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Lindy L. Johnson

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Editor's Introduction

Lindy L. Johnson
The University of Georgia

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In this issue of JoLLE, we introduce a new feature—the JoLLE Forum. We created this feature after feeling frustrated by the lack of teacher and principal experiences and voices represented in media and policy discussions of effective education. We envision the JoLLE Forum as an interactive space where educators from a variety of settings can engage in productive dialogue around issues related to issues of language and literacy education. By taking advantage of the unique affordances an open-access and online journal provides, we hope to create a more participatory space—one where our readers not only “consume” information, but actively become producers of that information as well. In that regard, we encourage you to comment on the essays in this issue's JoLLE Forum through the function that accompanies each article. Unlike popular media comment boards, where contributors post messages under assumed names more designed to inflame than enlighten or engage, we ask that you identify yourself by name and location in the field so that you take responsibility for your remarks. In addition, if you have an idea or topic for the Forum (or would like to contribute), please let us know by contacting Joanna L. Anglin, who will edit the JoLLE Forum for the next issue, at janglin@uga.edu.

Our first forum features the voices of a principal, a superintendent, a retired teacher who blogs extensively, and a recently retired teacher and department chair. Each challenges the authoritative discourse of high-stakes testing and teacher evaluation systems.

In “Rotten to the (Common) Core,” James Arnold, Superintendent of Pelham City Public Schools in Georgia, critiques the assumptions and processes behind the Common Core State Standards. Arnold argues that the Common Core standards will greatly increase the profits of standardized testing companies without doing anything to improve student achievement. In “The Testing Juggernaut,” Marion Brady, argues that teachers—“those who work with learners day after day, guiding the learning process, assigning them tasks, watching them interact with others, reading their papers, listening to their responses, observing their facial expressions and body language”—rather than standardized tests are best positioned to evaluate student performance. Elizabeth A. Kahn in “The Disconnect between Standards and Assessment,” problematizes the

instructional design of Common Core State Standards. She argues that because the standards do not specify methods of assessment that will be used to measure what students have learned, they are ineffective in helping to improve teaching and learning. In “My Struggle to Be Heard: A Principal’s Perspective on Education Reform,” Harry Leonardatos, a principal in New City, New York, offers a scathing indictment of individuals from private companies who want to determine what “teacher quality” means without ever actually consulting anyone (teachers or principals) who has classroom experience.

The research articles in this issue feature a variety of perspectives on literacy. In “Three Avid Adolescent Male Writers’ Experiences at a Residential Summer Writing Workshop,” Sean Roday explores how the social context of a summer writing program influenced the writing and identities of three adolescent male writers, and identifies the program features that supported their development as writers. Jacqueline B. Koonce in, ““Oh, Those Loud Black Girls!”: A Phenomenological Study of Black Girls Talking with an Attitude” explores the lived experiences of two African American adolescents who talk with an attitude, i.e., the manner in which they assert themselves culturally and socially in school, and how that stance affects their standing in classrooms. These studies are complemented well by our Voices from the Field article in this issue, “21st Century Literacies in the Classroom: Creating Windows of Interest and Webs of Learning,” in which Robyn Seglem, Shelbie Witte, and Judy Beemer discuss how they encouraged their students to draw on their knowledge of popular culture texts to engage more meaningfully with classroom texts.

Each of these articles contributes to the themes identified in the JoLLE Forum essays by accounting for the rich social milieu in which literacy practices unfold in school outside whatever is captured by the machinery of standardized testing as the authors highlight the importance of acknowledging and building on the individual experiences of students. Roday found that the supportive environment of a summer program encouraged the young men in his study to take risks in their writing. Koonce discovered that the girls who talked with an attitude felt frustrated and disrespected by their teachers. Seglem, Witte, and Beemer observed that their students were most engaged when they were exposed to multimodal texts. It was only by looking beyond the “core” of what these students needed to know that these important insights were revealed. We hope that educators will continue to look beyond the core—beyond high-stakes testing and evaluation systems—so that they might more fully understand what it is that their students need.

Finally, this issue includes a set of book reviews that we hope help to introduce you to recent publications serving both research and practical needs in the teaching of language and literacy. We encourage those who have read recently published books of interest to our readers to contact our book review editor, Deavours Hall, at deavourshall@gmail.com, if you are interested in contributing to this vital JoLLE feature.