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Guest Editors' Introduction

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Guest Editors' Introduction

*Gabrielle Isabel Kelenyi, Chad Seader,
Alison Turner, Ada Vilageliu-Diaz*

For this special issue of *Community Literacy Journal*, we invited submissions from practitioners who are applying methods and practices as a means for “imagining a world that doesn’t exist” (Ozy Aloziem). The call for papers developed from a discussion initially shaped by Coalition for Community Writing Emerging Scholars, who were inspired by the 2023 Conference on Community Writing’s theme: radical imagination. Conversations over several months highlighted this special issue as an opportunity to intentionally feature new voices and BIPOC perspectives. As guest editors for this special issue, we are proud to publish research that reflects ideas, values, and possibilities that deepen these foundational discussions.

As emerging editors navigating the business of academic publishing, we’re familiar with the rhetorical and systematic frictions shaping our work in community writing. It often seems as if the values and practices needed to support truly transformative antiracist, decolonial, anticapitalist community potentials are at odds with the conditions of our employment and the necessities to simply get by in the US. For us, this tension between the possibilities we strive to manifest and currents of the neoliberal university is a source of both frustration and creative resilience. While working with the authors featured in this issue, we felt a sense of comradery seeing them wrestle with the same questions and challenges that we face in our own practices. As drafts circulated back and forth between editors and authors, we offered each other fresh perspectives that inspired new ideas and strategies to strengthen our respective communities. The issue reflects the knowledge-sharing and mutual support that lies at the heart of our work to continuously reimagine what community writing and literacy can do despite institutional and structural limitations.

First, in two peer-reviewed articles, authors focus on how culturally specific rhetorics operate to heal and (dis)empower communities, respectively. In **“African Americans in Ghana: Enacting Literate Acts of Healing from Epistemic and Ontological Harm,”** Mohammed Sakip Iddrisu explores the ritual of African Americans visiting the Ancestral Slave River Park in the Central Region of Ghana. Iddrisu frames this site as a “space where African Americans and other Africans in the diaspora symbolically inscribe their names as evidence of their return to their ancestral homeland,” a “gesture” that he argues is “in defiance of colonial structures.” Traveling to this site, Iddrisu asserts, is a “radical literate social act” that heals ontological harm, manifesting in literacy practices ranging from embodied rituals of bathing, writing on the Memorial Wall of Return, dress, and naming.

While Iddrisu’s piece highlights the textual and non-textual literacies of African Americans in Ghana, Guadalupe Remigio Ortega radically reimagines literacy and non-literacy in **“Saliedo del Pueblo: Literacy and Non-Literacy Practices in**

a Mixtec Farmworking Community.” By highlighting her parents’ deliberate choices to prioritize orality, human connection, stories, spirituality, and connection to land to communicate both within and without their Mixtec farmworking communities, Remigio Ortega aims to transform “non-literacy into a positive, intentional, and proud choice, an act of self-preservation and resistance” for Latinx Indigenous folk. Her parents’ stories demonstrate how literacy and non-literacy interact, bringing questions about who and how literacy empowers and disempowers to the fore.

Then, rooted in her own experience as a first-year professor at a private, predominantly-white university, Teigha VanHester’s piece **“Finding the Lorde in Me”** draws upon Audre Lorde’s work on eros and anger to expand Aja Martinez’s concept of counterstory and develop strategies BIPOC scholars might use to navigate institutional violence. VanHester’s concept of *Lordean counterstory* deviates from Martinez’s model via its focus on embodiment. By honing in on our emotions and understanding how those emotions relate to the systems we’re positioned within, VanHester claims that Lordean counterstory has potential to build community and fight against the forces of neoliberalism by opening new possibilities.

Finally, Erin Green’s **“Radically Imagining Community Programs: Reflection, Collaboration, and Organizer Toolkits”** addresses the challenges of developing community writing projects through a discussion of their own public-facing syllabus project and organizer toolkits for social justice. Green’s piece argues for the importance of flexibility and adaptability when designing and implementing community writing projects despite scholars’ “ambitious” goals because “community literacy work is challenging and often comes with unforeseen disruptions.” This Issues piece serves as a useful reminder for community writing practitioners that we should move beyond the idea of reciprocity and focus instead on “more emergent strategies for enacting radical change.”

Taken together, these pieces show that imagining a better future isn’t enough; rather, radical imagination requires that we engage one another, experiment, and play outside predetermined structures as a means of guiding structural change and embodying new ways of being in the world. In the words of Michael Lone Wolf Orrell, the creator of this issue’s cover art, these new ways of being require “sharp edges” to arrive at “colorful beauty.”

We are pleased to also include two book reviews, edited by Jessica Shumake, and the fourth publication of “Coda: Community Writing and Creative Work,” edited by Kefaya Diab, Chad Seader, Alison Turner, and Stephanie Wade.