

April 2020

Teaching and Learning for Our Times: Editorial Remarks

James F. Nagle
Saint Michael's College, jnagle2@smcvt.edu

Penny A. Bishop
University of Vermont, pbishop@uvm.edu

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Recommended Citation

Nagle, J. F., & Bishop, P. A. (2020). Teaching and Learning for Our Times: Editorial Remarks. *Middle Grades Review*, 6(1). <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/mgreview/vol6/iss1/1>

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Teaching and Learning for Our Times: Editorial Remarks

James F. Nagle, *Saint Michael's College*
Penny A. Bishop, *The University of Vermont*

As co-editors of *Middle Grades Review*, we hope our first issue of 2020 finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy during these challenging times.

Since our last issue, we have witnessed dramatic global changes in health, the economy, and education. Although the majority of this issue's articles were written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are struck by how powerfully they speak to us as educators, scholars, and researchers during this time of great uncertainty.

In "We Are All Unschoolers Now," author Kathleen Kesson observes that "overnight we have hundreds of thousands of young people with no school to go to - compulsory unschooling." With this essay, Kesson calls for personalized and compassionate teaching and learning in the age of COVID-19. She reflects on her experience as a mother who unschooled her four children in rural Oklahoma for five years. She offers ten insightful suggestions for meaningful and authentic ways for children to learn while they are not at school. Through her personal perspective, Kesson reminds us that, "the curriculum for our complex times is emergent, non-linear, and unpredictable."

This point about emergent curriculum is underscored by Gary Weilbacher in his contribution to our current issue. In responding to James Beane's essay, "This is What Democracy Looks Like: Some Thoughts on Democratic Schools" [published in *Middle Grades Review* 5(3)], Weilbacher reflects on his time spent in a community school during his sabbatical. He notes, "If ever there seems to be a more necessary time to revive the discussion that democratic schools could emerge from the wreckage caused by decades of the

educational 'reform' imposed upon public schools, and especially on their curricula, it is now." Although, we assume, he did not envision the current pandemic when writing in January 2020, Weilbacher's embrace of democratic and integrative curriculum development demonstrates thoughtfully how we might leverage such practices for the common good.

Similarly, while the next two articles were written prior to the pandemic, they both offer powerful messages by highlighting populations who may be particularly vulnerable. In Matthew Moulton's sobering discussion of young adolescent homelessness in the United States, and the nation's response or lack thereof to address this issue, the author recommends practices to assist students who are homeless. In his essay, Moulton skillfully walks readers through Gorski's (2015) Equity Literacy framework, applying it in the creation of a manual for prospective and practicing teachers to consider and address students who are experiencing homelessness.

Cody Miller, Kathleen Olmstead, Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko, Amy Shema, and Natalie Svrcek adopt a similar stance in their practitioner perspective on challenging silences to support LGBTQ students in middle school English classrooms. The authors analyze a scenario, describe how to support students who identify as LGBTQ, and provide resources to help teachers engage in LGBTQ-affirming practices with middle school students. These authors urge readers to recognize that, "Teachers' inaction is an action. The decision to not include LGBTQ voices has ramifications regardless of any teacher's intent. Teachers send the message that LGBTQ identities are controversial or deviant when they exclude

LGBTQ topics from their curriculum (Lewis & Sembiante, 2019; Linville, 2011)." In fact, the "silencing of LGBTQ voices within our classrooms and curricula is another, more implicit, form of oppression" (Miller, 2017). Overall, Miller and colleagues provide essential insight into including and normalizing LGBTQ identities in middle school communities.

This issue closes with research on collaborative scientific argumentation in middle grades classrooms. The authors, Pi-Sui Hsu, Saurav Mukhopadhyay, and Rakez Al-Ararah, explore the intersection of collaborative scientific argumentation and technology integration and study how middle school science teachers enact the practice in their classrooms with the support of technology. These researchers conclude that, while each teacher recognized the importance of collaborative scientific argumentation, most of them taught the practice implicitly. As the world faces increasingly complex scientific problems, we cannot imagine a better time to learn more about this "social and collaborative process of proposing, supporting, evaluating, and refining ideas to make sense of a complex problem to advance knowledge" studied by these authors.

Harkening back to Kesson's opening observation that "hundreds of thousands of young people (have) no school to go to," many of us now find ourselves navigating unprecedented waters. Most researchers, teacher educators, and teachers have not witnessed a global event like the COVID-19 pandemic in their lifetimes. Yet, amidst the uncertainty, trauma, and indeed crisis, we are concomitantly lifted up by the strength, tenacity, compassion, and courage of middle grades educators.

We know much of our readership is on the front lines of this pandemic. As a result, we are announcing a new call for manuscripts for a special issue of the *Review*, entitled, Middle Grades Education in the Age of

COVID-19, with a rapid review process. We are interested in potential applications of middle grades education theory, practice, and research that can contribute to the public good at this time of international crisis. We look forward to disseminating useful and relevant papers that enable educators to offer responsive education for young adolescents, wherever they may learn.

Be well and stay safe.

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