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Guest Editorial

Journal of Language and Literacy Education (JoLLE)

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Recently, I visited the school of a friend from the Bread Loaf School of English who teaches ninth graders and seniors. On the wall of her classroom hangs the poster *Quoting Shakespeare* (Levin, 2000) which is filled with quotations and quips many of us hear every day. The fine print of the poster traces the origin of each quotation to one of Shakespeare's characters. Included among these is a portion of a speech we hear from Juliet early in *Romeo and Juliet*:

O, be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, retain that dear perfection which he owes without that title." (Act II, scene II, *Romeo and Juliet*).

We all remember that *Romeo and Juliet* leaves us the tragic irony that in spite of Juliet's assertion of the stability of the smell of the rose through various names, the truth is that what is in a name ultimately *does* matter. All that is conveyed by the names of the two lovers' families ultimately seals the fate of their final separation.

I write here in the conviction that the name *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* means something and reflects a determination not to separate literacy from language. The department supporting this journal also puts language and literacy on an equal footing in its name (Department of Language and Literacy). Those behind this journal must remain determined that its name means what it says.

Across Europe, Australia, and the Americas, many academic journals carry within their titles the term "literacy." Few journals link language and literacy—never mind give both equal billing. Most include only the rare acknowledgement that literacy is dependent on language; there is no literacy without language.

I am honored to write this guest editorial to launch the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* (hereafter JoLLE). I applaud the fact that this will be a student-run free-access on-line journal. Taking this opportunity, I hope first to set out the significance of this journal and what I expect it to accomplish. Next, I take this occasion to make the strongest case possible for the role of language learning in literacy acquisition, retention, and expansion. Finally, I hide in the safety of a student-run journal to challenge current dominant trends in "literacy research." I say "hide," for the challenge I offer may well distress professors of literacy and stir them to strong disagreement with the assertions behind my challenge.

What can we expect from JoLLE?

To prepare for this editorial, I've asked my graduate seminar in Linguistic Anthropology, as well as teacher educators and scholars well-known in the field of "literacy studies," what they would expect of a student-run on-line journal. The most common response—"something different!"—indicates the view that students will and should undertake in this journal to step away from at least some of the usual norms of publication and predictable topics of literacy education.

The majority of responses to my query urged that this student-led journal might examine new ways of "refereeing" submitted pieces of work. In the prevailing pattern, editors of refereed journals send would-be articles out to professors for review. Doing so often results in long delays, since professors are notorious for ignoring deadlines given for return of reviews. Moreover, professors often review submissions through narrow idiosyncratic lenses, with the result that a set of reviews can reflect two or three very different evaluations of the same article. Editors then face the choice of either sending the submission to a new set of reviewers or casting the deciding vote themselves on acceptance or rejection.

Students and faculty that I consulted all agreed that creative and innovative approaches to "peer review" must come soon, since dependence on journal publications now significantly shape tenure and promotion decisions. Yet all professors know that having an article published in the time frame necessary for use in such career decisions is often a matter of luck and persistence and not quality of research or writing. When I pushed on such comments and asked for specific suggestions as to what a student-led journal might do to alter these factors, no one could come up with specific recommendations.

Therefore, I take responsibility here and set out some possibilities derived from my own experience of working with graduate students and guiding them into their careers as university teachers and professional scholars.

1. JoLLE can take on an advisory role for first-year doctoral students who access this journal. Each issue should include an analysis (as either comparative case study or survey) of several programs in English Education, English, or Language and Literacy Studies. The research question behind this analysis should ask the extent to which doctoral programs initiate students into the culture of publishing. Many doctoral programs center their first two years on course work and ignore the essential need through these courses for students to be simultaneously preparing one or more articles for submission. Students cannot do this unless professors emphasize a few key topics across courses. By doing so, they could encourage students to write papers in two or more courses with the idea of being able to merge these into a single article. Students could thus dig deeper into certain topics while also learning general course material. They could also work toward publishing an article or, at the very least, preparing a literature review for a piece of research undertaken in a subsequent course.
2. JoLLE should in each issue return to a set of questions directed toward preparing graduate students to take on the multiple roles they will have to assume in their careers. Beyond teaching and publishing, these include becoming conference organizers and presenters and volunteering as editorial participants (e.g., book reviewers for journals). JoLLE should be brave enough to lay out for students the hazards of publishing a chapter in edited books (generally not considered

