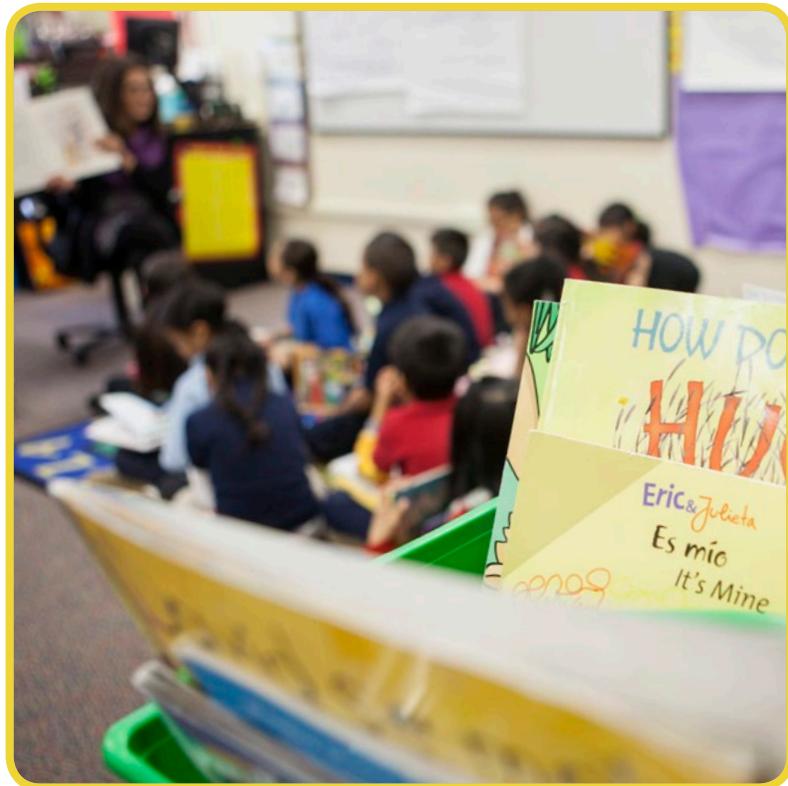
Gifting the Love of Reading:
One Classroom Library at a Time

By Sheryl Vlietstra, GVSU Faculty; Megan Freudigmann, GVSU Faculty; Forrest Clift, GVSU Staff

They say charity begins at home. And sometimes, a great idea for creating a charity or program begins in the same way. Such was the beginning of the Grand Valley State University College of Education Michigan Literacy Project.

Sheryl Vlietstra, Affiliate Professor in the College of Education at Grand Valley State University had a unique vision to support GVSU College of Education Alumni just starting out in the classroom. She had witnessed an outpouring of generosity that her own daughter, Kacy, received as she entered the world of teaching.

"[Kacy] went off to teach 4th grade in inner-city Chicago, [and] it became very apparent that she was given a big, empty classroom with no books and no financial resources to begin her own classroom library. Every cent she made went to rent, food and classroom expenses. Our hometown newspaper picked up on the story of 'small town girl making a difference in the big city' and before we could bat an eye, my garage was full of all kinds of used book donations from the small town community of Grand Haven, Michigan. We packed a trailer and loaded her classroom with over 1,500 books. That changed everything for her 4th graders! Reading attitudes and scores rose measurably and she had a little extra cash for her own life."

"*Once they started getting the books in their hands, their faces started to light up and they became excited about all the new books they were going to be able to read.*"

It was from this experience The Grand Valley State University College of Education Michigan Literacy Project (MLP) was born. Vlietstra, along with her colleagues Megan Freudigmann, Affiliate Professor, and Forrest Clift, Associate Director of the Center for Educational Partnerships developed the mission and direction of the program designed to support GVSU COE Alumni. In 2013, the Michigan Literacy Project pilot program received a $2,500 grant from The Meemic Foundation, a non-profit organization of Meemic Insurance Company committed to supporting education excellence through funding programs and other partnership initiatives. This initial grant provided classroom libraries to six new teachers in six different underserved Michigan public school districts. Based on this initial pilot funding, former College of Education Dean Elaine Collins committed $1,000 per year for ten years to help offset the cost of purchasing quality libraries.

