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Editor's Introduction: The Intersection of Identities, Texts, and Activism

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The early autumn air greeted me when I stepped out of the downtown Montréal building where I was teaching. It was a Wednesday afternoon and the first thing that came to mind while walking to the nearest metro station was how I loved the diversity of this city. As a relatively new Montréaler, I am proud of how queer friendly this city is. But that queer joy and feeling of elation was abruptly halted when I saw someone carrying a protest sign that reads, “*Canada has one flag!*”. Walking further, it dawned on me that there was an anti-LGBTQ+/anti-trans rights protest happening at a nearby park. The protester was carrying a simple object with few texts. However, such object speaks volume regarding the current attitudes that queer people face and the physical and emotional threats they are confronted with on a daily basis. That protest sign was a material attacking another object- the Pride Flag. The primary symbol of queer individuals and allies’ strength and the community’s hopes for a more inclusive, humane, and just society. It is personally disheartening to read news about protests (and the need for counter-protests) that are happening both in Canada and the US when just in June this year, two students and an instructor were stabbed in a gender studies class at the University of Waterloo. The police called it “a hate motivated incident related to gender expression and gender identity”. Such incidents make us question how safe our learning spaces are and to what extent we have to compromise our scholarly pursuits for the safety of both students and teachers.

Post-COVID-19 era has also made humans more divided. We have witnessed how various states or provincial legislations have further polarized public opinions. In Georgia, ‘divisive’ concepts in teaching about race are forbidden. We have also seen pictures of black cloth covered library shelves circulating on social media, a result of numerous book challenges in Florida. Locally, in my home province of Quebec, Bill 96 has been a subject of contestation. The bill restricts communications in government establishments in languages other than French. People may report businesses, big or small, that do not use French and technically, as an immigrant who has been living in the province for more than six months, I should be ‘fluent in French’. These bills, laws, and policies allude to the plots of *The*

Handmaid's Tale or 1984 coming to life in 2023, realities that we researchers and practitioners have to grapple with in our work to push current understandings of literacies and intersectionality.

Recent events outside the North American context have further exacerbated this division. Because “the Human has never been a politically neutral category” (Maynard & Simpson, 2022, p.17), educators are now more than ever confronted with the additional challenge to craft curricular programmes and utilize instructional materials that foster broader understanding of various perspectives or worldviews. This is especially significant since our classrooms are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse, with students bringing in funds of knowledge that are continuously being shaped by a plethora of political, religious, and social backgrounds. This does not even begin to account for the diverse forms of trauma from which learners are seeking recovery, nor does it encompass the ongoing efforts of many to extricate themselves from the colonial viewpoints and methodologies that significantly shaped their formative years. Indeed, conflict comes in many forms and is always present in any discourse setting, including language and literacy education classes across levels. This, thus, begs the question on what measures could be harnessed to counteract conflicts as we engage in both educating and caring for our learners (Pentón Herrera et al., 2023).

On the metro, I pulled out my copy of Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *Rehearsals for Living*, a required reading for a doctoral colloquium course. Surrounded by protesters who were just leaving the venue, I was struck by the following question: “*What does it mean to try to build worlds that affirm, rather than destroy, life, and to do so from outside the barricades?*” (p. 25). Indeed, we cannot continue ignoring questions that make us uncomfortable. If one of our main goals, as language and literacy educators and scholars, is to celebrate the fullness of human and non-human lives, there is an urgency to interrogate and problematize the status quo, the powerful, and the several other forces that dictate what goes into our instruction and scholarship. There is also an immediate need to address the role of emotions, feelings, and desirings. Ehret and Rowsell (2021) argued for “considerations of the uncontrollable and indeterminant in processes of meaning making through language, as well as with and around texts” (p. 205).

