Progression

Dear JAAL Readers,

As we write this, we are just past the start of another academic year in the United States, with all the new hopes and dreams that accompany the crisp fall air of Upstate New York. Given our production timelines, though, this issue introduction will appear just after the new year, a time when students and teachers are fully enmeshed in school routines and perhaps feeling a little less hopeful about imagined possibilities. Midway through a long school year, it can sometimes be difficult to note the progress that results from one’s efforts, whether one is a student or teacher.

The contents of this issue, however, may reignite hope for marking progress. To kick it off, this issue’s commentary authors, Jennifer Childress, Alysia Cella Backman, and Marjorie Y. Lipson, challenge literacy educators to develop new ways to assess students’ literacy learning in “Reframing Literacy Assessment: Using Scales and Micro-Progressions to Provide Equitable Assessments for All Learners.” This team makes the case that knowledgeable literacy educators collaborate to identify indicators of observable formative literacy progress, coplan literacy instruction that will address these issues, and work with adolescent and adult learners to refine these progressions with consideration for students’ aspirations. Childress and her colleagues also share helpful examples so literacy educators can build scales from their models.

The lead feature article for this issue, Soria E. Colomer and Chris K. Chang-Bacon’s “Seal of Biliteracy Graduates Get Critical: Incorporating Critical Biliteracies in Dual-Language Programs and Beyond,” also takes up the idea of learning progressions. These authors studied the impact of a U.S. state-level program intended to affirm students’ development of multilingual competence over time. The findings revealed, however, that benefits of the credential were experienced unevenly, depending on graduates’ racial and socioeconomic background. The next article, “‘It Broadens Our Horizon’: English Learners Learn Through Global Literature and Cultural Discussion” by Yang Wang, also deals with progressions of language acquisition in a cross-cultural initiative between Chinese undergraduates and U.S. teachers reading picture books together to support intercultural communicative competence. In both articles, progress is framed not as isolated skill but, rather, as increasing proficiency in context.

Addressing the various progressions involved in acquisition of multiple literacies helps literacy educators and learners work together toward learners’ independence. For instance, in “A Three-Tiered Framework for Proactive Critical Evaluation During Online Inquiry,” Elena Forzani offers a heuristic to help students recognize multiple dimensions during their own assessment of online sources, including content, source, and context. As youth become accustomed to critiquing these dimensions, they will also likely be better able to identify other critiqueable progressions, depending on the area of inquiry. Similarly, a key tenet of scholarship in disciplinary literacy is that teachers can, and should, support their students’ acquisition over time of a progression of linguistic practices within disciplines, an effort addressed by Keri-Anne Croce and Montana K. McCormick’s “Developing Disciplinary Literacy in Mathematics: Learning From Professionals Who Use Mathematics in Their Jobs.” These authors share findings from a study that identified disciplinary literacies deployed by adults who use mathematics at work.

In both music and mathematics, the term progression is used to refer to a succession—tones or chords in a melody, quantities in an arithmetic progression—allowing
the listener or learner to make some predictions about what will come next. In “Becoming a Great Reader: One Deaf Student’s Journey,” Maryam Salehomoum and P. David Pearson document the factors that led to literacy growth over time for one student. They also reveal the importance of ensuring that educators’ assumptions about disability do not lead to limiting particular students’ progress.

The next two feature articles share a focus on progression in the domain of English language arts. In “Dismantling Winning Stories: Lessons From Applying Critical Literature Pedagogy to The Odyssey,” Jacob Steiss describes how he helped students in his all-male classroom learn to deconstruct problematic ideologies, such as sexual double standards and the promotion of patriarchy. In “Exploring Educators’ Figured Worlds of Controversial Literature and Adolescent Readers,” Danielle E. Hartsfield and Sue C. Kimmel share their learning from examining the influences on secondary teachers’ readings of texts that have been challenged or banned. Both articles demonstrate that achieving greater competence over time in the domain of literature is sometimes about reading new texts and other times about reading the same texts in new ways.

The invited content for this issue offers other inspiration for moving onward as literacy educators. For example, in the Critical Perspectives on Literacy Policy and Practice column that he alternates editing with Hilary Janks and Barbara Comber, George G. Hruby critiques current workforce education rhetoric, offering a way forward tied to this issue’s focus on identifying progressions. In his piece, “In Dimmed Memory of Otto and Hayes: Workforce Literacy at Wanda’s Fish Fry,” Hruby argues for identifying workforce literacy progressions that are consistent with current and potential employment practices, not educators’ or politicians’ abstract ideals. In the contribution to the Sustaining Multilingual Literacies department edited by Limarys Caraballo and Danny C. Martinez, Alexis D. Patterson Williams, Jennifer M. Higgs, and Steven Z. Athanases offer “Noticing for Equity to Sustain Multilingual Literacies.” These authors propose an instructional framework for guiding teachers’ noticing and building around students’ rich, multilingual practices as learning resources. In a refreshing take on the variability of progress, Aaron Wilson and Stuart McNaughton share their “Literacy Leadership Learnings From a Large-Scale Program With Mixed Results” in the Leading Literacy Change department that Wilson edits with colleagues Cynthia Greenleaf and Mira-Lisa Katz. Finally, Leah Katherine Saal and Margarita Gómez describe how multimedia composing can support adult learning and development in “Photovoice as Multimodal Curriculum and Method for Community Change,” a contribution to Katherine K. Frankel and Maneka Deanna Brooks’s department, Beyond Struggling: Transforming Literacy Teaching.

The entries in the Text & Resource Review Forum note still other kinds of progressions. In his Texts and Identities column, Alfred W. Tatum advances “The Fumbles and Foibles of the Race Toward Equity: Selecting Texts With Greater Aims” to make the point that dynamic and responsive classroom text selection can help learners merge perspectives to determine ways to counter forces of inequity. In the Research review department that they coedit with Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, Josephine Peyton Marsh and Deborah Gonzalez identify key components in practitioner research in “University Faculty Talk About Practitioner Research: A Conversation.” Finally, in her Professional Resources department, M. Kristiina Montero reviews one text’s suggested instructional and assessment progressions, in “Creating Analytical Writers: A Review of Beyond Literary Analysis: Teaching Students to Write With Passion and Authority About Any Text.”

Noting progressions can be motivating for adolescent and adult literacy educators and the learners with whom they work. Such reckonings mark progress and paths forward—paths to improved pedagogies, understandings, literacies, and actions. The contributors in this issue have provided us with multiple helpful suggestions for identifying and making such moves in our own literacy teaching and learning.

Best,
Kathy and Kelly