



**Digital Culture & Education  
Volume 14(2), 2022**

Photo by Avery Evans on Unsplash

## **S(h)elfies in Bitmoji Classrooms: A Trend or a Literacy Practice?**

Suriati Abas, State University of New York, United States  
G Yeon Park, Korea National Open University, South Korea  
Simon Pierre Munyaneza, Indiana University Bloomington, United States  
Jae-hyun Im, Indiana University Bloomington, United States

Online Publication Date: 9 May 2022

To cite this article: Abas, S., Park, G. Y., Munyaneza, S. P. and Im, J-h. (2022) 'S(h)elfies in Bitmoji Classrooms: A Trend or a Literacy Practice?' *Digital Culture & Education*, 14(2), 78–102

URL: <https://www.digitalcultureandeducation.com/volume-14-2>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

# S(h)elfies

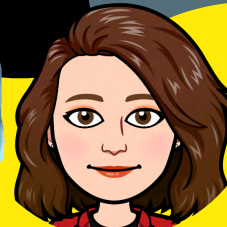
IN BITMOJI CLASSROOMS

A TREND  
OR  
A LITERACY PRACTICE?



KEYWORDS: s(h)elfies, bitmoji classrooms, literacy, multimodal literacy, socio-spatial, pandemic pedagogy

A VISUAL, SCHOLARLY ESSAY BY :



SURIATI ABAS, G YEON PARK, SIMON PIERRE MUNYANEZA & JAE-HYUN IM

**IN MARCH 2020, WHEN COVID-19 HITS THE NATION...**



**BITMOJI CLASSROOMS BEGAN SPROUTING LIKE**



**BIT...BIT..MOOOOOO..JI**



**A BITMOJI CLASSROOM IS  
A VIRTUAL SPACE  
CREATED USING A BITMOJI  
APP AND DIGITAL TOOLS  
LIKE GOOGLE SLIDES OR  
CANVA.**



# SOME EXAMPLES OF BITMOJI CLASSROOMS



The sudden craze among teachers prompted us to investigate how the various configurations of book shelves in bitmoji classrooms were used as a pandemic pedagogy.

# THE RESEARCHERS...

I'm teaching pre-service teachers and teachers who are interested in becoming a literacy specialist.

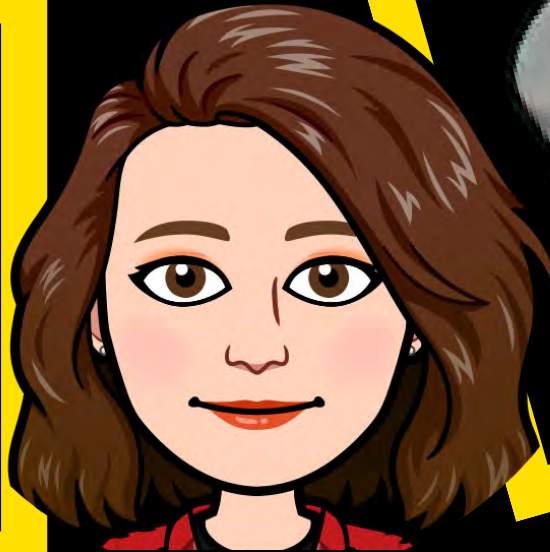
I'm teaching online MA TESOL students in Seoul. Some of my students are in-service English subject teachers in K-12 schools or private institutes in Korea, while others work for international companies.

I am a father of three kids who use bitmoji in their everyday classrooms.

I'm interested in understanding how K-12 teachers utilize various online platforms to expand teaching and learning opportunities.



Suriati Abas



G Yeon Park



Simon Pierre  
Munyaneza



Jae-hyun Im

# AT THE BEGINNING...

In Spring 2020, I started following bitmoji classroom groups on Facebook out of curiosity.

Amid the pandemic, I got my undergraduates to develop bitmoji classrooms that portray diverse books as part of their Children's Literature assignment.

The bitmoji classrooms that my students created motivated me to research on it and recruited like-minded researchers to join me.

The shelves on the bitmoji classrooms and how they were used as part of a pandemic pedagogy are of interest to us!

