

**Editor's Introduction:  
Rethinking "Cookie Cutter" Literacy Practices**

Michelle M. Falter

I am going to begin my introduction with some thoughts on Zhang Zhaohui's "You and Me" Art Installation<sup>1</sup> that is our cover art for this issue. This particular art piece can be found in the 789 art district of Beijing, and it invites its viewers to participate, and to step into the body of another. Within this art space, people come together and play. They also laugh, as the picture of the young girl demonstrates. While I am not exactly sure the message behind Zhang's Zhaohui's work, it does make me think about the "cookie cutter" ways in which society and schools tries to shape us as individuals and as teachers and learners. The gendered bathroom icon shapes of a male and a female literally represent some human bodies, but they also symbolically represent control of bodies, forcing a conformity of sorts into a certain category. No individual who participates and interacts with this piece of art will ever be able to fill those giant cookie cutter shells, yet the artwork seems to invite us to try to stay within the mold. While this artwork could encompass both embodiment and participatory practices, I wonder what statement Mr. Zhaohui is making through these cookie cutters. Is it a social justice statement about hegemonic institutions that attempt to box us in, or is it a whimsical piece inviting us to find our partner, our match, who completes the pair? It is with this piece of artwork that I wish to begin the exploration of what embodied and participatory literacies might look like.

When deciding on the theme of this special issue (and our *JoLLE@UGA* 2015 Winter Conference) over a year ago, I wanted to consider a different way educators teach and students learn, one in which play, participation in social and community practices, and the body were embraced. For me, "Embodied and Participatory Literacies" as a theme speaks to the direction I believe language and literacy education needs to be heading. School cultures, as they currently are, have a tendency to control and isolate bodies, and this seems to be more and more the case as our schools become increasingly standardized and test-based, and students have less time for free play. Barton and Hamilton (1998) wrote, "like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and is located in the interaction between people" (p. 3)<sup>2</sup>. This themed issue of Embodied and Participatory literacies highlights the need to understand how we construct and participate in the world through our bodies and through our active participation in social networks and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see <http://hahamagartconnect.tumblr.com/post/58175672995/you-and-me-folks-enjoying-zhang-zhaohuis> for more information on this Art Installation

<sup>2</sup> Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. New York, NY: Routledge.

When I first thought about what embodied and participatory literacies mean to me, a very distinct image and experience popped in my head. It is one in which many of you, I will assume, can relate to. For me that image is the act of writing and composing at a computer. About 10 months ago I had the distinct displeasure of throwing out my back, and it was during this time when I fully began to realize just how embodied our literacy skills are. Simple tasks such as sitting up straight were difficult for me. Yet, as an academic, writing is an activity that I do every day, and I found it extremely difficult to continue doing. I took for granted how my body informed and shaped my language and literacy practice. Besides typing, I also use my computer to connect to my friends and families, via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. All of my daily participations and interactions with the world and people were instantly cut off during this period as I learned how to refocus my body in a way that I could stay productive.

Thinking about my daily writing routines also made me think about reading, which for me is also a very participatory and embodied act. Whether it is a print book or one on my Kindle or iPad, I am actively engaging with my body in the world. Flipping through my Kindle and highlighting parts of the text with my finger is surprisingly fun. Sharing what I am reading with others on Goodreads also helps me to engage and participate with others in an act of reading that many people might characterize as a solitary one. Furthermore, where I sit and how I sit when reading is just as important as the feel of a book against my skin. And as I reminisce about school, I can also remember how my body felt—sweaty, slightly shaky, and uneasy, despite being a gifted reader—worrying about whether my teacher would call on me to read a passage aloud unexpectedly, “popcorn style.”

These two personal examples are just the beginning of what embodied and participatory literacies look like and feel like. Although schools and society can confine the body and both teachers' and students' participation, there are many out there that are pushing envelopes, breaking barriers, and striving for a different type of experience for teachers and students—ones that embrace participation and embrace the role of the body. Each author in this spring issue of *JoLLE* offers unique insights into the complexities and subtleties of what embodied and participatory literacies looks like in research and in practice.

Our two keynote speakers from our winter conference provide us with two **Featured Articles** to help us consider embodied and participatory literacies. The first article, “Multimodal Play and Adolescents: Notes on Noticing Laughter,” by Lalitha Vasudevan examines laughter as a form of embodied multimodal play in which adolescents' engage across contexts and in various ways. In Christine Woodcock and Phyllis Hakeem's article, “The Power of Our Words and Flesh': An Experienced Literacy Coach's Love Letter to Incoming Educators about the Transformational Roles of Relationships and the Body in Learning,” they explore the power of words alongside the implications of voice and silence in our work as educators, the role of the teacher's body in (dis)embodied knowledge, and the multidimensional partnerships necessary to work together in empowered, democratic schools.

Next, this issue offers six **Research Articles**, each dealing with different dimensions of embodied and participatory literacies. Our first two articles explore the participatory side of our issue's theme particularly in online spaces. Stacy Haynes-Moore explores how students created alternative versions of *The Hunger Games* through digital role-play in her article, “Trading Spaces: An Educator's Ethnographic Exploration of an Adolescents' Online Role-Play.” Jon Wargo's article, “Spatial Stories with Nomadic Narrators: Affect, Snapchat, and 'Feeling' Embodiment in Youth Mobile Composing,” considers the embodied processes of youth composing with and through mobile technology with his participant Ben.

The third research article in this issue focuses on the underrepresented literacies of dance and drama in the elementary grades. Charlotte Frambaugh-Kritzer, Stephanie Buelow, and Jamie Simpson Steele's article, “What are the Disciplinary Literacies in Dance and Drama in Elementary Grades?” explores their research with elementary pre-service teachers in deepening the connection between literacies of the body with relation to the discipline specific literacies of dance and drama.

