

JOLLE@UGA®

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Editors' Introduction

Intentional Meaning: Exploring How We Read and Write Our Worlds

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No matter where language and literacy educators are—in a classroom, in a meeting, driving to a friend's house, on a date—we tend to story our lives. Individual contexts filter and shape those stories to be unique and influenced by the stories of those around us. Story is a tool we use to make meaning of our worlds. As members of the language and literacy education community, we often are charged with the privilege and responsibility of constructing, managing, and reconstructing narratives. Jerome Bruner (1986) argued that the human experience cannot be explained wholly in numerical terms because narrative “deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions” (p. 16). This intentionality instills a duty within educators, students, and researchers to frame their work and words in ways that move toward inclusion and acceptance. There is an ethic of making stories that invites people to connect with one another while reaching out to connect with the myriad voices found in others' stories, even when they do not reflect their own.

One of my (Nick's) most difficult stories to reflect on from my teaching career happened in the spring of 2006, not long after I began teaching, when I watched two high school seniors in an argument about who suffered the most at the hands of their classmates, community, and even some of the faculty in the high school where I taught. To give a little context, it was an upper-middle class high school with a mostly White student body in the Southeast that led the charge [to put stickers on newly-adopted biology books stating that evolution is only a theory, not a fact](#) in 2002. I was struck dumb by the shocking realities that my students were unearthing for me. I saw my role as serving only to make sure that their words did not turn into personal attacks. I did not stop the argument because it seemed to be an important conversation for them to have so they could express their pain. It seemed necessary for me to witness so that I could move toward understanding the personal histories of two students who were treated unjustly by their school. I reflect on this story frequently as I trace the memory of my still unfolding path to becoming a teacher.

I was struck by—and carry with me—a few realizations from witnessing my two students' argument. First, I was not prepared in my own education to engage in this conversation. As a White, heterosexual, male with a middle-

class background, I did not have the personal experiences that allowed me to relate to my students' contexts with acute instances of mistreatment that reflect the larger systemic, oppressive attitudes in our community and our country. Second, though aware of the racism, sexism, and homophobia around me, I was completely ignorant of the abusive behavior that some of my students, those whose well-being I was charged with protecting, suffered. Third, though my students' experiences were different from each other and their stories were forged in different historical crucibles, I couldn't help but view these two young people as embattled allies. There was a chance for the encounter to be mutually therapeutic, for them to gain each other's perspective, but instead, it was only a standoff about who of the two could claim the most suffering. Lastly, I was left wishing for a magic button that would help me find the ethical response, much like the Ctrl + F function in Christina Berchini's article in this issue of the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education (JoLLE)*.

There is no easy fix. From elementary school-aged readers to university faculty writers, the work presented in this issue seeks to help educators grow a hope for a "viable pluralism backed by a willingness to negotiate differences in world-view" (Bruner, 1990, p. 30). There is work to be done towards this end, and we are proud in this Fall 2016 issue of *JoLLE* to bring readers examples of the efforts being put forth by educators from many walks of life, in multitudinous settings, and through diverse mediums. It is our hope that this issue calls to question the stories around us, inviting dialogue, raising questions, and challenging the dominant discourses that construct—and potentially change—our worlds.

Fall 2016 Academic Articles

We begin *JoLLE's* Fall 2016 issue with an experimental nonfiction essay, *Ctrl F: A Scholar's Tips for Delving into the World of Creative Writing*, where Christina Berchini unpacks the creative writing process and the difficulties that come along with it using the Ctrl + F function as an extended metaphor. Throughout her piece, Berchini merges the two worlds of creative and academic writing, illuminating the ways in which they work together—not only in the physical process, but also through the vulnerability of putting one's work out into the world and dealing with rejections when they inevitably come. According to Berchini, "If only there were a life function for Control Hide—which is about the only thing a teacher/scholar/writer who dares to delve into the creative wants to do the day they receive a rejection" (p. 7). In a way, this issue is about rejection—rejecting normativity, rejecting monolithic language, and moving toward (re)storying the narratives in constant flux around us in order to shape our unique worlds.

In *The Trouble with Niceness: How a Preference for Pleasantness Sabotages Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparation*, Jeanne Dyches Bissonnette leads our readers through some of the possible reasons underlying why teacher training programs are under-preparing preservice teachers for teaching in culturally-responsive ways. What could be wrong with being nice? Critical thinking, speech, and action are rarely "nice." Difficult change is seldom achieved through niceness. Bissonnette argues that change is a product of disrupting and dismantling normalized culture, and is therefore interpreted as rude, dangerous—even nasty. Niceness helps to perpetuate the dominant narratives in society, and the *status quo* only serves to advance those who benefit from disenfranchising forces. When opponents to change criticize the medium of an argument as "not nice," and they

can't challenge content of the message, the argument is probably on the right track. To Bissonnette, disrupting the order can be valuable.

