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Licona and Stephen T. Russell

Article 1

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Front Matter

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We understand “community literacy” as the domain for literacy work that exists outside of mainstream educational and work institutions. It can be found in programs devoted to adult education, early childhood education, reading initiatives, lifelong learning, workplace literacy, or work with marginalized populations, but it can also be found in more informal, *ad hoc* projects.

For us, literacy is defined as the realm where attention is paid not just to content or to knowledge but to the symbolic means by which it is represented and used. Thus, literacy makes reference not just to letters and to text but to other multimodal and technological representations as well. We publish work that contributes to the field’s emerging methodologies and research agendas.

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Manuscripts should be submitted according to the standards of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA).

Shorter and longer pieces are acceptable (8–25 manuscript pages) depending on authors’ approaches. Case studies, reflective pieces, scholarly articles, etc., are all welcome.

To submit manuscripts, visit our site—communityliteracy.org—and register as an author. Send queries to Michael Moore: mmoore46@depaul.edu.

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Special Issue: Youth, Sexuality, Health, and Rights
Guest Edited by Adela C. Licona and Stephen T. Russell

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Transdisciplinary and Community Literacies: Shifting Discourses and Practices through New Paradigms of Public Scholarship and Action-Oriented Research

Adela C. Licona and Stephen T. Russell

In 2010, we received a nationally competitive grant from the Ford Foundation to undertake cross-disciplinary, community-engaged work to shift public conversations around youth sexuality, health, and rights (YSHR). We came to the projects from our positions as a humanities scholar (Licona) and as a social science scholar (Russell). According to the Ford Foundation, “a deeper understanding of human sexuality is an essential element of human rights and healthy social relationships.” Beginning with this assumption, we seek to be informed by and to inform policies and local practices; to initiate broad conversations that address sexual health and healthy sexualities for youth; and ultimately to develop innovative collaborations, programs, and research.

We proposed and were funded to: 1) engage in action-oriented research; 2) train cross-disciplinary sexuality scholars; and 3) produce strategic communications that would allow for our collaborative research to circulate meaningfully throughout academic and non-academic contexts. Community literacies are relevant to each of these goals, as they must necessarily inform participatory research and its circulation. By “community literacies” we mean not only the lived, relational, and situated knowledges that circulate in and across communities, but also the ways in which those knowledges are produced and communicated.

With our funding, we established the Crossroads Collaborative, a *think-and-do tank* that brings together University of Arizona faculty, postdoctoral research associates, graduate student scholars, youth-oriented community partners, and local youth to understand what and how young people learn about the dimensions and intersections of the full spectrum of their identities and what it all means for their sexualities, health, rights, and well-being. Our grant was one of six such grants in the US that year. Instead of taking already established research agendas to a community, grantees worked to develop their research agendas *with* communities to address topics deemed by the community to be locally relevant and connected to youth sexuality, health, and rights (YSHR). The projects that were funded, and are delineated in this special issue, hold the potential to critically and creatively address the possibilities and constraints that often exist simultaneously in community contexts. These local possibilities and constraints aid and/or prohibit youth access to sexuality and health knowledge, information, and resources that are basic human rights. The same possibilities and constraints are at play when youth attempt to express themselves about these issues and others regarding their sexual and gender identities. Articles here highlight the ways in which literacy practices produce and inform, as well as are produced and informed by, these very possibilities and constraints and the broad social issues, relations, policies, and practices from which they emerge.

Our own research at the Crossroads Collaborative began in a context of “legislated intolerance,”¹ which initiated and enforced restrictions on particular bodies,