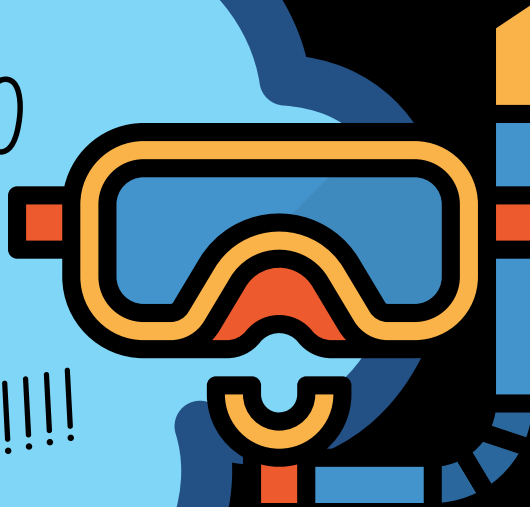
We employed netnography, a study of online behaviors and relationship (Kozinet, 2021) BUT our focus is on **OBSERVING BITMOJI CLASSROOMS CREATED BY TEACHERS**

Our shared interest in bitmoji classrooms brought us together.



# BUT THE PROBLEM IS....

There are 500000  
many bitmoji  
classrooms here!!!!



"Critical case sampling is a method where a certain number of important or "critical" cases are selected and then examined" (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

**WOW**

We need to use critical case sampling. Else, we will be drowned with the huge data.



# SO WE CREATED A LIST OF CRITERIA TO FILTER THE DATA...

KEYWORDS for search on social media: diverse books, children's books, social justice and antiracism

1

Shelfies with books written by diverse authors

2

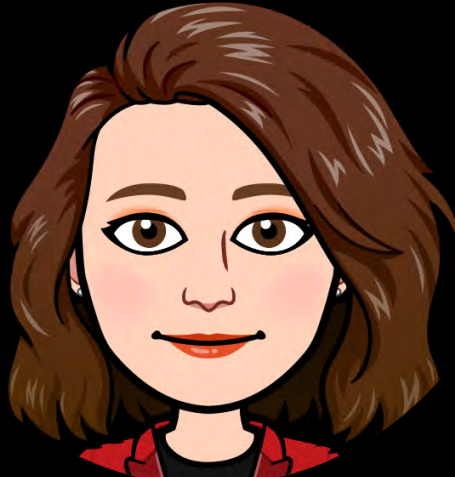
Shelfies with books that have a social justice theme

3

Bitmoji classrooms created on one slide for an elementary age children

4

Bitmoji classrooms that does not include a teacher as part of the setup (i.e the focus on shelves)



# WHAT MOTIVATED OUR DATA SAMPLING CRITERIA WERE...

*The importance of incorporating diversity and inclusivity in teaching and learning*

*Our interest in promoting diverse children's books as international scholars*

*On-going discussions that make visible issues of social injustices within and beyond the US (egs. racism, discrimination, oppression)*



# OUR APPROACH TO THE STUDY

*Viewing from a socio-spatial lens (Comber, 2015) and grounding our work in multimodal theory (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), we evince how three bitmoji classrooms were used as semiotic resources (van Leeuwen, 2005).*



# SOCIO-SPATIAL THEORY (COMBER, 2015)

A socio-spatial approach attends to the organization of the physical (layout and organization of the bitmoji classroom), social (what students do) and affective spaces (how students feel).

"Literate practices in schools are realized spatially, materially, and are governed by diffuse forms of disciplinary power."  
(Mills & Comber, 2015).

OUR FOCUS: the "physical" space - the shelves that make up a bitmoji classroom.

We noticed that each teacher has different arrangement of books and artefacts on their bookshelves.

Is "S(H)ELFIES IN BITMOJI CLASSROOMS" a TREND or a LITERACY PRACTICE?

