Connection, Community, and Identity: Supporting Diverse Learners in the Core Era

Comments from the Editors

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Debate remains in New York State around the Common Core State Standards, their implementation, associated testing, and the relationship between the standards and the teacher accountability movement. Yet, while debate continues, young people walk into school each day with hopes to learn, to wonder, and to connect. They get on the bus or walk down the block and their families entrust them to us--teachers and building leaders. It is our belief that teachers regardless of the standards seek to build connections, to strengthen communities, and to honor the identities of the young people in their classrooms.

Yet, recently, one of our graduate students, a veteran Social Studies teacher, shared that in her affluent suburban district teachers referred to the “College and Career Readiness Standards” and not the “Common Core” because parents would not accept ‘common’ in the learning for their children. Other districts have interpreted common in a different but similarly limited fashion by treating the EngageNY modules as sacred texts. This issue is intended to question these definitions of common within the CCSS by examining how teachers and teacher educators are working to make space for their students’ lived experiences in their Core Era Classrooms. In particular, this issue focuses on diverse learners and the impact of our instructional practices on learning and engagement. The articles included in this issue offer potential pathways for redefining learning for all students in the Core Era.

In this issue of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum*, we are pleased to introduce a new section of the journal “Voices from the Field”. Here you will find an essay by Bob Ruder, a retired Middle School Administrator from Poughkeepsie City School District. His essay provides a point of reflection on the power of reading, human connection, and the role of adults to inspire and nourish the reading and writing lives of young people.

In addition, we are also pleased to provide both the print and audio file of an interview with Tammy Ellis Robinson, the 2013 New York State Reading Association Literacy Advocate award recipient. Ms. Robinson, the Founder, Managing Editor, and Executive Director of *Skribblers Magazine*, has graciously offered to share her remarks from the awards banquet which are included with the interview. If you have not already viewed the [Skribblers website](#) and the accompanying video from Ms. Robinson, we strongly recommend it as a site of possibility for student publication.

Also, in this issue:

Elizabeth Yanoff, Aja LaDuke, and Mary Lindner, provide analysis of six professional texts from the field in their article “Common Core Standards, Professional Texts, and Diverse Learners: A Qualitative Content Analysis”. They specifically questioned the
degree to which the texts address the needs of diverse learners, defined by the authors as above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners. Their findings are hopeful in that each text showed evidence of attention to those students though in different ways.

Thea Yurkewecz in her article “Observational Tools to Inform Instruction for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners” offers critical insights into observational tools that teacher candidates, teacher educators, and teachers themselves can use to better understand the literacy skills and cultural backgrounds of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Carmen Sherry Brown in her article “Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years: Foundational Skills that Support Emergent Readers” offers a research-based perspective on the importance of high-quality early education for all learners. She specifically emphasizes the need for active engagement and purposeful, meaningful language and early print activities to support emergent readers. She also emphasizes the importance of providing young learners with an understanding of the myriad of reasons why people read and write if we are to provide lasting foundational skills.

Kathleen Gormley and Peter McDermott provide us with important digital tools including apps and website to support literacy learning for all students in their article “Differentiating Literacy Learning—There’s an App for That!” Suggestions are provided to support teachers and literacy leaders with ways to incorporate these tools into classrooms.

Laurie A. Sharp provides further insight into digital spaces for literacy learning in her article “Literacy in the Digital Age”. In this article, she provides an overview of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards and provides literacy educators with an evaluative tool to measure their adeptness with the knowledge and skills needed to teach in the digital age.

Francine Falk-Ross and Brian Evans in their article “Word Games: Content Area Teachers’ Use of Vocabulary Strategies to Build Diverse Students’ Reading Competencies” provide a research-based context for analyzing the impact of a professional development program focused on developing a language-building approach to support literacy activities for marginalized students. Specifically, notable changes in students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary use, and discourse participation were found, and a significant difference in the students’ achievement following the interventions. Implications for teachers include increased use of language modeling to meet students’ specific literacy needs.

In his article “Building Schema: Exploring Content with Song Lyrics and Strategic Reading”, Justin Stygles shares his experience using reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown 1984) within the reading workshop Justin’s students pondered provided song lyrics to activate schema, questions, and a purpose for reading social studies content.
Finally, we are always searching for new ways that research can be and is being shared with authentic audiences. At Manhattanville College, we host an Annual Graduate Student Research Fair. This year, several of our literacy candidates shared their action research projects through self-created websites rather than traditional posters or paper presentations. We found this an exciting and important shift in practice and invite you to review two sites that offer points of reflection for the field by clicking on the hyperlinks associated with their names. **Andrea Rogers** teaches second grade in Bedford, NY, and conducted research on the blending of writing workshop with the district-mandated *Journeys* program. In her work, Andrea, provides an important model for teachers committed to workshop-based approaches in an era of scripted curriculum. **Meghan Lohrs** is an Assistant Teacher at Rye Country Day School in Rye, NY. Her research focused on the impact of an arts-based approach to her students’ literacy learning, particularly on their comprehension of complex texts. Through the use of artistic approaches, Meghan’s students were able to express their predictions, explanations, and interpretations through pictorial representations.

Please find our call for manuscripts for the 2015 issue of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* at the end of this issue. We welcome your voices and scholarly contributions. We look forward to seeing you **November 9-11 in Syracuse, NY for the New York State Reading Association Annual Conference**. See www.nysreading.org for details.

Enjoy!