The ‘becoming’ of JoLLE’s Fall 2023 issue actively progressed with the aforementioned events as the collective backdrop. Hence, it is not surprising that the articles forming this assemblage directly address our current social and political realities. As a doctoral student, I am humbled, along with the 2023-2024 editorial team, to curate this issue. Being a student-run publication, we are grateful to the authors for entrusting their lovingly crafted work to us. These works are extensions of authorial identities, testaments to years of scholarly pursuits and advocating for community causes. In a way, this issue is also a continuation of the Spring 2023 issue’s decolonizing and humanizing practices in education theme.

As I was rereading the papers that made this issue possible, I also reflected on their seamless thematic connections. The following overarching question could hopefully guide us as we attempt to critically reflect and interrogate these discourses that the authors offered.

How can the amalgamation of texts as forms of resistance, the incorporation of activism in language and literacy teacher education programmes, and the recognition of the power of multilingualism contribute to fostering inclusive and transformative educational environments?

Research Articles

We open this issue with **Chloe Morris**' work with teacher candidates on using diverse books with persona dolls. Morris' primary intention was to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to put into action some concepts from culturally responsive pedagogy. Key aspects of their work are the diverse stories that teacher candidates engaged with and the creation of bibliographies that reflect the persona dolls. Using reflection exercises, Morris attempted to understand and assess their participants' 'level of comfort and plans' to include 'diverse representations' in their future classrooms. Whilst the results are promising due to the participants' openness to include diverse perspectives in their future teaching, Morris' work also pushes us to think about the intersecting complexities of teacher identity constructions and societal pressures. Most of Morris' participants did not have plans to include materials with diverse gender identities.

Continuing on the theme of using texts that depict diversity, **Kwangok Song, Annamary Consalvo, Ann D. David, Angela J. Stefanski, and Carolyn Walker Hitchens** capitalize on children's literature to examine preservice teachers' (PST) responses in terms of engaging with multiple perspectives from these texts. Their two case studies that were conducted in literacy courses highlighted PST's broadening understanding on the roles of multicultural literature for equitable representation of diverse learners. However, while the book club discussion was effective in engaging participants in perspective-taking, we learn that PSTs had the tendency to focus on the main characters.

Still anchored on texts but this time in the context of young adult (YA) literature, **Michelle M. Falter** and **Jessica Eagle** ask us to be continuously critical and conscious in helping preservice teachers develop their identities. In their YA course, they deployed book club discussions with PSTs in order to foster development of "sympathetic knowledge" of adolescents as "they grappled with their shifting positionalities and subjectivities". Perhaps one of the main takeaways of this paper is the invaluable power of reflexivity in our teacher education courses. In this case, Falter and Eagle ask us to actively involve future teachers to reflect on their own lived experiences to develop understanding of the teacher self and young learners' identities.

The fourth paper similarly situates the discourse within the power of texts. **Kelli A. Rushek** and **Ellie MacDowell**'s work continues the conversations on interrogating and disrupting the place of canonical literature in our curriculum in relation to teacher educator identities. Their work is an example of how

a university-based educator and a high school classroom teacher could work together to address pressing issues in language arts education. In their collaborative work, Rushek and MacDowell problematized an American literary canon in order to disrupt representations of race and power and to rethink the place of canonical works in teaching and learning.

Activism in preservice teacher education programmes, while not explicitly worded as such, is starting to take a stronghold, at least in the North American context. Given that programmes have shifted their orientations to embracing critical pedagogy, societal issues and decolonizing concepts are to some extent integrated into teacher education curricula. But how do preservice teachers, who are in the early stage of navigating their evolving identities, view themes of activism from children’s picture books? **Erica Holyoke** and **Lauren Fletcher** explore responses of two preservice teachers who are part of a professional learning group on children’s literature that depict activism and critical social issues. By discussing various books, Holyoke and Fletcher reported how the PTs wrestled with their own beliefs and connections to activism. In addition, they ask how we might continue to disrupt whiteness in the curriculum to foster transformative pedagogies.