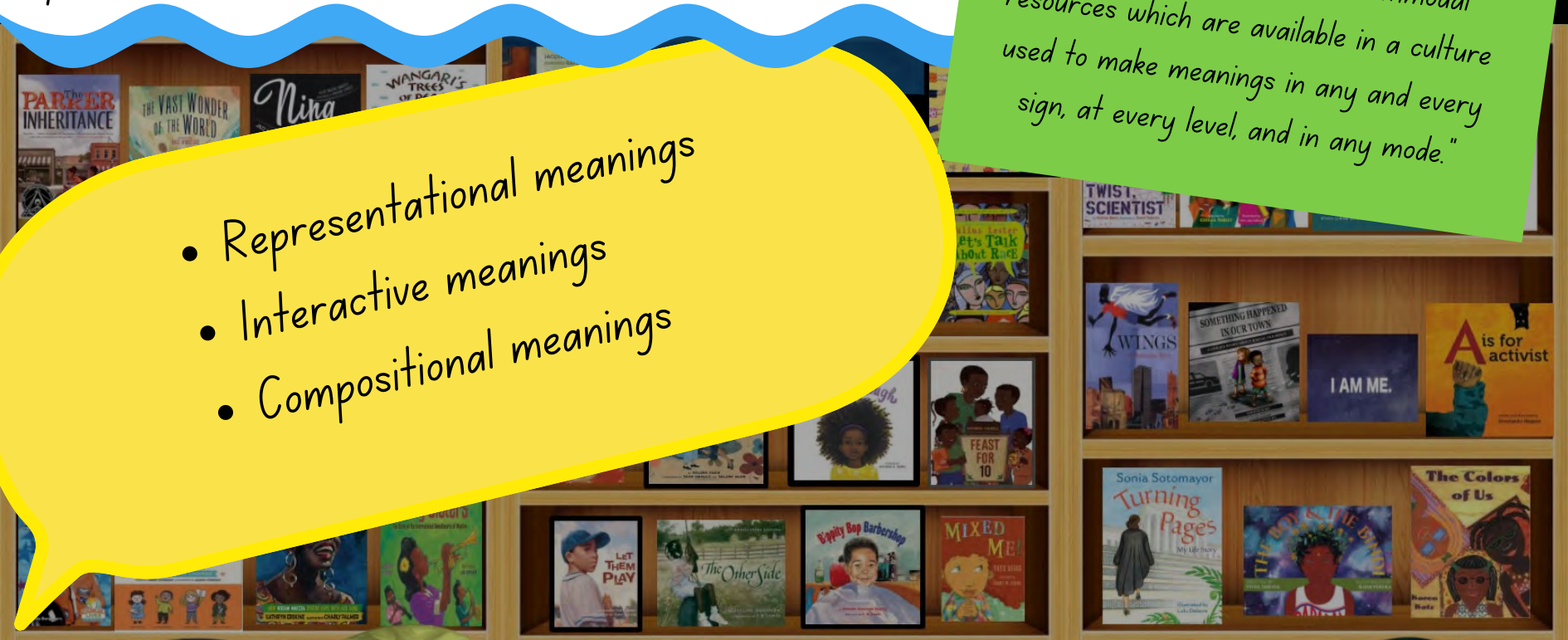


# MULTIMODAL THEORY (KRESS & VAN LEEUWEN, 2001)

Through multimodal theory, we were able to examine closely the semiotic resources or objects (egs., books, portraits, picture frames) in a bitmoji classroom, the relationships among them and, their meaning-making potential.

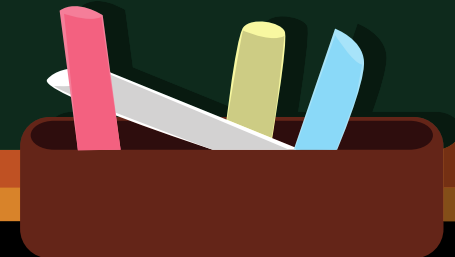
"...[I]n the age of digitisation, the different modes have technically become the same at some level of representation, and they can be operated by one multi-skilled person, using one interface, one mode of physical manipulation. We see the multimodal resources which are available in a culture used to make meanings in any and every sign, at every level, and in any mode."