- refereed), editing a collection of conference papers, or being uninformed about how to tell which journals are refereed and which are not.
3. JoLLE should undertake in at least one issue each year intensive examination of the matter of bibliographic preparedness of young scholars in language and literacy research. All who become professors have to know a wide range of bibliographic information, often unrelated to their dissertations. Yet few departments of English Education or Literacy and Language Education offer courses analogous to Historiography, a course frequently offered by History departments. Thus, many young scholars in fields related to literacy leave graduate school with an excessively narrow perspective on the full bibliography of research related to language and literacy. Courses to be taught as assistant professors, as well as new topics of research, depend on knowing how to build quickly and efficiently core bibliographies on specific topics or research questions. Young scholars need to understand that just as professors use conferences for academic conversations, so journals sharing a certain kind of kinship engage in a kind of “conversation” through the articles they publish over a run of a few years. Reading within families of journals, as well as knowing particular biases of certain handbooks (of education, literacy, teaching, etc.), helps students ferret out fundamental separations of “schools” or traditions of scholarship. For example, once the National Research Council published *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998), criticisms came from those who believed that narrow concentration on psycholinguistic aspects of reading instruction marked the report. Those favoring sociocultural approaches to language and literacy studies charged that the report favored decoding, phonics, and comprehension over encoding, sociocontextual motivations, and interpretation. Yet insightful experienced teachers of language and reading know that human beings need multiple paths of entry and sources of motivation if they are to move from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Hence, neither “school” standing alone can be sufficient as grounds for teaching practice.
 4. This last point, though made with reference to bibliographic knowledge, leads to yet another challenge I hope JoLLE will tackle. I hope the editors and contributors will work to weaken current dichotomous (often absolutist) approaches to literacy studies. These divisions affect both research approaches and schools of practice. Thus examining the folly (as well as the politics) of simplistic bifurcations in the literacy field would be a worthwhile undertaking for JoLLE. Such a task may well mean that at the University of Georgia, a special seminar will need to surround production of JoLLE. A student-led seminar might pull in a collection of scholars whose work reflects a spectrum of approaches, as well as practitioners who can testify to “what has worked with my students and why.” Follow-up consideration of how effective practices reflect numerous lines (and “sides”) of research could then form the backbone of such a seminar and the basis of at least a portion of each issue. A good start for students undertaking this task would be the creation of a short list of the most divisive of dichotomies in education research (consider, for example, quantitative **vs.** qualitative, case study **vs.** ethnography, basic research **vs.** action or applied research, etc.). Why is it that the **versus** of these duos is so often emphasized? Such dichotomies have a firm grip on the entire

arena of education research; hence, a decided and purposeful effort will be needed by JoLLE to dislodge these.

5. Finally, JoLLE will need to include in its journal guidelines that may provide graduate students comparative annotated bibliographies of journal articles and book chapters. A series of such bibliographies could pull together career-building materials. These might include: articles that set out parameters of dichotomies (cf. Gee, 1999 and Snow, 2000); field-bending articles that modify established theories because of new research findings; articles or chapters that include superior models of abstracts, literature reviews, statements of research findings that also help build theory, or summations that point in new directions. [This list contains sub-genres that all successful publishing scholars must master.]

All of these tasks are surely more than we can expect of any single journal. Yet aspirations and a sense of need often lead us further than we might ever think we can go. This journal will make a significant contribution to graduate education and research if its editors seriously and consistently take up some bold strategies to reshape the future of the field of language and literacy studies.

Why keep language and literacy tightly linked in education?

Learning to decode written texts, manipulate symbol systems through a medium other than oral performance, and incorporate interpretation of written texts into action or text depends on language as key resource. Fundamentally, for children without significant neurological disorders, learning to use a variety of syntactic constructions and a range of vocabulary, as well as modulations of voice, proves basic to predicting and shaping future success in academic performance. This is the case in spite of the fact that, in school, displays of oral competence count far less than those of reading and writing. Only the latter seem to matter as evidence of skill buildup and information accumulation.

The irony—and often the tragedy—however, is that without deep and meaningful practice in oral language, readers and writers face severe limits on the extent to which their literacy performances can mark academic achievement. Extensive conversational practice on extended topics, with multiple speakers, and in a variety of roles is necessary to fuel language development (Heath, forthcoming). Classrooms, with one teacher and many same-age students, cannot offer oral language practice sufficient to arm speakers with large vocabularies, fluency across syntactic and generic forms, or experience in taking on multiple roles as speakers and performers.