The final research article in this issue is **Stephanie Wessels’** empirical and theoretical work that focuses on how to better serve and support literacies development of children from multilingual families. Culminating in presenting a model she calls Bilingual Literacy Development Model, Wessels attempted to argue for a more holistic view of literacies, drawing insights from the lens of child, family, and the wider society.

Voices from the Field

In this issue, we have one article under the voices from the field category. In **Ewa McGrail** and **Lisa York’s** piece, we are given insights on how we might scaffold with and empower graduate education students to self-select texts. Several recommendations are also given on how practitioners might practice self-selection strategies with their learners.

Children’s Literature and Young Adult Book Reviews

Two children’s literature reviews are included in this issue. *Everyone Loves Lunchtime but Zia* by Jenny Liao was reviewed by educator **Krista Postel** and second grade student reviewer **Amaya Moreno**. The second is a review of *Remember Us* by Jacqueline Woodson, written by educator **Angie Prophet** and fifth grader **Letao Li**.

Poetry, Fiction, and Visual Arts

This issue also contains a short story entitled “Solo” by **Allison Shanahan** and **Gabrielle Baut**.

Gratitude and Recognition

It was in early June this year when Jennifer Ervin, my predecessor, informed me that I have been offered the Principal Editor position of this journal. Knowing that JoLLE is an established publication outlet in the field of language and literacy education, I initially felt anxious and worried about how to juggle my editorial responsibilities along with teaching and doing PhD work. However, Jenn’s support during the entire transition process was very reassuring. I thank Jenn and her team for the seamless transition and for their trust on us, the JoLLE 2023-2024 editorial board.

Joining the class virtually every Monday night does not happen without difficulties. While the rest of the board congregates in-person at UGA, Faith Thompson (Managing Editor) and I have to rely on technology and communication difficulties almost always exist. I thank the rest of the board for their patience and accommodation. As a student-run publication, I admire the board’s dedication to learn the ins and outs of academic publishing. It is a joy to be able to partake in weekly conversations with these people, learning from them not only about scholarship but about life’s peculiarities in general. Thank you for modeling how to truly humanize language and literacy education. I wish to thank Faith Thompson, managing editor; Seon Ja Chang, production editor; Ngoc-My Tran and Taylor Blankstein-Miller, conference chairs; Michael Gray, treasurer, and communications editor; Yuxiang Liao, poetry, fiction, and visual arts editor; Maki Shinzato, children’s literature and young adult book review editor, and Zihan Lin, scholars speak out and digital content editor. Dr. Usree Bhattacharya, faculty advisor, also deserves a special ‘thank you’ for her wisdom and for generously guiding the board as we navigate this process.

It is a common knowledge that reviewers play a pivotal role in any peer reviewed publication outlets. On behalf of JoLLE, I would like to thank all the reviewers for devoting their time and expertise to ensure that we produce articles of high quality.

I also thank the authors for choosing JoLLE as the mouthpiece for their work. It was a joy to read their manuscripts and I am certain that the whole editorial board have learned a lot from their scholarship. I especially thank them for graciously working with us throughout the whole revision and production process. Finally, I thank the readers for engaging with the journal and for sharing our work with the wider discourse community.

An Invitation

The journal’s Winter 2024 conference will take place virtually on February 3, 2024, Saturday. I would like to extend an invitation to practitioners, community workers, and scholars to submit a presentation proposal. The conference theme is “*Multiliteracies as Pedagogy: Connecting, Advocating, Resisting*”, and we hope you will join us as we listen to Dr. Suresh Canagarajah’s keynote address, on top of individual papers, roundtables, and panel presentations. The main conference page can be found [here](#).

The Spring 2024 Issue will also be anchored on the conference theme. We hope you will consider your manuscripts or artworks to be featured in this issue. Please refer to our [submissions page](#) for further details. We also actively post on [Facebook](#) and [X/Twitter](#).

Sincerely,

Cris Delatado Barabas

Principal Editor, 2023-2024

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