- Representational meanings
- Interactive meanings
- Compositional meanings



# QUESTIONS THAT GUIDED OUR ANALYSIS DRAWING FROM SOCIO-SPATIAL AND MULTIMODAL THEORY

1. *What catches your attention?*
2. *How is white, or negative, space(s) used?*
3. *What is foregrounded, and what is included in the background?*
4. *How are the books/book shelves positioned in relation to the other objects?  
How does this add to the overall meaning in the bitmoji classroom?*
5. *How are size and scale used? What is large? What does it mean when certain elements are presented larger than others? How does this add to the overall meaning in the bitmoji classroom and the shelves?*



# BITMOJI CLASSROOM 1

I created a Social Justice Themed Virtual Library! Thought I'd share if anyone would like to use it 😊

<https://docs.google.com/.../1RQhTT.../copy...>



**Click on each book cover to read!**  
**Haga clic encima de cada portada del libro para leer!**



**English**

**español**

*Created by Michelle*



# BITMOJI CLASSROOM 2

My bestie and teaching partner and I have been so sad about everything going on in the world that we wanted to do something to help. We know that it starts with our children. We worked together to create this Black Lives Matter Reading room. It is filled with wonderful stories to listen to, information about famous black people in our history, and other interesting information. Everything you see in the room has a clickable link. Please take time to go through this with your child. We hope this helps to have open conversations about equality, justice and the importance of treating everyone equally.

**\*\*Edit\*\*** Please make a copy of the Google slide. You will be able to edit it there without changing our original copy or asking permission!**\*\***





# BITMOJI CLASSROOM 3

Every one of you, my coworker (and amazing librarian) Alanna and I created a Diverse Children's Book Virtual Library for our students to be able to access a selection of books about racism, activism, equity, diversity, inclusion... online. There are five rooms filled with books linked to online read alouds, to the Toronto Public Library and more. This library will definitely keep on growing, but it is a start. We borrowed the room decor from another teacher here! Thank you! Feel free to access the Diverse Children's Books Virtual Library here: <https://docs.google.com/.../1hE3DzfGXe3cJSS2M6NE6urk.../copy> Also check out <https://www.adifferentbooklist.com/>, an amazing multicultural bookstore in Toronto with even more choices and selection.



BLACK HEROES

I CAN DO ANYTHING!

Black Lives Matter

# HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF HOW WE ANALYZED A BITMOJI CLASSROOM

## PHASE 1: MAKING SENSE OF VISUAL DATA

USING "NOTICE-MEANINGS-IMPLICATIONS" (SERAFINI, 2011)

### Bilingual bitmoji classroom

Employment for people of color in Minneapolis, USA

Social justice in the Global South - Chile

Social justice for people of color

The three wall hangings amplify the message of social justice

Home deco

Instruction in English and Spanish  
Calling for a separate conversation on race

Table lamp symbolizes the "spotlight" topic

Children's books published from 2018-2020

Bookshelves categorized according to the language used in the book

Books evenly distributed for both the English and Spanish shelves  
(Row 1: 3 books, row 2: 4 books & row 3: 3 books)

Topics covered in the books: immigration, disabilities, indigenous and Latinx communities



Created by Michelle

English

español

# THE NEXT STEP IN ANALYZING A BITMOJI CLASSROOM

## PHASE 2: MAKING SENSE OF TEXTUAL DATA THAT ACCOMPANIED THE BITMOJI CLASSROOM USING "NOTICE-MEANINGS-IMPLICATIONS" (SERAFINI, 2011)

A link to synopsis of each book in English and Spanish was also shared.

I created a Social Justice Themed Virtual Library! Thought I'd share if anyone would like to use it 😊

<https://docs.google.com/.../1RQhTT.../copy...>



Created by Michelle

English

español

The teacher created this bitmoji classroom that focuses on books with social justice themes, for sharing with educators who might have similar interest.

# THE OTHER IMPORTANT STEP IN ANALYZING A BITMOJI CLASSROOM

## PHASE 3: APPLYING THEORETICAL LENS GUIDED BY THE FIVE QUESTIONS THAT WE DEVELOPED (SEE THE QUESTIONS ON PAGE 13)

### Bilingual bitmoji classroom

Qs 1, 3 & 5: The collection of three posters on social justice  
[larger font and frame --> express significance of the topic]



Qs 1, 3 & 5: Instruction in English and Spanish  
[larger font and frame, color coded according to the language]

Qs 2 & 3: Calling for a separate conversation on race.  
Table lamp symbolizes the "spotlight" topic.  
[Using the background objects with intentional choice of book on race]