The mission of MLP is to *"provide quality, multi-genre classroom libraries to recent Grand Valley State University College of Education graduates teaching in K-5 public school classrooms in underserved districts across the State of Michigan"*.

Often when new teachers begin their careers, they are thrilled to be landing a first teaching job. They arrive with fresh ideas and new energy. Sadly, despite their idealistic outlooks and unstoppable drive, their jobs come with

ill-equipped classrooms and little or no funding available—even for some of the basic tools necessary to provide a quality education to students. A beginning teacher career can be daunting, but when that new teacher is faced with paying for classroom basics, it can be downright overwhelming. This has never been more evident than in the acquisition of that most vital classroom resource—a diverse, grade-appropriate, multi-genre classroom library.

The Michigan Literacy Project team recognizes that quality children's literature is essential to the successful implementation of classroom curriculum. Students can use their classroom's library not only to reinforce their understanding of academic content, but in other ways, too. They can pursue their curiosities and gain access to a world beyond their circumstances and they can build the foundation for lifelong learning and better global understanding. Exposure to books in all genres can help foster a healthy love and respect for learning. Plus, MLP team members agree that exposure to these classroom libraries lays a critical groundwork. Curious and well-read students become Michigan's next generation of socially responsible, forward-thinking, creative and skilled, workers and entrepreneurs. Research shows students need to spend a large amount of time reading in order to improve and hone their reading skills (Allington, 2001), what better place for children to have access to books than in their own classroom (Neuman, 1999; Reutzel & Fawson, 2002; Routman, 2003)

What impact has the MLP classroom library had in your classroom?

The impact was enormous! My students were so excited to see the books delivered and couldn't wait to get their hands on them to read. We had many books with waiting lists because they were in such high demand. Students this year have also become amazing readers this year because of the library. Without access to books it is hard to build literacy, but with the support of the MLP grant we have taken huge strides.

~Christina Brown—5th Grade-Coloma Public Schools

MLP Positively Impacts Student Learning

Upon completion of the pilot year of granting classroom libraries to new teachers in underserved Michigan public school districts, MLP conducted a 10-question survey measuring program impact. The survey results revealed that students were: 1) highly engaged with the books on a daily basis; 2) demonstrated greater motivation to read; and 3) greater reading stamina than was demonstrated prior to the delivery of the classroom libraries.

Teachers also self-reported an increased integration of quality children's literature into their daily lesson planning, resulting in more engaging and more in-depth lessons.

In addition, students from the recipient classrooms were asked to score (on a 1-10 scale with 10 being the highest) their overall attitude toward reading before and after receiving the classroom libraries. The average reading attitude score before the libraries arrived was 6.13. After receipt of the classroom libraries, students rated their own attitude about reading at an average of 8.71, representing a 42 percent (42%) increase in positive student attitude toward reading. Thus, it appears the increased access to quality literature was impactful for students, creating enthusiasm for engaging in reading activities.

Teachers were polled to determine the ratio of books to students within their own classrooms, both before and after the classroom libraries were delivered. The average ratio prior to receiving the classroom libraries was eight books for every one student (8:1). After the books were in place, the ratio increased to 17 books for every one student (17:1), an average increase in excess of 112 percent (112%).

Despite the pivotal role classroom literature plays in supporting academic learning, it often takes new teachers several years of personal spending to develop a functional

and varied classroom library. Additionally, given the barrage of administrative, instructional, and assessment demands placed on new teachers, the procurement of classroom texts most often falls by the wayside. This frustration knows no bounds since teachers in both urban and rural communities find these obstacles to be especially challenging.