Calling for a “dramatic shift” in teacher education in *Living and Learning in the Here-and-Now: Critical Inquiry in Literacy Teacher Education*, Katherine Crawford-Garrett and Kathleen Riley argue for critical “here and now” positioning of preservice teachers. They show the value of looking at the political climate of teaching, not only in the abstract, but from a personal, lived, local lens. Crawford-Garrett and Riley claim that looking critically at “here and now” experiences is at the core of training to be a teacher. The authors discuss critical inquiries that their undergraduate literacy methods course students engaged in within two areas of the United States that are dealing with very different social issues, one in the Northeast, the other in the Southwest. Where and who preservice teachers are matters in their ability express their worldview as teachers, and Crawford-Garrett and Riley argue it can be an essential skill in teaching any student population.

Eliza G. Braden and Sanjuana C. Rodriguez continue the work of advancing society toward critical consciousness in *Beyond Mirrors and Windows: A Critical Content Analysis of Latinx Children's Books*. In [their podcast interview](#) for *JoLLE*, we asked if some students are too young for conversations about privilege. They argue that books are educational tools that can serve as a “vehicle to interrogate how groups are represented,” and that “children hold a wealth of knowledge around politicized topics” that some adults see as unfit for curriculum. They constructed four major insights through the content analysis of Latinx children's books: a. English is privileged; b. The books don't include significant cultural context; c. There is a reliance on traditional gender roles; and d. The books have a reliance on utopian society backdrops. This piece will help teachers, especially those in elementary contexts, to build a more culturally responsive classroom library. Braden and Rodriguez also provide specific recommendations as well as give guidance on how to choose books that more responsibly offer representations of Latinx peoples and cultures.

In her piece, *Empowering the Foreign Language Learner through Critical Literacies Development*, Margaret Keneman notes that while strides have been made in the field of language and literacy education, too often, students in the foreign language classroom still receive education through a banking model that lacks critical pedagogical awareness. According to Keneman, “Students often have difficulty perceiving the wealth of opportunity that is possible as a result of studying a foreign language, including the potential to develop and grow personally as they interact with new cultures using new modes of expression in a new language” (p. 90). She challenges foreign language educators to use a critical literacy teaching model in order to create a classroom space for students to learn more than a language—to learn about a culture, a people, and to situate their own stories within those worlds.

Book Reviews and Poetry and Art

In addition to the academic articles in this issue, our board members, led by the section editors, have assembled book reviews and original artistic pieces related to language and literacy education. Academic Book Review Editor, Kathleen R. McGovern, has included a number of diverse book reviews in this issue of *JoLLE* that continue the theme of critical narratives, starting this section with a review by S. R. Toliver of *Nobody: Casualties*

of *America's War on the Vulnerable from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* (Hill, 2016). Other books reviewed in this issue are: *Research-Based Practices for Teaching Common Core Literacy* (Pearson & Hiebert, 2015), reviewed by Courtney Shimek; *Focus on Literacy* (Fu & Matoush, 2014), reviewed by Rhia Moreno-Kilpatrick; *Engaging Writers with Multigenre Research Projects: A Teacher's Guide* (Mack, 2015), reviewed by Jessica F. Kobe; *The Complete Guide to Tutoring Struggling Readers: Mapping Interventions to Purpose and CCSS* (Fisher, Bates, & Gurvits, 2014), reviewed by Helene Halstead; *Voices for Diversity and Social Justice: A Literary Education Anthology* (Landsman, Salcedo, & Gorski, 2015), reviewed by Kristen E. Duncan; and *Multimodality, Learning and Communication: A Social Semiotic Frame* (Bezemer & Kress, 2016), reviewed by Jason DeHart.

T. Hunter Strickland, the Children's and Young Adult Literature (CYAL) Book Review Editor, continued a great tradition of mixing student and adult voices when reviewing books for young people. This section begins with a feature review of books marketed for elementary-school-aged children: *Tinyville Town Gets to Work* by Brian Biggs, reviewed by student Mary Frost Osborne and teacher Kate O'Rourke; *Ada's Ideas: The Story of Ada Lovelace, the World's First Computer Programmer* by Fiona Robinson, reviewed by student Faith Tucker and teacher Madalene Ramsey. For middle grades readers, *JoLLE* features reviews of *Shadows of the Dark Crystal #1* by J. M. Lee, reviewed by student Emily Whitney and teacher Sam Tanner; and *The Boy with 17 Senses* by Sheila Grau, reviewed by student Madison Lavender and teacher Miriam Voyles. Lastly, the CYAL section includes reviews of books geared toward high school students: *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go: A Novel of Haiti* by Laura Rose Wagner, reviewed by student Sierra Rainville and teacher Daniel Hayes; and *The Red Abbey Chronicles: Maresi* by Maria Turtschaninoff, reviewed by student Rebecca Posten and teacher Shannon Lindsey Cheek.