Qs 1 & 4: Books evenly distributed for both the English and Spanish shelves (Row 1: 3 books, row 2: 4 books & row 3: 3 books. [Two bookshelves are located in the middle of the room as the primary source for students under wall posters on social justice and a bilingual reading guide]

# PUTTING THE BITMOJI CLASSROOMS TOGETHER

## PHASE 4: COMPARE-CONTRAST S(H)ELFIES IN BIMOJI CLASSROOMS



BITMOJI CLASSROOM 1

ARRANGEMENT

English-Spanish books

Books that have a social justice theme  
Book covers facing viewers and placed upright on the shelves

The title, "Let's talk about Race" is singled out and placed on a side table, beside a lighted table lamp --> important conversation on race is required

POSITIONING

Bookshelves placed at the center

The other objects are on the right, left and top of the bookshelves

[1] Right - direction on how to navigate

[2] Left - A wall hanging that conveys the message of social justice for people of color in Minneapolis, USA

[3] Top - Wall hangings that convey the message of social justice in the Global South and beyond.

--> These objects introduce students/viewers to the overall theme of the bitmoji classroom.



BITMOJI CLASSROOM 2

English language books

Books that have a social justice theme

Some book covers facing viewers while others are slanted and placed upright on the shelves

Bookshelves placed at the center and right

The other objects are on the left and top of the bookshelves

[1] Left - Portraits representing Black Children

[2] Top - Portraits of African American who had died

--> These objects are elaborations to the text, "You Matters", placed on the right of the bookshelves.



BITMOJI CLASSROOM 3

English language books

Books that have a social justice theme

Book covers facing viewers and placed upright on the shelves

Two titles were placed on top of the middle shelf. [1] "The Day You Begin" - Even if you feel like outsiders, you have to go on. [2] "Don't Touch My Hair" - seeking permission before touching my hair. The text, "BLACK LIVES MATTER" placed at the center. ---> the experiences of Black people

Bookshelves placed at the center and right

The other objects are on the top of the bookshelves. The texts which function as labels provide students/viewers with an idea of how the books were categorized and placed on the shelves.

# PUTTING THE BITMOJI CLASSROOMS TOGETHER

## PHASE 5: COMPARE-CONTRAST S(H)ELFIES IN BIMOJI CLASSROOMS



BITMOJI CLASSROOM 1



BITMOJI CLASSROOM 2



BITMOJI CLASSROOM 3

### DIFFERENCES

Instructional text in two languages for readers to navigate

Portraits of real African Americans in black and white  
Pop culture representation of black people and character

Explicit display of the phrases that indicate the empowerment of Black people ("Black heroes", "Black Lives Matter", "I can do anything!") complement the s(h)elfies

### SIMILARITIES

Teachers' goals: to open discussions on social justice issues  
Interdependency: each s(h)elfie is a reference to other s(h)elfies  
S(h)elfie as an affinity space (Gee, 2013) wherein teachers and learners share opinions, expand knowledge, recontextualize learning and invite students to engage in social issues.

Colorful decorations  
Black figures

# OUR FINDINGS...



The reproducible feature in s(h)elfies encourages the creation, co-creation and sharing of teaching and learning resources virtually. This may not happen so easily among teachers, in a physical classroom with a class library.

I created a Social Justice Themed Virtual Library! Thought I'd share if anyone would like to use it 😊  
<https://docs.google.com/.../1RQhTT.../copy...>

\*\*Edit\*\* Please make a copy of the Google slide. You will be able to edit it there without changing our original copy or asking permission!\*\*

We borrowed the room decor from another teacher here! Thank you! Feel free to access the Diverse Children's Books Virtual Library here:  
<https://docs.google.com/.../1hE3DzfGXe3cJSS2M6NE6urk.../copy>  
Also check out <https://www.adifferentbooklist.com/>, an amazing multicultural bookstore in Toronto with even more choices and selection.

"S(H)ELFIES IN BITMOJI CLASSROOMS" IS NOT JUST A TREND BUT ALSO, A LITERACY PRACTICE!!!