Literature resources are shockingly sparse in underserved districts. That is why these districts became a target of focus for the Michigan Literacy Project. MLP provides new teachers in such districts with classroom libraries filled with quality children's literature crucial to student learning and achievement.

The Project's mission is supported by the simple fact that children learn to read by reading. What does this look like in a standard classroom? Teachers can promote students' involvement with books by reading to their classes on a daily basis and by having students connect with books through the extensive use of classroom libraries. With hundreds of good books to read and time to read them, children will get on the right road to reading achievement (Neuman, 2001).

Since the initial pilot, the MLP program has slowly progressed and in 2014-2015 the team was able to use limited funds to purchase classroom libraries for four K-5 classrooms in the West Michigan area.

The goal of building on the successful first two years and expanding across the state by providing classroom library

collections to 15 classrooms each year for the next 3 years became a reality this past summer. Beginning with the 2015/16 academic year, the MLP has secured a $20,000 grant gifted to the program by the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Outstate Michigan. "We look for grants that promote the health and wellbeing of children. Because this grant provides a tangible necessity, i.e. books, to help educate children through reading, it fit all of RMHC's guidelines for awarding funds" says Lesa Dion, Executive Director-Ronald McDonald House Charities of Outstate Michigan.

How has the grant helped you?

The grant has allowed me to expand my classroom library so students will always have high interest books at their fingertips. These books allow me to successfully run my Reader's Workshop program where students have high quality books that interest them. I cannot thank enough all those that have worked to make this grant possible. What they have done will have a positive impact on my students for years to come.

~Timothy Zinger—5th Grade-Mona Shores Public Schools

As the next three years pass, the MLP team will continue to seek GVSU COE alumni who are new teachers (teaching 3 years or less) in underserved Michigan public school districts all over the state. MLP applications will be available to qualified candidates and recipients will be chosen based on a scoring rubric designed to identify significant need within each school population. High priority will be given to schools with elevated poverty rates, limited district resources and poor academic achievement. Similarly, high

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priority will be given to those teachers who exhibit a clear plan for implementing their classroom libraries.

Interviews:

We wanted to find out what the reaction and impact of the new classroom libraries made. Here are some responses from the recipient teachers.

Christina Brown—5th Grade Coloma Public Schools

What was your STUDENTS' reaction to receiving all of the new titles for your classroom library?

My students were beyond excited, seeing the amount of the books and the titles they were excited to see. When I asked them to help me make the wish list, it was like nothing I had ever seen before. They couldn't believe they were asked for input and that their input was actually meaningful! They were really excited to help sort and level the books – and they were really excited to brag to other kids about the awesome new books we had!!

Jamie Sanborn—2nd Grade-Fremont Public Schools

What IMPACT has it had in your classroom?

With more choices in the library, students were better able to find something they WANT to read about that was at their reading level.

Did any ONE comment or student reaction stand out from the others?

I had one student comment (the day we received the books): "This is the best day of my life!" I loved that!

Any other COMMENTS about the grant?

This is such a wonderful thing that you've begun. I was very blessed to be chosen as a library recipient and continue to be grateful for the generosity shown. I hope that you can continue to bless others in the same way!

Jean Estevez—1st Grade-Southwest Community Campus-Grand Rapids Public Schools

What was YOUR reaction to receiving the Classroom Library grant through the COE MI Literacy project?

Once I got over the initial shock, I was so grateful. I have put so much of my own money into my classroom, but it was never enough. As a first year teacher, the pay checks are small but the amount of money needed for books and supplies is outrageous. Books are the best gift that I could have received for my classroom. I am constantly trying to grow my classroom library and with Grand Valley's help, my students have access to so much more quality literature than I could have provided them on my own.

What IMPACT has it had in your classroom?