Finally, Poetry and Arts Editor, Kuo Zhang, is excited to feature the painting also shown on our cover titled, *The Muses Among Us*, by Jerome C. Harste. The Poetry and Arts section also includes five poems—all themed around language and literacy: *A Writing Lesson* by Sally Jarzab, *The Poet* by Alex Johns, *When You're Not Smarter Than a Fifth Grader* by Janine Certo, *Keep* by Ariel S. Maloney, and *Let Us Feast at Poetry's Table* by Johanna M. Bailie.

JoLLE Winter Conference

The [JoLLE@UGA winter conference](#), to be held at the Georgia Center on February 3rd and 4th, 2017, strives to be a participatory and innovative place for academics, teachers, and students locally and across the world to learn from each other. This year's conference, organized by Conference Chair, Rachel Kaminski Sanders, is built around the theme of Out of the Box and Into the Margins. The 2017 conference will feature keynote speaker Nick Sousanis, an assistant professor in the School of Humanities and Liberal Studies at San Francisco State University, as well as an opening session by children's book illustrator and author, Eric Velasquez. This year's conference features sessions by educators and students who take risks, sometimes subversively, to employ and widen the spaces between the essentializing forces faced by all people. *JoLLE* invites artists, gamers, remixers, techies, and fandoms to attend this year's conference. We welcome all who experiment with the intertwining of identities and all who refuse to be labeled to share and explore how to exert agency within highly-constrained contexts—or, in other words, how to move out of the box and into the margins. We invite national and international scholars with ranging research interests in language and literacy education to join us for a

conversation on various topics within our field. Please visit [our conference page](#) for more details and information regarding registration.

Thanks and Recognitions

On behalf of the *JoLLE* editorial and review boards, Nick and Jenn want to say thanks to you, our readers and contributors. We also want to encourage you to support *JoLLE* by submitting your own work for consideration in future issues. We are currently accepting research articles, theoretical pieces, Voices from the Field articles, academic book reviews, reviews of children's and young adult literature, and submissions of poetry and art. For all details regarding the submission process—or if you are interested in serving as a reviewer—please refer to the *JoLLE* submissions page and/or contact our Managing Editor, [Heidi Lyn Hadley](#). In addition to the biannually-published journal, *JoLLE* also invites you to submit shorter op-ed essays to our Scholars Speak Out (SSO) feature. To learn more about the SSO purposes and publication process, please contact our Scholars Speak Out Editor, [Lou Cardozo-Gaibisso](#). And, as always, please continue to follow *JoLLE* on both [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) (@Jolle_uga).

JoLLE is an online, open-access, completely student-run journal that has a rotating editorial and review board each semester. This semester's board has been a dedicated group who worked together to move the journal with current research trends in language and literacy education in order to advance the field towards new, progressive, critically-minded work—(re)storying our words and worlds. We want to take a moment to recognize this semester's *JoLLE* editorial and review boards for the excellent job they do: Heidi Lyn Hadley (Managing Editor), Bradley Robinson (Production Editor), Rachel Kaminski Sanders (Conference Chair), William J. Fassbender (Website Editor), Kathleen R. McGovern (Academic Book Review Editor), T. Hunter Strickland (Children and Young Adult Book Review Editor), Kuo Zhang (Poetry and Arts Editor), Lourdes Cardozo-Gaibisso (Scholars Speak Out Editor), Kalianne L. Neumann (Communications Editor), Maria A. Van Allen, Isabel Balsamo, Khanh Bui, Lei Jiang, Sharon M. Nuruddin, Soudabeh Rafieisakhaei, and S. R. Toliver (Editorial Board Members). Lastly, we want to thank and recognize our Faculty Advisor, Peter Smagorinsky, for his tireless leadership and support. Without him, we could not continue to grow the field and produce a quality publication and conference.

We, Nick and Jenn, and the rest of the *JoLLE* board, are grateful for your support, readership, authorship, and artistry as we help construct the story of language and literacy education toward advancing ourselves, our classrooms, and our worlds with thoughtfulness and intent.

Sincerely,

Nick Thompson and Jennifer Jackson Whitley, Co-Principal Editors 2016-2017

References

Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.