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A Note from the Editors

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Note from the Editors

Michael Moore & John Warnock



It's not self evident to us that this is the ideal time to introduce a new print journal in the disciplines of English Studies, Rhetoric and Composition, Education, or Linguistics. Our initial correspondence with writers, teachers, researchers, other journal editors, and community workers over the past two years suggests, however, that there may be no better time. "Community" and "literacy" are both words that carry strong cultural capital in our discourses. Their meanings are, however, anything but clear and settled. Putting them together in the expression "community literacy" hardly clears things up. The definition we adopted in 1995, when we offered our first Practicum in Community Literacy in the graduate program in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English at the University of Arizona, is the one we have adopted for the mission statement of the *Community Literacy Journal*:

For purposes of the Forum, "community literacy" is understood as the domain for literacy work that exists outside of mainstream educational and work institutions. It can be found in institutionalized programs devoted to adult education or lifelong learning or work with marginalized populations, but it can also be found in more informal, *ad hoc* projects.

And what about the term "literacy," a term that is used, we estimate, about a hundred times for every time it is defined, even though many possible definitions of the term are incompatible? Among the strategies for coping with this situation, we did not like the one that lets the term mean almost anything—a synonym for "knowledge" or "know-how." "Literacy," we felt, refers to a special kind of knowledge or know-how: the kind that has to do with an awareness that we are acting through language. We expressed this sense in the final paragraph of the mission statement:

For us, literacy is defined as the realm where attention is paid not just to content or 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.

As the last sentence here makes clear, we wished also to embrace in the journal discussion of “symbolic means” that were not limited to letters but included the other media and modes of representation that are becoming daily more significant in our lives, enabled—for those who have access—by developments in digital technologies. The electronic forum communityliteracy.org that is associated with the *Community Literacy Journal* is one result of that wish.

Anyone who has worked with employees, clients, volunteers, coordinators, and staff in community literacy or adult education will know that they often do not see their interests as entirely aligned with those of people in universities. The “semester” does not organize their lives, for example. On the other hand, workers in community literacy programs know that the universities are positioned to offer benefits that can transcend simply a new supply of volunteers. People in universities can benefit from an association with community literacy work on several levels, as witnessed and affirmed in our inaugural articles.

Finally, the ethical dimension: work in community literacy seems to us often to be informed by a powerful sense that a great many people in our country are not being served by mainstream educational institutions. This is not to find fault with those institutions, which in our experience are usually doing a much better job than they are given credit for. It is simply to notice that those institutions are structured in a way that does not normally address the educational needs of a great many citizens. Class and race are obviously factors, though surely not the only ones. People from privileged situations, like the universities, may have something to offer to address this situation, but it is likely that the communities themselves may have the most to offer.

We want the *Community Literacy Journal* and Forum to provide a megaphone for workers in this field, a place where support can be sought and found, and a place where academic collaborations and increased attention and sensitivity to research methodologies will abound.

For this, our first issue, we are grateful for excellent articles, editorial support, and material contributions. This issue’s authors—Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, Linda Flower, Andrew Cline, Christopher Schroeder, and David Coogan—have been uncommonly gracious and patient as their manuscripts have moved through various stages of blind peer review, revisions, and editing. Graduate students at the University of Arizona—Holly Ryan and Anna Varley—and at Michigan Technological University—Alexa Ducsay, Heather Jordan, Roxane Gay, Ethan Jordan, Joanna Schreiber, Jim Nugent and Sarah Truax—have stepped up to solve both anticipated and unanticipated challenges. A special acknowledgement of support goes to Robert Johnson, Chair of the Department of Humanities at Michigan Tech, who has unfailingly provided the material and office space needed to get a new journal off the ground.

You can participate in the field’s and this journal’s future by submitting your articles, reviews, case studies, and work done in collaboration with community partners. Please see Page 4 for editorial specifications. And thanks for reading.

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