

# JOLLE UGA

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Editor's Introduction  
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## Challenging Assumptions among Theory, Practice, Research and Policy

The articles in this Spring 2012 issue of *JoLLE* emphasize the disconnect between theory and practice on the one hand, and research and policy on the other. This disconnect seems particularly dramatic as we face the implementation of a national curriculum that privileges one particular kind of literacy and emphasizes the standardization of knowledge. Our diverse group of authors—all at different places in their professional trajectories—underscore the importance of listening closely to a variety of voices and perspectives related to literacy education.

All of the articles in this issue are informed by years, and even decades of research. This is no more so true as in Peter Smagorinsky's "Vygotsky, "Defectology," and the Inclusion of People of Difference in the Broader Cultural Stream." Smagorinsky provides an overview of the ways in which Vygotsky's Jewish heritage affected his views on people who were different. Smagorinsky argues that Vygotsky's approach to difference has important implications for 21<sup>st</sup> century educators, namely that "the effects of being treated as a lesser person through society's assumption that difference is tantamount to deficit, a problem that helps create the devastating secondary disability of feeling inferior, helpless, dependent, and in need to pity and charity" (p. 20). Vygotsky's solution to this problem was to provide alternative means of mediation for people of difference and to re-educate people to view difference more equitably. For Smagorinsky, Vygotsky's solutions apply not only to special education, but to all areas of difference.

Kristen Perry also addresses "alternative means of mediation" but rather than focusing on individuals who are different, she focuses in on the multiple definitions of literacy emerging from sociocultural perspectives on literacy. Perry addresses the problematic overlap in meaning of key terms and theories related to sociocultural theory—literacy as social practice, multiliteracies, and critical theory. Though Perry acknowledges the limitations of sociocultural paradigms for struggling readers, approaching literacy from this frame would seem to lessen the kind of secondary disability of stigma and low self-esteem that often plagues those whose literacy practices don't align with those typically measured and privileged in schools.

While Smagorinsky and Perry's article articulate and untangle theory, Stephen Krashen, Syying Lee, and Jeff McQuillan in "Is The Library Important? Multivariate Studies at the National and International Level," use statistical analysis to determine factors that affect literacy rates. Krashen et al. replicated McQuillan's 1992 analysis of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores and found that access to books in schools and public libraries was a significant factor in predicting 2007 NAEP reading scores. Although Krashen et al.'s research shows that access to books (including librarians who can help kids find the books they want) makes a significant difference in the literacy gains of children, their research doesn't seem to be affecting policies or practice. Currently, schools are addressing budget shortfalls by cutting funds for school libraries, which to Krashen et al. will reduce the literacy rates that comprise the heart of school learning.

Finally, in our *Voices from the Field* column, four pre-service teachers (Eliza Altenderfer, Amanda Doerfler, Erika Poblete, and Marissa Williamson) and their education professor (Vivian Yenika-Agbaw) share their experiences transforming texts in their article, "Traditional Tales and Literacy: Pre-service Teachers' Transmediation of "Hansel and Gretel." Although the authors engaged in an innovative literacy practice in their pre-service course, and recognized that mediating literary texts in this way could help children become more critical thinkers and more imaginative writers, they were unable to use the transmediation activity in their student teaching placements. Their story highlights the tensions between the theoretically informed literacy practices they learned about during their pre-service course, and what they were actually able to do with that knowledge once they entered their mentor teachers' classrooms.

Together the articles in this issue argue for educational contexts that include multiple opportunities for meaning making—through inclusive approaches to difference, multiple literacies, access to large libraries of books and librarians who know how to bring kids and books together, and student teaching placements that allow room for experimentation. I hope that the articles published in this issue of *JoLLE* inspire readers to keep their goals high in this era of constraint and reduction, and view literacy as involving multiple variations and possibilities to address the diverse populations enrolled in today's schools.