



SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

Director's Message

I am excited to bring you the first issue of the [Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities'](#) semi-annual newsletter. Each issue of the newsletter will include updates about our partners and projects by program coordinator, Melissa Bailey; a feature article; a summary of new research in early childhood education; and a video showing how teachers, teacher candidates, or parents are linking research and practice to advance young children's learning.

In this inaugural issue, Dr. Nancy Shelton, professor of education and co-curator of the [Sherman Center Diverse Books Collection](#), provides insights on why multicultural literature is important. The 2017-18 [Sherman Center Research Fellows](#), Dr. Kindel Nash and Joshua Michael, provide a brief overview of their research study focused on improving struggling readers' fluency and comprehension. Lastly, Alyssa Dispoto, kindergarten teacher at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School and Lydia Coley, Sherman STEM Teacher Scholar, share how they have used books from the Collection to deepen students' learning and appreciation of themselves and others.

We hope that you enjoy this issue, and will visit our web site to learn more about the Sherman Center.

Dr. Mavis G. Sanders is professor of education and inaugural director of the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities at UMBC

Sherman Center Update

by Melissa Bailey

Within the last six months, the Sherman Center has established a campus advisory committee, formed collaborative planning teams with teachers at our two [partner schools](#) in south Baltimore, funded an innovative research study on early literacy, and launched two cross-site teacher professional development projects. Our center's mission to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning among young children in Baltimore City, and develop best early childhood education practices for urban schools is coming to fruition.

Thankfully, we have great principals, Najib Jammal from Lakeland Elementary/Middle School and Benjamin Crandall from Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle School, who have supported their teachers' participation in Sherman Center activities, including the [Spring 2018 Diverse Books Project Kick-Off](#). This school-based partnership activity, planned by a committee comprised of Drs. Nancy Shelton and Kindel Nash at UMBC, Eryn Lessard, Instructional Support Teacher at Maree G. Farring, and Sherman Center staff, was inspired by a needs assessment completed at the partner schools. The event gifted over 200 diverse books to more than 30 classrooms.

An upcoming professional development event for early childhood educators at our partner schools is a [4-day Summer Teacher Institute](#). The planning committee for this event consists of teacher liaisons, Sarah English and Lori Morgan at Lakeland and Arikana Douglas and Kelsie Kodak at Maree G. Farring; [Sherman Center Campus Advisory Committee](#) Members, Rehana Shafi and Marie Lilly; and Sherman Center staff. At this year's Summer Teacher Institute, keynote speaker, Dr. Pamela Brillante, and professional development facilitator, Kristina Robertson, will focus on creating inclusive classroom environments, and literacy and family engagement strategies for English learners.

Research supported through the Sherman Center Faculty Research Award will be initiated by Dr. Kindel Nash (Professor of Education) and Josh Michael (doctoral student, School of Public Policy), who will conduct research on a literacy intervention for struggling third grade readers in fall 2018. A portion of the intervention includes working with students' families at Maree G. Farring, and promises to promote these families' ongoing engagement in their children's literacy development.

Featured Article: Why Diverse Books are Important

by Dr. Nancy Shelton

As the semester comes to a close and I reflect on the various accomplishments made by both my students and me, there is no doubt that enjoyment and knowledge of diverse books tops all others. When I moved to Maryland in 2003 and started supporting the work teachers do in the public schools in Baltimore City and County, I was surprised to see the lack of diversity in the children's literature. As I went from classroom to classroom and spoke to teachers at all grade levels, the only book that seemed to be well-known and broadly read was Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. While I knew Taylor's work and recognized this as an award-winning book, it was published in 1976! Cassie's story is no doubt one to be told through the ages, but where were all the other stories that spoke of so many other African-American experiences? Rinaldi's Miss Crandall, a brave woman who opened a school for black female students in 1832¹, Howard's little Virgie whose character was inspired by the education movement during Reconstruction², and Little Sugar's beautiful story of Jolie and her family as they dealt with the White community's hate-filled reaction to the arrival of a Freedom School teacher³ were only three stories that resonated with school children, but they were all absent.

Not only were books with African-American characters and stories few and far between, but the growing body of diverse children's literature that shared international stories, immigrant stories, and various family structures were also missing. These voices were not being shared, their stories were not being told.