My students have been able to read a wider variety of literature. They have also been able to find more books that are at their level, especially with the set of Bruce Larkin books. My students are excited to switch their books in their book boxes...they always want to be reading new stories! The library has also helped me promote the love of reading in my students.

Katie Lett—1st Grade ELL-Kentwood Public Schools

What was your STUDENTS' reaction to receiving all of the new titles for your classroom library?

My students are immigrant/refugee students from all over the world. Their reaction to receiving hundreds of NEW books chosen just for them was breathtaking. They have the most beautiful hearts I have ever been blessed to know, and the cool thing is, they love to share the books with others.

Did any ONE comment or student reaction stand out from the others?

Upon receiving the books, one of my students exclaimed, "I wish the kids in the [refugee] camp could see this!"

Any other COMMENTS about the grant?

I just want to highlight again how amazing this grant is, not just for new teachers, but for generations of students. It just proves, yet again, how amazing Grand Valley is. Grand Valley isn't just a University, but a family that truly cares about all of its members, even after they've moved on. I could not be more proud to have attended a University willing to go above and beyond to give back to the community. My students and I sincerely thank you all from the bottom of our hearts! May you all be blessed this year and always!

Applying for an MLP Classroom Library

1. Are you a Grand Valley COE graduate?

2. Have you been teaching 3 years or less in a non-chartered public school in Michigan?

3. Are you teaching in a general education elementary classroom (K-5)?

4. Are you teaching in an underserved district with limited resources?

5. Are you in need of quality children's literature for your classroom?

6. Do you have a clear vision for how these books could be utilized to foster a love of literature in your own classroom?

If you answered, "YES" to all six questions, you are eligible to apply for a classroom library book grant provided by the Grand Valley State University College of Education Michigan Literacy Project. These grants recognize the importance of quality children's literature being available in K-5 classrooms.

To apply, simply follow the link https://www.gvsu.edu/coe/MLP and complete the short application which asks for: your personal information; your teaching/school information; your need for classroom literature; and supporting rationale. All applications will be reviewed by a team of GVSU faculty/staff. Qualified candidates will be chosen based on specific criteria. Those selected as grant recipients will be contacted and will be asked for input regarding titles needed for their individual classrooms. Good luck!

Timothy Zinger—5th Grade-Mona Shores Public Schools

What was YOUR reaction to receiving the Classroom Library grant through the COE MI Literacy project?

I was amazed with not only the amount of books I received but also the variety of topics and genres. The books are high quality and many are hardcover, which will last for years to come. It has taken a lot of the pressure off of me having to always buy books for my classroom library, which is much appreciated.

What was your STUDENTS' reaction to receiving all of the new titles for your classroom library?

They were ecstatic! When the books were unveiled from their bins and distributed for students to see, students erupted in smiles and chatter about what they wanted read and what books they have already read. The books brought new life to our classroom library.

Beth Ruhlman—1st Grade, West Godwin Elementary, Godwin Public Schools

What was YOUR reaction to receiving the Classroom Library grant through the COE MI Literacy project?

I was absolutely blown away when I received the Classroom Library grant! GVSU professors surprised me in the middle of teaching and delivered an amazing amount of books! I was speechless.

What IMPACT has it had in your classroom?

I can definitely see the love of books growing in my classroom. The students did not have a lot of non-fiction books and those are the ones I see them most interested in. I love that these books have really sparked their interest!

Did any ONE comment or student reaction stand out from the others?

I remember a student looking at me and saying, "Miss Ruhlman, we get to keep these in our classroom?!" Pretty cool feeling.

List of 2014-15 MLP Recipients

Allison Orth
2nd Grade Buchanan Elementary, Grand Rapids Public Schools

Anna Ball
Kindergarten West Godwin Elementary, Godwin Heights Public Schools

Brent Miller
2nd Grade Godfrey Lee ECC, Godfrey-Lee Public Schools

Erin Doughty
5th Grade Stocking Elementary, Grand Rapids Public Schools

The 2015 Big Ten Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award

By Dottie Barnes, GVSU Staff

John Shinsky, Interim Dean of the College of Education, was the 2015 recipient of the Big Ten Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award.

