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Community Food Literacies: An Introduction

Michael Pennell, Special Guest Editor

Because food sovereignty and food justice are some of the most important issues of our time, issues that tie to topics of ecological collapse, peak oil, racism, poverty, corporate capitalism, overpopulation, disease, and hunger, service-learning practitioners are well-positioned to help launch initiatives in colleges and universities across the country, in partnership with our local communities, to address community-centered food literacy(4).

Veronica House

This special issue of the *Community Literacy Journal*, focused on community food literacies, presents six responses to and extensions of Veronica House's call for service-learning practitioners and, more generally, literacy workers across communities and educational institutions. This journal provides an ideal venue within which to grapple with the overlapping and intertwined relationship between food and literacy, especially as it relates to communities. Both food and literacy find themselves in equally "revolutionary" stages of their development. While the literacy revolution may be found in discussions of a rise in social media, mobile communication devices, and ubiquitous network technologies, the food revolution is witnessed in a re-localization of food systems, including farmers markets, community-supported agriculture, and community gardens. Moreover, both "revolutionary" moments present challenges, concerns, and inequalities, captured in discussions of digital divides, cyber-security, labor, food deserts, hunger, and sustainability. The recent local food movements are tied to and reflective of local communities. In particular, these local communities represent the people, places, and literacies behind our food system. Furthermore, they occupy a key context for investigating and exploring the intertwining of food and community literacy. The growing overlaps and complicated relationships between food and literacy warrant a special issue devoted to these expanding relationships.

The following articles present a variety of perspectives on community food literacies, ranging from inside and outside educational institutions. All of the authors echo House's call for investigating and acting on community food literacies, as well as highlight her positioning of service-learning, rhetoric and composition instructors, and literacy workers in general, as key allies and advocates for such a focus on community food literacies. Ideally, this collection will strengthen and/or encourage fellow literacy workers to unpack and explore the complicated pairing of food and literacy in our communities, workplaces, and classrooms.

In literacy and food discussions, how we label and define practices and products is a key window into the evolving food movement. For example, discussions surround such questions as: What is "local"? What is the difference between organic and

natural? What does it mean for an animal to be “cage free”? Erin Trauth, in her article, “Nutritional Noise: Community Literacies and the Movement Against Foods Labeled as ‘Natural,’” explores the ubiquity of “natural” as a label for food and food production practices. She examines how the label is deployed in an expanding market of “natural foods,” along with a growing grassroots movement challenging the use of “natural.” Trauth supplements her discussion by presenting survey data capturing participants’ understandings of “natural” and natural foods.

Moving into the spaces within which we connect food and literacy education, Lucia Dura, Consuelo Salas, William Medina-Jerez, and Virginia Hill offer an overview of an interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, after-school literacy partnership on the U.S.-Mexico border. Their article, “*De aquí y de allá*: Changing Perceptions of Literacy through Food Pedagogy, Asset-Based Narratives, and Hybrid Spaces,” shares how the Escuelita Program uses food pedagogy to tap into funds of knowledge, bridging “home” and “school” literacies.

Similarly investigating the spaces within which community food literacies develop and impact our lives, Christina Santana, Stacey Kuznetsov, Sheri Schmeckpeper, Linda Curry, Elenore Long, Lauren Davis, Heidi Koerner, and Kimberly McQuarrie, show how “mindful persistence” is central to a team of scholars’ and community members’ exposure to and interest in fermentation-based food projects. As the article, “Mindful Persistence: Literacies for Taking up and Sustaining Fermented-Food Projects,” highlights, an interest in fermentation does not require or assume identical understandings of the science of fermentation or similar positions in the probiotic debate surrounding contemporary fermentation practices.

In continuing to explore our understanding of key concepts in the development of community food literacies, Marcy Galbreath examines oral histories and archival materials to see how agricultural literacy, arising in the scientific research of land-grant colleges, was transmitted to local farming communities. In particular, the article, titled “Sponsors of Agricultural Literacies: Intersections of Institutional and Local Knowledge in a Farming Community,” captures the role of extension services and 4-H programs in interfacing with local farming communities.

A focus on archival materials continues with Lisa Mastrangelo’s “Community Cookbooks: Sponsors of Literacy and Community Identity.” In her contribution, Mastrangelo investigates how communities are created by and reflected in the shared memories/traditions, geographical identifications, and representations of class within two cookbooks. With the proliferation of both community and celebrity cookbooks in our current food movement, we would be wise to follow Mastrangelo’s lead in unpacking such print and digital books.

Echoing and expanding the call forwarded by Veronica House, Stephanie Wade places our attention back on the role of the classroom and our pedagogies in analyzing and engaging with local food literacies. Her article, “Feed Your Mind: Cultivating Ecological Community Literacies with Permaculture,” asks writing and rhetoric teachers to push their use of ecological literacies by practicing permaculture, an ecological alternative to conventional agriculture. Her work shares ecological community literacy

projects created by students grounded in the concept of permaculture.

Finally, I draw your attention back to the cover image. This image of the cutting of bread, specifically, *Pane di Altamura*, was provided generously by Aimée Knight. From the individual to institutional level, we are all implicated in and exposed to the food and literacy “revolutions”; more importantly, how we respond to, invest in, and enact such revolutions in our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces will determine how such revolutions evolve for future communities. Intervening in community food literacies requires an understanding of process, not just product. The hands that cut the bread, as in the cover image, represent one moment in an extensive process, a process of food and literacy.

Works Cited

House, Veronica. “Re-Framing the Argument: Critical Service-Learning and Community-Centered Food Literacy.” *Community Literacy Journal* 8.2 (Spring 2014): 1-16.