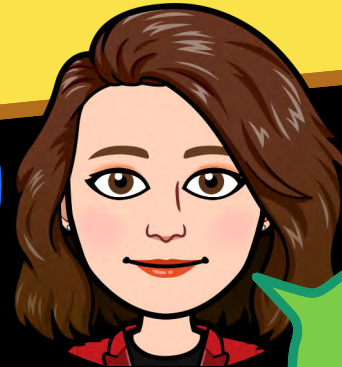
How s(h)elfies are positioned in relation to the other objects in the bitmoji classrooms contributed to meaning-making, which is essential for communicating particular messages to students/viewers

- Bitmoji classroom 1 - A side table with a book, "Let's Talk About Race" placed **upright** on it calls for a separate conversation on race. The table lamp **beside** it evokes the message that "race" is a spotlight topic.
- Bitmoji classroom 2 - The portraits in black and white represents African Americans who had died and the text, "You matter" **above** the bookshelves tells us that the books were displayed in response to the "Black Lives Matter" movement.
- Bitmoji classroom 3 - **On top** of the three-part bookshelves, there are labels that help us to identify how the books were categorized.



As a semiotic resource, s(h)elfies afforded new ways of promoting Children's literature virtually. Teachers need to be both digitally literate and critically engaged with current socio-political events to construct learning spaces that raise social issues of concern.

My bestie and teaching partner and I have been so sad about everything going on in the world that we wanted to do something to help. We know that it starts with our children. We worked together



Creating s(h)elfies is a form of literacy practice. Teachers identified appropriate books, organized the books on the shelves according to types of stories, language used and social justice topics (egs. racism, gender, diversity, oppression). They added additional objects such as portraits, light bulbs, a table lamp and computer-printed labels to convey the theme of the bitmoji classrooms.

"Space and literacy practices, and the organization and meaning of those literacy spaces, are socially constructed" (Mills, 2016, p.93).

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS...



- How are elementary age children experiencing learning using bitmoji classrooms in times of COVID-19?
- Which aspects of a virtual classroom appeal to children?
- What are the literacy practices that children acquire as they continue learning through bitmoji classrooms?

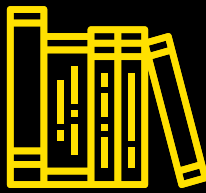


- What motivates teachers to create bitmoji classrooms?
- How do teachers decide on the designs and content of their bitmoji classrooms?
- How do the literacy practices of teachers who created bitmoji classrooms vary across subject areas?
- How do teachers, students and parents perceive bitmoji classrooms as a teaching and learning tool in times of COVID-19?





# REFERENCES

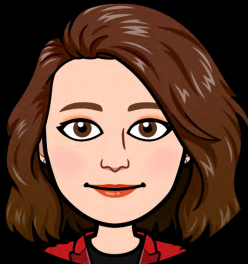


- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. American journal of theoretical and applied statistics, 5(1), 1-4.*
- Gee, J. P. (2013). The anti-education era: Creating smarter students through digital learning. Palgrave Mcmillan.*
- Kress, G. R., & Van, L. T. (2001). Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication. London: Arnold.*
- Mills, K. A. (2015). Literacy theories for the digital age. Multilingual Matters.*
- Mills, K. A., & Comber, B. (2015). Socio-spatial approaches to Literacy Studies: rethinking the social constitution and politics of space. In The Routledge handbook of literacy studies (pp. 111-123). Routledge.*
- Serafini F. (2011). Expanding Perspectives for Comprehending Visual Images in Multimodal Texts Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 54(5), pp. 342\_350. doi:10.1598/JA*

# DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR US?



*Suriati Abas, Ph.D.*  
State University of New York (SUNY)  
College at Oneonta  
[suriati.abas@oneonta.edu](mailto:suriati.abas@oneonta.edu)



*Giyeon Park, Ph.D.*  
Korea National Open University  
[gyeonpark@knou.ac.kr](mailto:gyeonpark@knou.ac.kr)



*Simon Pierre Munyaneza*  
Indiana University Bloomington  
[smunyane@iu.edu](mailto:smunyane@iu.edu)



*Jae-hyun Im*  
Indiana University Bloomington  
[imjaeh@iu.edu](mailto:imjaeh@iu.edu)

