

Editors' Introduction To Issue 10.2

This issue centers the stories of people who (re)define what meaningful literacy practices are from such positions as an aging mother, women refugees, a returning student, and formerly incarcerated people. These articles explore how literacy practices shift and change over the life course and across contexts in ways that ask us to reorient our own understanding of the relationship between literate subjects and the knowledge they produce.

In this issue's lead article, "Bouncing Back: Resilience and Its Limits in Late-Age Composing," Louise Wetherbee Phelps undertakes the study and analysis of an unpublished body of lifespan writing by her late mother, Virginia Wetherbee, as part of her own contribution to retrospective lifespan studies and "literacy lives in relation" (2). Phelps begins by asking how to undertake the daunting task of a project that has challenged her in multiple ways: "challenges of method...of genre...of grief, responsibility, and learning under the condition and unpredictable trajectory of [her] own aging" (ibid). One of the sayings Phelps inherited from Wetherbee, "proceed as way opens," provides a framework for a series of articles in which Phelps considers the intersections of longitudinal and lifespan studies, late-age literacies, cross-generational literacies, slow composing, and ecosystemic and chronotopic approaches to literacy. In this article, Phelps charts the relationship between her own composing project on parenting and her aging literacy in figures that visualize a pattern of moments of disruption and resilience that Phelps terms "bouncing back." Ultimately, Phelps reminds us that our understanding of the intersections of literacy and aging are, to quote an embroidered saying that Wetherbee passed on to her and that hangs by her desk, "It's not as simple as you think."

Katie Silvester examines how women refugees living in "protracted displacement" (39), or "decades-long displacement and massive refugee resettlement process" (ibid), use dialogue, narrative, and re-story to offer perspectives on literacy learning across their lifespans. In "At the 'Ends of Kinship': Women Re(kin)figuring Literacy Practices in Protracted Displacement," Silvester draws from an ethnographic study of women's literacy learning experiences in the Bhutanese refugees resettlement process and considers the relationality they take up as they negotiate various people, places, and contexts. Specifically, she elaborates on "the ends of kinship" (40), which she defines as "a dialogic space of negotiating relational ties that have become stretched and transformed by local-global forces" (ibid). This dialogic space allows women to "*kin*-script and (*kin*)figure their own ideas about and practices of literacy in relation to kin and friends as these relational ties stretch, contract, and become transformed throughout a protracted displacement and ongoing resettlement process" (42). In the process of kinship, friendship, and woman-centered community, these women were able to redefine their literate subjectivities, relationships, and practices through grounded, embodied, and imaginal means. Silverster argues for a dynamic methodological and theoretical approach to better understand adult literacy learning in migration through "the tensions and contradictions of everyday living in relation to others over time" (46).

Maggie Shelledy's "Precarious Citizenship: Ambivalence, Literacy, and Prisoner Reentry" uses case studies to explore "the literacy myths that surround higher education in prison" by foregrounding formerly incarcerated people's experiences with and the effects of their participation

in higher education in prison (HEP) programs (61). Of particular interest to Shelledy are embedded assumptions about academic literacy as a doorway to citizenship and the ways three formerly incarcerated students disrupt those assumptions. These students offer a range of perspectives about their HEP experiences within the contexts of reentry, or the transition out of incarceration. Topics include the damage that hopeful rhetoric about HEP can produce when these students go through reentry, the loss of meaningful community that can be build in incarcerated settings, the challenges of transitioning from HEP to college campuses, and the felt sense of the limits of being able to reintegrate into “mainstream society.” Shelledy invites scholars to reconsider how we think about the meaning and significance of literacy in light of these student perspectives while resisting simple solutions. She asks us to “listen and hold space for the material and social realities of our students’ likely futures, which may look very different from our own, as well as their dogged, insistent hope, and create learning environments aimed at cultivating belonging rather than assimilation” (73).

The final essay of this issue, Alison Turner’s “Citing Oral Histories in Literacy Studies,” shares the educational journey of Jazz, a Black, returning student in Minnesota who shared her oral history with the St. Catherine University (SCU) Voices of Homelessness Oral History Project. Jazz’s literacy journey is a complex and compelling one, and that complexity is best captured through Jazz’s own words in the oral history she provided. Given this complexity, Turner argues persuasively that despite many oral history projects/archives, literacy studies has failed to center oral histories as primary sources within written research. Turner provides snapshots of the low frequency of oral history citations in literacy research, explores the reasons and results of such over-reliance on written sources, and ultimately contends that if we fail to cite existing oral sources in our research we limit both our methodological integrity and the range of rich insights into literacy that oral narratives offer. Ultimately, Turner provides not only a methodological reality check for the field of literacy studies, but a significant and deeply “heard” case study of literacy development. We are certain that readers will find this piece – and her argument that “more intentional use of oral histories as primary resources could enrich ongoing efforts of inclusion among literacy journals” – powerful (79).

We conclude this issue with Joshua Barnes’ review of Erec Smith’s book *A Critique of Anti-racism in Rhetoric and Composition: A Semblance of Empowerment*. Barnes focuses on Smith’s argument that “anti-racist pedagogy in rhetoric and composition often inadvertently disempowers students by ignoring important aspects of empowerment theory” (100). Barnes, a former student of Smith himself and a practicing teacher of rhetoric and composition, notes a challenge he perceives Smith to be offering the field: to sit with the discomfort of recognizing that some theories and pedagogies may, despite themselves, have disempowering effects for our students.

We hope readers find these contributions as provocative as we did, and we encourage readers to submit essays to our symposium section that take up or respond to any of the conversational threads raised here.

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