In the 1980s, when linguistic anthropologists began studying the phenomenon of verbal teasing across cultures, they found curious correlations. The more extensive the verbal teasing of young children, the earlier these speakers acquired what local adults viewed as fluent oral performance. At a basic level, the causal link seemed obvious: verbal teasing enables children to take on imagined roles they cannot yet assume in reality. Hence, they can speak in the voice of dads and dragons, grannies and gremlins, and “play” that they are someone or something they cannot yet be. This play amounts to critical practice—meaningful, responsive to various demands, and highly interactive.

Something quite similar happens for the children of those social and cultural groups that give their children broad and deep experiences with children’s literature. The young of these groups tend to enter school with fluency in styles and uses of language, whereas their counterparts who have not had the benefits of talking, looking, and

listening with children's literature lag behind in language performance. Numerous studies testify to the importance of early experiences with children's literature. Reading richly illustrated literature with children enables opportunities for extended talk on a single topic. Moreover, the best children's literature ensures that adult and child examine together subtleties of character, word meanings, and co-occurrences of facial expressions and words expressed by fictional characters. Children's literature, whether fiction, poetry, or non-fiction, generates talk that helps children acquire facility with different genres. Though the genre of "story" or "narrative" tends to draw the greatest amount of attention, experience with children's literature of multiple genres is essential to building fluency with explication, description, extended metaphors, and comparative analyses.

Despite promotion of these points in journals such as *Journal of Child Language*, *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, *Language and Society*, and many others, few programs that center on literacy address language acquisition. Perhaps one course on child language in another department (generally Psychology) will appear as "recommended." However, courses on later language development, theories of narrative and genre, or language uses across cultures rarely appear on the roster of courses in any department. Hence, departments or schools of education ignore the need for these and offer instead courses having to do with either reading or writing under titles such as "the teaching of..." "topics in..." or "assessment of..."

If JoLLE is to take seriously the name of the journal, students will need to strive to balance articles that address language with those that take up topics of reading or writing. Few researchers within departments of education have undertaken extensive scholarship on language development. Catherine Snow of Harvard's Graduate School of Education is the primary figure whose early work in child language has continued and undergirds her invaluable contributions to studies of reading. The presence of scholars of children's literature in departments of education is equally rare. Ohio State University—largely through the influence of Rudine Sims-Bishop-- has built the strongest cadre of scholars whose work links literacy and children's literature, as well as dramatic education. Pat Enciso and Brian Edminston host at Ohio State national and international scholars working to advance understanding of the cognitive, aesthetic, and linguistic powers of children's literature. Beyond Ohio State, few departments of education have even one scholar of children's literature. Most notable are exceptions such as Shelby Wolf in the Education Department of the University of Colorado and Dorothy Strickland of Rutgers University's Graduate School of Education. Until departments that include literacy and language studies address their need for at least one scholar of children's literature, efforts to deepen awareness of the importance of language acquisition to reading and writing will continue to lag in their effectiveness.

What further challenges can we expect JoLLE to undertake?

Guest editorials give scholars a rare opportunity to express their own biases. Mine are quite clear in what I have said here, just as they will be in the following list of further challenges for the student leaders of JoLLE. The core of these challenges may initially seem contradictory to my strong urging in the section just above that oral language development be sustained and expanded in its partnership with literacy. The fervency of this plea comes from the fact that unless we bring the study of early and later language development to center-stage in literacy research, we can as scholars do little to improve

the academic position of many low performers. The harsh reality is that schools now center their diagnostic and assessment instruments on students' abilities to read and comprehend print. Therefore, work on language development is critical to improving the academic chances of large portions of the population.

But just because formal education is characterized by cultural lag does not mean that language and literacy research should not look beyond schools in their responsibilities. We all know that infrastructural inertia, commercial interests behind tests and textbooks, and the inadequacies of teacher education and continuing support hold schools back from keeping pace with societal needs.

Beyond schools, employment, creative work, leisure, and entertainment demand as much of our research as schools do. We know little about how people sustain literacy skills or expand these to new challenges highly dependent on rapid interpretation of schematic drawings. We know even less about linkages between visual discernment and attention and verbal understanding and explication. In effect, we have neglected life-long learning (often termed "adult education) as an arena that challenges our theories and practices. We have been far too keen to stick with early levels of reading and writing for adult education rather than to address sustainability and adaptability of literacy skills through the life-course.