The award recognizes Big Ten players who have achieved success in the area of humanitarianism after college; Shinsky was an All-American football player for Michigan State University. He was a three-year letter winner from 1970-73, earning Academic All-America recognition and second-team All-Big Ten honors in 1973.

As a former orphan, Shinsky has committed his life to serving the needs of abandoned children. He and his wife, Cindy, are co-founders of Ciudad de los Niños, "The City of the Children," orphanage in Matamoros, Mexico.

"I am humbled to receive this award and consider it a tribute to all of the exceptional people who have supported me and Cindy for the past 10 years with building and operating the orphanage," Shinsky said. "I also want to recognize Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, our partner organization, and our 100 beautiful children who have entrusted us with their lives with the hope that they will receive what they need to become caring and contributing adults who will reverse the pattern of abuse, neglect and abandonment that they have been so accustomed to experiencing."

The Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award is named for Minnesota's Tony Dungy and Indiana's Anthony Thompson. For more information about the orphanage, visit *www.shinskyorphanage.org*.

Dungy-Thompson Humanitarian Award recipients include:

2011: George Taliaferro, Indiana University

2012: Chris Spielman, Ohio State University

2013: Drew Brees, Purdue University

2014: Brian Griese, University of Michigan

2015: John Shinsky, Michigan State University

COE

Honoring the Memory of Julie Chlebo

By Dottie Barnes, GVSU Staff

The Grand Valley community is mourning the death of Julie Chlebo, a longtime professor in the College of Education, who died March 19.

Chlebo, ssociate professor of early childhood education, came to Grand Valley in 1997. She was known for her caring attitude with students.

"Julie was an exceptional professor who always went the extra mile with her students," said John Shinsky, Interim Dean of the College of Education. "She had high expectations and cared about the success of her students; she kept their needs at the forefront. Julie will be deeply missed by her students, colleagues and everyone who had the opportunity to know and work with her."

Her scholarly interests included Waldorf Early Childhood Education, Head Start and Jewish Early Childhood Education.

GVSU staff member Suzanne Rogers said, "Julie was one of the most

intentionally encouraging individuals I have ever met. She took every possible opportunity to share positive, uplifting words of encouragement."

Chlebo earned a bachelor's degree from Taylor University, a master's degree from Grand Valley, and a doctorate from Indiana University.

"Julie Chlebo was always a bright light in a dark room with the unique ability to share a positive comment to make you feel just marvelous. Julie became one of my favorite colleagues and a highly successful scholar, co-presenter at international conferences, and a dedicated leader in early childhood education. She was a close friend, more so a "family" member. She leaves a void that will be difficult to fill," said Dr. Faite Mack, faculty.

A service was held March 22 at Muehlig Funeral Chapel in Ann Arbor and a COE memorial was held on campus on May 17.

Groundswell Initiative Helps Students Create Real Solutions for their Communities

By Joanna Allerhand, GVSU Staff

Students from New Branches Charter Academy, a Groundswell school, work with community partners on their 2015 ArtPrize entry depicting the Grand River.

A student carefully adds chemicals to a glass test tube, drop by drop. He watches as the water in the tube changes color. If it turns really dark, he will know there is a lot of pollution in the water.

KeSean Garmon, a ninth-grade student at CA Frost Environmental Science Academy, is analyzing water from a creek near his school. He wants to know how healthy the creek is and what needs to be done to help protect it.

Through this project, KeSean is learning that rain water picks up pollution as it flows over the ground. This type of pollution is called nonpoint source (NPS) pollution because it comes from diffuse sources—anywhere rain falls. The rain carries these pollutants, including fertilizer and pet waste, as it flows down storm drains that empty into creeks and the Grand River.

