Thoughts from the Editors

In this time of contention and unease about literacy instruction, we need to take a step back and think about what really matters to us as educators, parents, scholars, and learners. Our cover symbolizes the confusion about literacy that currently swirls around education, dragging us deeper and deeper into political quicksand. Too often we rush around trying to defend our stance and respond to critics while searching for ways to work within current mandates without compromising our teaching. In the process, we risk losing sight of what we value most about literacy.

We see this issue of the journal as an opportunity to get our feet back on solid ground by reflecting on the following questions:

- What is literacy?
- Why does literacy matter?
- What does it mean to be a literate person?
- How do we become literate?
- What is success in literacy? Who defines success?
- Why bother?

Katherine Paterson, Perry Gilmore, Donaldo Macedo, David Pearson, Karen Gallas, James Banks, and Allan Luke accepted our invitation to write a short essay directly responding to these questions. These authors offer powerful perspectives, including anthropology, sociology, internationalism, critical theory, literature, research, and pedagogy. What is consistent across these essays is a deep concern about current misdirections in literacy and a belief that we need to focus on kids and learning within these multiple perspectives to move ahead as educators.

Two articles highlight the misuse and misinterpretation of reading research in our society and schools. Brenda Miller Power expresses her fears about how research inform instruction in a fictionalized story about leveling. Joanne Yatvin, Connie Weaver, and Elaine Garan critique current U.S. legislation to identify the inaccuracies and distortions in the research used to support this legislation. Esther Fine and Kenneth Slater personalize the current debates by focusing on the significance of caring relationships within literacy instruction. Their story reminds us of the consequences of not considering individual learners within their own sociocultural communities.

The authors of the next two articles focus on creating classroom contexts where children use literacy to revisit as well as to go beyond the familiar within writing workshop. Mary Ehrenworth explores how children can imagine the experience of the other through the visual arts so that writing becomes an aesthetic experience. Ruth Hubbard and Virginia Shorey encouraged students to write stories about their lives in both their first and second languages. These stories supported students in exploring their own identities and in acquiring written English proficiency.

Mari Riojas-Cortez, Belinda Bustos Flores, Howard Smith, and Ellen Riojas Clark describe a family literacy institute focusing on the connections between home and school literacy practices. Family storytelling is one example of a literacy event within Mexican American culture where parents can support their children’s language and literacy development. Richard Allington then provides a list of further readings on inequality, policy making, and ways to take action related to literacy.

We welcome our new department editors and field consultants in this issue. Our new editors of the Reading Corner for Educators, Zhihui Fang, Danling Fu, and Linda Lamme, review three new books about what matters in literacy and literacy instruction. The new editors of Reading Corner for Children, Lester Laminack and Barbara Bell, highlight an assortment of books that they believe will become new favorites for educators. Darwin Henderson is the new department editor for profiles on authors, illustrators, poets, and editors, and Angela Jaggar is the profiles editor for notable educators in language and literacy. The Profile by Rose Casemont in this issue is based on an interview with Jacqueline Woodson who reflects on the people and experiences that have influenced her work. We also welcome two new field consultants for our sidebars. Richard Meyer has accepted the task of highlighting ways to take political action, and the goal of the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group is to provide a broad range of resources that introduce different approaches to research and to writing about research.

These articles have helped us realize that some of our responses to current literacy debates have caused us to sink more deeply into political quicksand instead of rising above it to pursue the issues that really matter to us as literacy educators. We will remain trapped in others’ agendas for schools and kids unless we choose our struggles and redefine the debate.