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- Dr. Nancy Shelton, Professor of Education, UMBC.

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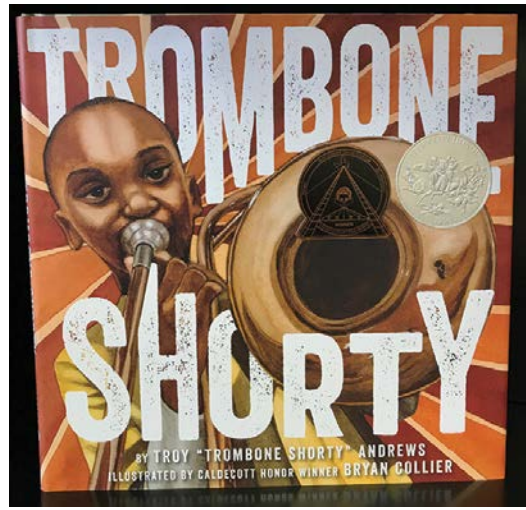
Research Notes

We are excited to collaborate on the first sponsored research project through the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities: Read Two Impress: A Method for Building Literacy Proficiency and Family Engagement in an Urban School. Partnering with Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle School in south Baltimore, we will train parents and pre-service teachers to implement a strategy used with struggling readers in grades two and three – Read Two Impress (R2I).

R2I is a one-on-one reading strategy where a student reads aloud a text with a more experienced reader who models expressive, fluent reading, and provides support with word recognition and comprehension. Our work builds on previous studies, but also introduces unique elements not yet investigated including texts selected to be culturally authentic to the student readers.

Beginning in fall 2018, we will investigate the impact of R2I on young students' reading fluency and comprehension and on their attitudes towards reading. Further, we will explore how the strategy influences family members' engagement with the literacy development of their children, and pre-service teachers' feelings of efficacy with literacy instruction and strategies for struggling readers. We look forward to sharing preliminary results from this study in the spring 2019 issue.

Kindel Nash, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Education and the Director Early Childhood Education Program. Her scholarship and teaching focus on critical issues in early literacy learning with particular focus on how issues of race, language, and culture interface with children's school experiences. Joshua Michael, M.S.Ed., is a doctoral student in UMBC's School of Public Policy focusing in Education Policy and serves as the Assistant Director of the UMBC Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program.



I soon realized that the rich network I had in my former community where groups of teachers, professors, and children's librarians would meet to share the latest children's literature and support each other's professional interests didn't exist everywhere. I then knew a big part of my interactions with schools would include increasing access to, knowledge of, and excitement for children's literature.

The Diverse Books Project is designed with these goals in mind. We hope to support teachers, and thus their students, as they take journeys to far-away countries, grapple with current events and how to engage in critical conversations with young children,

attempt to understand both natural and human catastrophes and the consequences of conflicts and war, and help children understand how to cope after experiencing great loss or how to find comfort in a world when they feel like a misfit.

The world of children's literature is the single most powerful avenue to young students' learning and discovery⁴. Connecting children to books that reflect their cultures and values helps them develop intrinsic motivation to become readers and writers⁵, and enables educators to better understand and appreciate them and their families. Introducing new and exciting worlds to children is one reason many of us are teachers and the Diverse Books Project is here to support this thrilling adventure.

- ¹ *The Education of Mary: A Little Miss of Color*, 1832 by Ann Rinaldi (2000)
- ² *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys* by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard (2000)
- ³ *Freedom School, Yes!* by Amy Little sugar (2001)
- ⁴ *Essentials of Children's Literature* by Kathy Short, Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl Tomlinson (2018)
- ⁵ "Strong black girls: A ten-year-old responds to fiction about Afro-Americans" by Rudine Simms (1983)

Research to Practice

In the one-minute video clips below, Alyssa Dispoto (on the left), kindergarten teacher at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School, and Lydia Coley (on the right), Sherman STEM Teacher Scholar, share how they used books from the Sherman Center Diverse Books Collection to enhance students' learning. Ms. Dispoto describes how *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown was at the center of a lesson on embracing differences

among individuals. Ms. Coley details how she used *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi to teach third graders new vocabulary, history, and social geography while enjoying a beautifully written and illustrated story about a Vietnamese father and son. Through these inspiring lessons, Ms. Dispoto and Ms. Coley are translating research into practice.