"This can affect the chemical balance of the river and affect the things that live there," KeSean explained.

KeSean and his classmates plan to educate the community about this problem and create solutions to reduce the amount of NPS pollution entering the creek. For example,

students will give their neighbors a tip for protecting the creek from car wash soap.

"You should wash your car in the grass so the grass and dirt can filter the soap," KeSean said.

CA Frost is part of the Groundswell initiative, a place-based environmental education program housed in the College of Education's Center for Educational Partnerships at Grand Valley State University. Groundswell supports K-12 teachers in West Michigan who want to move beyond the classroom. Teachers help students engage in learning through real-world problem solving and building connections between education and their community.

"By taking students out in the field, we nudge the door open so students ask questions, make observations, look for problems, and seek solutions," said Nijagara Davidson, a teacher at North Park Montessori, a Groundswell school. "They start to understand they are part of this world and they indeed can make a difference."

Supporting Place-based Education

Groundswell began in 2009 as the Kent County hub of the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative—a place-based education initiative funded through the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. The initial mission of Groundswell came together through a collaborative effort by 29 individuals representing 23 organizations. They created Groundswell to provide K-12 teachers with support for place-based environmental education and academic service learning pedagogies.

The Groundswell model has successfully demonstrated how teachers can help guide students to become lifelong stewards of the environment and leaders in their communities. Students become empowered by identifying and solving real needs in their community.

"For me, I think place-based education is the best thing that's happened to current education," said Rosemary Lucchese, a teacher at City High/Middle School in Grand Rapids.

"You need hands-on learning to figure out what's real. I don't need to memorize facts, I need to know what pertains to what and what the connections are. Students need to go experience it," Lucchese said.

Groundswell supports teachers by providing sustained professional development on pedagogy and content knowledge, project funding, connections with community organizations, and opportunities for collaboration with other passionate educators. The program currently works with 30 schools and more than 3,500 students in the Grand Rapids area.

"It has the biggest impact on the kids because the students who traditionally have behavior issues, it gives them an outlet so they are much more successful," said Laura Zeichman, a teacher at Pinewood Middle School in Kentwood.

"They're much more engaged in their work and more willing to put forth large amounts of effort. If a kid is interested in something and sees how it impacts their life they're going to be way more likely to do well," Zeichman said.

Groundswell is funded through grants from government entities and local foundations. Staff in the Center for Educational Partnerships maintain and expand the program by submitting innovative and compelling applications to multiple funding sources. To date, the program has been

Grand Rapids Public Museum School students participate in a Teach for the Watershed stream sampling experience at Highland Park as part of their Groundswell program.

awarded more than $1.5 million in grant funds. Groundswell is funded through the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Wege Foundation, and the Baldwin Foundation.

Protecting the Local Watershed

In 2014, Groundswell was awarded a three-year grant of nearly $500,000 – the largest single award the program has received to date. This grant enabled Groundswell to expand the level of support offered to teachers and students by providing additional financial resources, technical expertise, and opportunities to engage with community organizations. The funds were granted by the EPA through the MDEQ.

Groundswell used this grant to create the Lower Grand River Education Initiative (LGREI). The LGREI program supports Groundswell's mission to develop environmental stewards through its focus on water quality in the Lower Grand River Watershed (LGRW).

Specifically, LGREI focuses on nonpoint source (NPS) pollution impacting the Grand River—pollution carried by urban stormwater and agricultural runoff. In urban areas, stormwater runoff occurs when rain lands on sidewalks, roads, and other impervious surfaces that prevent the rain from soaking into the ground. As the rain flows over the

ground, it picks up fertilizer, pet waste, soil, and other substances. The rain then carries these substances down storm drains that empty into local water bodies. NPS pollution is one of the leading causes of water quality impairments in rivers and lakes, according to the U.S. EPA. Pathogens, sediment, and nutrients are the main NPS pollutants of concern in the Grand River watershed.