We have also neglected our responsibilities to the widely reported "short attention spans" of young children, their impatience with regular classroom routines, and their preference for computer games over reading and writing of extended texts. Fundamental to all these problems is the matter of sustained visual attention. Today in the vast majority of homes in the Americas, Europe, and Great Britain, cognitive training of young children is taking place through the rapid changes of visual images in video and television. Very young children learn early that holding visual gaze is not what is needed with these media. For the brain in the earliest years of development, this kind of cognitive and visual training and extensive practice instills automatic habits that work against sustained attention to visual details. The short rapid pace of language (with notable absence of extended text materials) offers no models of explication, comparative description, or extended metaphors.

Video and television as baby-sitter and companion have been much debated for their possible effects on violent behaviors and thirst for entertainment. Yet long hours of viewing these media forms offer other challenges for those who care about language development and literacy acquisition and sustainability. These forms of entertainment keep children away from play that can bring with it important fundamental visual and manual skills.

Hand-eye coordination is assumed to be important, but few adults consider how the working together of hand and eye ultimately matter in brain development. As manual manipulation across a span of types of activities (not simply moving the mouse of a computer or the buttons of a remote control clicker has diminished, the young have lost opportunities to create with their hands. Clay, finger-paints, blocks, sand, pieces of clothing, pots and pans, and other raw materials call on children to look ahead, to envision what they wish to create, and to make the hand follow the orders of the inner eye. Though children and adults vary in their talents of hand-eye coordination, all developing humans need extended practice in bringing the hand under the command of

the imagination. Linking what is in the mind to what is expressed through the hand and body supports competencies in communication, art, and technological production fundamental to being human.

Just as verbal teasing expands facility with genres for young children, so undertaking the role of manual creator extends visual attentiveness to details. As children develop, they increasingly need to link details to large meanings, just as they have to remember details of maps, sketches, drawings, and blueprints to navigate, create, engineer, and decorate. Moreover, both sciences and the arts depend on the meaning of details in visual presentations of their works. Surgeon, sculptor, cartoonist, filmmaker, graphic designer, architect, engineer, fashion or automotive designer, and a host of others in the labor market rely jointly on the arts and sciences. In both these fields, sustaining attention to the visual details is vital.

As children grow older and face new kinds of learning, both in and beyond school, they must link visual with verbal representations. Yet they must *learn* how to see the details of the visual, interpret their meanings, and tie these to the words of others as well as express meanings verbally and visually themselves (Heath & Wolf, 2004, forthcoming).

Literacy and language researchers have in the past decade been too quick to value specific aspects of what technologies and new media may offer literacy. We have been reluctant to think of the limiting forces on flexible creativity that these technologies represent. Literacy and language scholars must give much more critical attention to what neuroscientists are learning about the integrative capacities of the brain in early child development. Then these scholars will be able to reflect in more informed ways on the benefits and risks to cognitive, visual, and verbal development that technologies offer.

We know that all forms of technology (and their entertainments) restrict open interactivity and flexible creativity in many ways. Though some toys, teaching tools, and entertainment forms ask viewers to talk and do, the vast majority of these strictly limit both forms and extent of interactivity. Because these technologies must be pre-programmed, they can never offer the full and open potential of a human interlocutor or playmate. Creative “inventions,” though possible with videogames, have, in the main, been framed by those who created the technology. Users need only find ways into the deeper routes of connection to use those within any piece of technology. Until the young themselves know how to program and arrange and develop the hardware, they are not being fully creative; they are only responding to what has been put there for them to discover and do. Engineers, neurologists, and vision experts know these fundamentals about the technologies that most attract the majority of young people. They have not yet been able to move very far beyond these fundamentals; they would welcome the interest and commitment of language and literacy scholars in their efforts.

The challenges ahead in language and literacy research are not endless; they all cluster around the tight linkage of visual, verbal, manual dexterity, and multiple-role capabilities of human beings that can be released in interaction. No scholar in language and literacy should be unaware of how to address the interdependence of these four capacities in acquisition, later development, and support of information buildup and skill expansion. As they do so, they must also see to it that teacher education, as well as community development, remain informed of their work and invited to test new theories in practice both within schools and beyond.

Though generally unknown to those who limit their quotation from Juliet's plaintive lament to the question "what's in a name?" the last portion of her speech warrants our attention. She maintains that Romeo, even by another name, would "retain that dear perfection which he owes without that title." Today we must read "owes" for its meaning of "owns." And we must disagree with Juliet, for the agent who carries a name or title does not just passively retain "that dear perfection." It must work for it. Responsibilities, along with the burdens and constraints of history, come with any name.

JoLLE should be no exception. Having taken on the binding together of language and literacy, its originators and future editors have now also taken on the many responsibilities that the name of their department and its new journal dictate. I wish them well and look forward to the many benefits sure to follow from their undertaking.

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