The final two research articles explore embodied and participatory literacies through two different cultural perspectives and frames. Willy Ngaka & Fred Masagazi Masaazi's article "Participatory Literacy Learning in an African Context: Perspectives from the Ombaderuku Primary School in the Arua District, Uganda" is an important piece in thinking about language and literacy education in an international context. Their article explores the experiences and perceptions of teachers on phonics and whole language approaches to teaching and learning, discovering the untapped cultural resources and tools within the community and the potential for digital technologies as motivational strategies for participatory learning in rural Uganda. The final research article "Testimoniando en Nepantla: Using Testimonio as a Pedagogical Tool for Exploring Embodied Literacies and Bilingualism" by Christina Passos DeNicolo & Mónica González explores the Chicana/Latina concepts of *nepantla*, *testimonio* and *testimoniando* as embodied literacy practices within a third grade classroom with emergent bilingual students.

Our final article in this Spring Issue is titled "Who are *Our* Mockingbirds? Participatory Literacies in a Community-Wide Reading Program." In this **Voices from the Field** piece, Deborah Vriend Van Duinen & Kathryn Schoon-Tanis describe and exemplify their community based mockingbird project, in which over 400 high school students and community members artistically responded to the question, "Who are the mockingbirds?" (i.e. marginalized or oppressed people) in their community. Their article explores the need for more embodied, visual and critical visual literacy practices, and place-based pedagogies in both in-school and out-of-school settings.

In addition to our manuscripts, *JoLLE's Academic Book Reviews*, edited by Xiaoli Hong, offer considerations of five titles that extend the discussions in this issue's other sections. The five books reviewed include: *Moving Ideas: Multimodality and Embodied Learning in Communities and Schools*; *Cultural Transformations: Youth and Pedagogies of Possibility*; *American Circumstance*; *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education*; and *After Pedagogy: The Experience of Teaching*. The reviews focus on books that help teachers and educators understand embodied/participatory literacies from different approaches. Some of the books present creative pedagogies that enable students to meaningfully interact with their socialites. Others discuss research projects or educational phenomena that challenge us to rethink current educational settings and students' engagement with the world through embodied /participatory learning experiences.

The **Children's and Young Adult Literature Book Reviews**, edited by Helene Halstead, complements our academic book reviews, and provides educators with opportunities to preview books that they might wish to include within their classrooms. *JoLLE* reviews children's and young adult literature in order to support engagement with textual literacy, both for the classroom and for the individual learner. The journal reviews newly released and soon-to-be-released texts designed for the pre-K through twelfth grade audience. Books or other texts include topics related to issues of social justice, providing voices for marginalized youth, fostering discussion regarding children's concerns, accessibility through low-level but high-interest texts, and promoting cross-curricular lessons in the classroom. We have included two viewpoints on each book reviewed—one from an educator's perspective, and one from a student's perspective—so that we are always keeping in mind our students when choosing literature, and not only privileging adult perspectives. In addition, we cover books ranging from elementary through high school readers. The literature reviewed for this issue includes: *Girls Like Us*; *Bombay Blues*; *Elena Vanishing*; *Anything Could Happen*; *The Book with No Pictures*; and *Jim Curious: A Voyage to the Heart of the Sea in 3-D Vision*.

Furthermore, the **Poetry and Arts** section, edited by Margaret Robbins, includes eight poems: "Spinning Straw into Gold—A Teacher's Plight," "Ryan," "Hale," "Blowing and Bursting Bubbles," "The 451 App," "Benjamin," "Failing Students," and "The Yellow Crayon." In addition to these poems, we also have two art pieces, titled "Burning Hell" and "Dream". The selections include such important themes as technology's influence on modern day society, schools as sources of embodiment, issues of control and conformity in schools, the dreams and imagination of children, and teachers' encouragement from students to continue in a demanding, but rewarding profession. Many of our poets are also educators, so they understand the importance of encouraging creativity,

even in a world where individuality is sometimes stifled. We hope you enjoy these uplifting, thought provoking, and powerful works of art.

As *JoLLE* moves forward into the 2015-2016 academic year, I hope that the journal's readers and conference participants will continue to support the journal's efforts whether through being a reviewer of manuscripts, participating in our social media, on **Facebook** (please "like" us and join in the conversation at <https://www.facebook.com/JoLLE.UGA>) and **Twitter** (@jolle\_uga), writing a **Scholars Speak Out** op-ed piece, currently edited by Meghan E. Barnes (<http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/scholars-speak-out/>), listening to our author **Podcasts**, produced by Jennifer Whitley, or through attending our annual conference. The incoming Principal Editor, Meghan E. Barnes, and the rest of the 2015-2016 *JoLLE* Editorial Board are already working to offer spaces for new and transformative thoughts and practices through future issues and the *JoLLE@UGA* 2016 Winter Conference.

As a final note I wish to return to the art installation "You and Me." While our educational system becomes more rigid and standardized, less playful and more controlled and disciplined, I want to rethink this "cookie cutter" mentality of education, but particularly our language and literacy practices. No student or teacher is alike. Rather than conforming to the mold, I encourage us all to take up the call for more embodied and participatory research and pedagogical practices that expand the notions found in this issue.

Sincerely,



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## ***JoLLE* wishes to say Thank You to our 2014-2015 Editorial Board and Reviewers!**

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**And a huge thank you to our Faculty Advisor, Dr. Peter Smagorinsky!**

*Note: If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *JoLLE*, please contact us at [jolle@uga.edu](mailto:jolle@uga.edu)*