The LGREI program is designed to improve education and awareness about NPS pollution and reduce the associated impacts on water quality. Schools involved with LGREI will receive support to participate in teacher professional development workshops, educate students about water quality issues, enhance community awareness about NPS pollution, engage with watershed managers and other technical experts, and implement service learning initiatives that reduce NPS pollution impacts.

To protect lakes and rivers from NPS pollution, watershed managers use both large and small-scale projects that capture and clean rain where it falls. Given the widespread nature of stormwater—rain falls all over the city—and large volume of runoff, managers must implement many projects throughout the urban area. For example, one inch of rain landing on Van Andel Arena, a 140,280-square-foot entertainment venue in downtown Grand Rapids, will generate more than 87,000 gallons of runoff.

> *"I think place-based education is the best thing that's happened to current education. You need hands-on learning to figure out what's real... Students need to go experience it. When I started working with Groundswell and PBE, everything came alive. All the activities the kids did were authentic because they were connected to their community."*
>
> *Rosemary Lucchese,*
> *City High/Middle School—Grand Rapids,*
> *Groundswell Teacher*

Groundswell teacher Laura Zeichman participates in a professional development experience provided by Groundswell partner Plaster Creek Stewards.

Capturing and cleaning such large volumes of stormwater runoff requires a community-wide effort. Through the LGREI program, Groundswell students are learning what they can do to help. They are exploring how rain gardens, rain barrels, and native vegetation gardens soak up rain and filter pollutants from runoff.

"I am amazed at how schools, teachers and administrators, are asking for direction and becoming more and more interested in dealing with water issues and education issues by taking their kids outdoors and figuring out ways to bring nature into the school yard," said Andrea Lubberts of Plaster Creek Stewards, a Groundswell community partner.

"I wish that every school had the support of the Groundswell program," Lubberts said.

Students from CA Frost are helping neighborhood residents determine what they can do at home to help protect the Brandywine Creek from NPS pollution. This creek runs through Blandford Nature Center property, and protecting the creek is a high priority for the center. Students are working with Blandford staff and other community partners to evaluate the health of the stream and develop projects to protect it.

Groundswell emphasizes reciprocal partnerships, where both the schools and community organizations benefit from working together. These mutually beneficial relationships tend to be more impactful and sustainable.

"The Groundswell LGREI program allows for ongoing engagement between community partners and students," said Jamie Vaughan with Trout Unlimited, a Groundswell partner. "Because of this, I have recognized a noticeable improvement in the teachers' and students' environmental literacy in regards to NPS pollution."

When Art and Science Collide

A large-scale, community-based mural designed to raise awareness about NPS pollution exemplifies Groundswell's reciprocal partnership model. Students from New Branches Charter Academy, a Groundswell school, wanted to submit a stormwater pollution mural in the 2015 ArtPrize contest. They wanted to paint this mural around a storm drain to educate the community that the drains flow directly to the river, along with pollutants from any surface the rain touches. But a long list of regulations limited and restricted what the students could paint and where.

The students needed help obtaining the necessary permissions and ensuring the project proceeded properly. They needed community partners who would also benefit from a stormwater pollution mural.

Two community partners were vital for the completion of this project—the Grand Rapids Environmental Services Department and the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW). Both groups work to help protect the Grand River from NPS pollution. A mural would fit their mission by serving as a public education campaign and raising community awareness.

"Making the connection between stormwater and the Grand River through activities like macroinvertebrate sampling and mapping infrastructure students can see the moving parts of the cause and effect relationship between NPS pollution and water quality. When students make that connection the natural next step is wanting to do something about it," said Bonnie Broadwater of LGROW.

Over the course of two weeks, more than 60 students, teachers, and community members painted the stormwater pollution mural on a city-owned parking lot adjacent to the Grand River. Passers-by stopped to ask what was happening and the students engaged them in conversation about protecting the river. ArtPrize attendees explored the final piece by searching for hidden pictures in the mural as part of a scavenger hunt. Community members continue to enjoy a permanent art installation—and reminder about NPS pollution.

