“Sometimes we shouldn’t seek the commonalities, the things that make us alike. Sometimes literature can help us view difference, and difference is just as important. When you say you are color-blind, then you don’t see me. When you say that your experiences are exactly like mine or you know exactly what I mean, you are wrong, and you are erasing my experience.”

— Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich, p. 27

As this issue was conceptualized, we knew we were embarking on a challenge. How could we possibly put together an issue that recognizes and appreciates the diversities among us—in our classrooms, schools, communities, and selves—while also recognizing all the ways we, middle level literacy educators, are alike? How do we approach culturally relevant pedagogy and wrap it up in a succinct package with a pretty bow for our readers? Is it possible to help each of our readers feel good about their classroom culture and our propensity toward wanting to be more culturally aware (with culture being defined in a multitude of ways)?

The answer is we cannot. Nor should we. While we would love to offer each of you a recipe for a classroom that recognizes all of the cultures and diversities at play, we know all too well from experience that our efforts toward equitable learning have led us too often to inadvertently “erase the experiences” of some of our students, as Rhuday-Perkovich shares.

So how do we grow as educators? We must embrace struggle. It takes courage to admit when we are struggling with an idea or concept or approach. We also know that learning and talking about our struggling is unsettling. It’s messy. The dissonance throws us off balance and we wobble our way through, trying to find the right balance for our students and for ourselves (Garcia and O’Donnell-Allen, 2015).

In this issue, we offer opportunities for each of us to struggle in the wobble. We learn alongside Randy Bomer, Linda Christensen, and Wendy Warren as they write about their personal experiences as literacy leaders.

A chorus of dynamic educators in Dana Stachowiak, Nadia Behzadeh, Nicole Mirra, Gabriel Pietrzak, Mark Pacheco, and Jon Wargo offers us examples of classrooms that use their cultural diversity as a strength, propelling their students to be socially active and socially conscious.

We get a glimpse of cultural collaborations at their best, with Luciana de Oliveira and Melanie Shoffner highlighting the importance of ELL voices and Kathy Garland and Kisha Bryan reminding us of the importance of partnering with families and communities. Our columnists Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich, Linda Rief, and Chris Lehman bring unique perspectives and voices to the conversation, adding depth and dimension to our understanding of pedagogy that is relevant and culturally aware.

Learning happens in the wobble. We look forward to wobbling with you.

Call for Voices from the Middle Cover Photos

Have you got an eye for a great photograph?

*Voices from the Middle* editors are looking for compelling digital images to feature on our four journal covers during each of our volume years. We are looking for color photos that highlight our classrooms, our students, and the unique and important work that we do as Middle Level teachers.

**Images should align with the themes for each issue and deadlines are the same.**

Photos should be at least 300 DPI in either jpg or tiff formats. Published photos will be full color. Please do not submit previously published photos.

If you choose to include people in your submission, you are responsible for obtaining the necessary releases from all of the individuals depicted (and parent/guardians, where appropriate) and must be able to provide copies of those releases prior to publication. For more information contact voices@ncte.org.

Call for Nominations: Outstanding Middle Level Educator in the English Language Arts Award

The Outstanding Middle Level Educator in the English Language Arts Award recognizes exceptional English language arts teachers in grades 6–8 who have demonstrated excellence in teaching and inspired a spirit of inquiry and a love of learning in their students. Nomination information can be found on the NCTE website at www.ncte.org/awards/middle-educator and must be submitted by May 1, 2017. The award will be presented at the Middle Level Luncheon during the 2017 NCTE Annual Convention in St. Louis, Missouri.
Randy Bomer is professor of curriculum & instruction at The University of Texas at Austin, where he also directs the Heart of Texas Writing Project. A leader in secondary English/language arts teaching, his goals have always been to connect research to classroom practice and to make a literate life possible for every student. He is the author of Building Adolescent Literacy in Today’s English Classroom and coauthor of Time for Meaning, For a Better World, and The Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research. Formerly a middle and high school teacher, he has consulted with urban school districts across the USA. He is a past president of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich is the author of two highly recognized books for middle school readers: 8th Grade Superzero and Two Naomis with Audrey Vernick. She holds a master’s in education, a professional development certificate from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University, and has a great time incorporating all of her different ways of working and playing into author visits and workshops. More on her work can be found at http://olugbemisolabooks.com/.

Linda Christensen is the director of the Oregon Writing Project (OWP), located in the Graduate School of Education at Lewis & Clark College. She is the author of Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word, and Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-Imagining the Language Arts Classroom. She has given keynote addresses at local, national, and international conferences about her work on literacy and social justice. An award-winning educator and researcher, she most recently received the Humanitarian Award from Williamette Writers.

Wendy Zagray Warren, an educator and teacher-educator for more than twenty-five years, recently earned her EdD and currently works as an independent writer and scholar and as a consultant for the Memorial Library/Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights. Her work has appeared in The Poverty and Education Reader: A Call for Equity in Many Voices, Phi Delta Kappan, the Journal of the Montana Writing Project, and Full Circle: A Journal for Teachers Implementing Indian Education for All, where, as cofounder, she also served as director of publications.

Melanie Shoffner is associate professor of English education at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, where she holds a joint appointment in the Departments of English and Curriculum & Instruction. This year, she is a Fulbright Scholar in the Faculty of Letters at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her recent work includes the edited book Exploring Teachers in Fiction and Film: Saviors, Scapegoats and Schoolmarm and the coedited book Teaching English Language Arts to English Language Learners: Preparing Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers with colleague Luciana de Oliveira.

Luciana C. de Oliveira is associate professor in the Language and Literacy Learning in Multilingual Settings program area in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of Miami in Miami, Florida. Currently, Luciana’s research examines the linguistic challenges of the Common Core State Standards for ELLs and their implications for teachers of ELLs. She has authored, coauthored, edited, or coedited ten books including Teaching English Language Arts to English Language Learners: Preparing Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers with collaborator Melanie Shoffner.