Welcome to the 2014 Issue of the Journal of Classroom Research in Literacy!

The JCRL continues to showcase research by teachers who have implemented new approaches in their classrooms or have studied their existing practices to make data-informed changes. In looking to the future, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) suggested that to “teach new kinds of ‘knowledgeability’ we need to prepare all to: be participant-researchers or action researchers—analyzing situations, anticipating and solving problems, thinking creatively, innovating and taking well-judged risks” (p. 84). The authors in this issue embraced these new roles through implementing very different methodologies and presenting unique literacy research findings. Yet four common themes emerged from their studies: they drew upon students’ experiences, promoted student-directed learning, specifically emphasized the importance of writing, and they concerned their investigations with ways teacher practices might be improved.

In all three articles, the authors drew upon students’ experiences and looked for ways to situate the curriculum in the lives of their students. In Historical Fiction Through Fifth Graders’ Eyes, Rebecca Barone, Bethany Oswalt and Diane Barone observed and analyzed students’ responses to the stories they were reading. The genre of children’s and young adult historical fiction tends to extend students’ experiences by connecting to the past through characters that are of the same ages as the readers. The authors investigated, in part, how their students drew relations between past events and their own experiences. In Rapping Romeo and Juliet: Supporting Students’ Understanding of Text Through Their Existing Literacy, Elaine Wang integrated rap into her English program, so that her students could use a familiar literacy to make sense of a new and unfamiliar academic literacy experience. In Writing From the Heart: Motivating Students to Write with Passion and Voice, Laryssa Gorecki drew upon the universal struggles and experiences expressed in Aboriginal and other texts to connect with her students’ writing about their personal experiences.

In all three studies, the authors revealed their interest in students directing their learning. Barone, Oswalt and Barone, after analysing the responses that the students made when reading, suggested ways that students might further explore historical fiction and develop their understandings. Wang’s students selected Romeo and Juliet as a text for study, and she worked with them to integrate this text with other forms of literacy with which they were most familiar. Gorecki’s students chose aspects of their experiences to explore in relation to the Aboriginal texts they were reading together in the class.

Student writing played an important role in all three investigations. In Historical Fiction, writing was the primary means by which the students responded to their readings. They expressed their ideas and understandings over the course of reading long texts, and the authors explored how their responses developed. In Rapping Romeo and Juliet the students used one writing form to express their understandings of another writing form.
They moved ideas from one form to another to gain insight into the challenging text they were reading. In *Writing From the Heart* the students used Aboriginal and other texts as models for expressing their personal experiences clearly, descriptively and metaphorically.

Finally, one primary interest across all three studies was to explore ways for teachers to improve their practices. *Historical Fiction* shows the collaboration between two grade five teachers and a professor. The two teachers implemented literature circles in their own ways, without feeling the need to try and make both classrooms the ‘same’. In this way they explored the students’ responses to authentic classroom contexts and their suggestions for deepening students’ genre understandings reflected this. In *Rapping Romeo and Juliet*, Wang acknowledges that teachers are sometimes uncomfortable bringing literacies that are unfamiliar to them into their classrooms. But through her study, she demonstrated that taking this risk can be rewarding for both the students and the teacher. In *Writing From the Heart*, Gorecki showed how students from a wide variety of backgrounds were able to connect with Aboriginal authors and the human concerns that are part of all of our lives. By identifying these common concerns, teachers can help their students relate to a range of texts. In addition, Gorecki demonstrates how a written text can serve as the model for expressing ideas and experiences.

We hope that the 2014 issue of the *JCRL* will inspire you to run with a new idea or approach that you have been wanting to try in your classroom. Or perhaps you might turn the lens and look a little closer at one of your current practices. You may find that by gathering a little data, you will see a way to make a good practice even better.

Reference

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