Stewards of the Future

These are just a couple of examples of how Groundswell helps support community-based action to help ensure adequate protection of our water resources. The program serves as a model for how place-based environmental education can successfully engage students in community-based learning and stewardship. Ultimately, Groundswell strives to foster lifelong environmental stewards and civic engagement as a vital component of a thriving, vibrant community.

"Students are uniquely fit for inspiring community stewardship because of their fresh ideas and positive attitudes," Vaughan said.

Groundswell is demonstrating that place-based learning and project-based education are effective strategies for engaging students. The program provides students with an opportunity to see and learn about their place. Learning through their community and developing projects to protect their local environment helps create a meaningful goal for the students.

"When I started working with Groundswell and PBE, everything came alive," Lucchese said. "All the activities the kids did were authentic because they were connected to their community. Learning becomes more like play. The avenues are endless."

Joanna Allerhand is the Groundswell LGREI Coordinator with the GVSU Center for Educational Partnerships, College of Education. Contact: *allerhaj@gvsu.edu*.

Latino Earth Partnerships and Groundswell Join Forces

The Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Center for Educational Partnerships received a small grant from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the Latino Earth Partnership project. Groundswell, a place-based environmental education initiative housed in the GVSU College of Education, will utilize the Latino Earth Partnership funding to provide professional development for West Michigan K-12 teachers this summer. The Latino Earth Partnership project engages educators in environmental stewardship integrating Latino perspectives with grade-level academic content and provides culturally appropriate educational resources. Groundswell is excited to work with the Latino Earth Partnership project to support teachers in encouraging the next generation of environmental stewards.

Haas Appointed to State Education Commission

By University Communications

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder announced that Grand Valley State University President Thomas J. Haas will head up his commission on the state's education system.

Haas will chair the Education Commission that will be comprised of 25 members who will study pre-K through 20. These members will have backgrounds in education, business, government or non-profit entities and will have an interest and expertise in education and successful outcomes.

"I am honored to accept the request of the governor to chair this important commission," said Haas. "We will collaborate and undertake the critical mission of designing a pre-K through 20 continuum that will shape the next generation of educated citizens essential to our state's continued economic health."

Snyder made the announcement following his March executive order, which created the 21st Century Education Commission. The P20 Education Commission will analyze top performing states and nations to determine how their systems of education lead to successful career credentialing and post-secondary education, recommend changes to Michigan's system and prioritize those recommendations. The commission must finish its work and issue a final report to the governor for his consideration no later than February 28, 2017.

Photography by University Communications

Kennedy honored by Literacy Center of West Michigan

By University Communications

John C. Kennedy, vice chair of Grand Valley's Board of Trustees, was honored by the Literacy Center of West Michigan May 12th during "Spellebration 2016," an event that celebrates community leaders and volunteers who have worked to increase the power of literacy in the area.

Kennedy received the Fifth Third Bank Champion of Literacy Award.

He is the president and CEO of Autocam Corp. and was appointed to the Board of Trustees in 2011 after serving an initial term from 2002-2004.
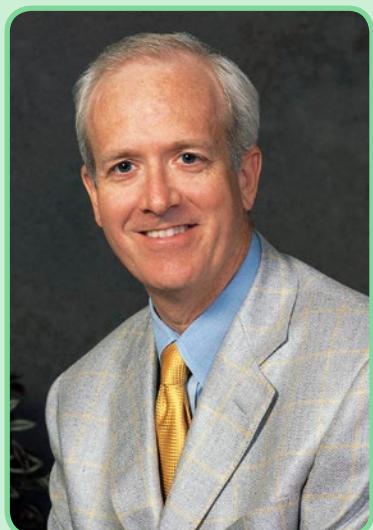
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