

## Special Editors' Introduction to Issue 3.3

The movement of people and information across national borders is rapid and widespread. By some estimates, over 230 million people worldwide are currently living outside the countries of their birth, keeping in contact with homelands, forging new migratory networks, and navigating new circumstances through writing (UN 2013). Literacy research in composition studies has begun to respond to this context through increased attention to the global, the international, and the transnational. This special issue seeks to forward this emerging area of interest, asking how writing motivates, influences, or restricts the travels of people: What does the transnational movement of people mean for literacy? And what does literacy mean for the transnational movement of people?

Often defined as a set of skills and resources, literacy has figured prominently in debates about immigrants' national integration. Some have called for migrants' swift assimilation through literacy, others have pointed to the value of migrants' diverse literacy legacies, and still others have examined how their literacies change in new national contexts.

But if we think of literacy more materially, as skills and resources made possible by the technology of *writing*, it becomes clear that literacy plays a role in more than migrants' incorporation within nations. It also shapes their movement among them. Writing can facilitate transnational communication and network migration via the postal system and Internet. And writing is a key tool in migration policy, as nation states use immigration documents, such as visas and passports, to allow some migrants in and to keep others out. Writing does not, of course, act autonomously in transnational realms. People leverage their writing and educational credentials to move across national borders, and they use writing to negotiate the emotional and cultural complexity of such movement. In this way, writing becomes a resource for understanding literacy's imbrication in larger political trends as well as a resource for everyday people who are swept up in mass global movement. Writing, in other words, shapes and is shaped by transnational lived experiences and the infrastructures that govern transnational mobility. The central question this special issue answers is how.

This issue does so via careful qualitative studies of diverse contexts: Filipina labor migration, a bilingual after-school program serving Mexican-origin youth, online and digital spaces employed by Arab migrant families, a college-affiliated Intensive English Program, South Korean college student spaces, and government-sponsored filmic literacy programs in the Americas. We believe these studies—set in schools, communities, and families at key moments in literacy history—offer some principles of transnational inquiry for literacy studies in composition. Here we lay out an analytic to help guide understandings of everyday transnational literacies.

### DEFINING OUR TERMS

This issue uses *transnational* to indicate systems of social relations that move literacy across borders. We understand transnational to be an optic or analytic that traces how individuals build social fields across real or perceived borders to accommodate and resist difficult circumstances (Glick

Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton) with sustained activities over time and across space (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt). The transnational does not analyze spaces “out there” beyond borders but examines how cross-border connections—kinwork, affective ties, or long-distance nationalism—occur among spaces, inclusive of the US.

And transnational is not a synonym for international or global, in that the term captures the effects or consequences of global change and people’s incorporation of these effects and consequences into their daily lives. For example, changes in the global economy have created a transnational existence—“the feeling that one might or must always be moving”—for many (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 9), and the fluidity of modern global migration (as opposed to previous forced migrations like the slave trade) creates for migrants more restrictions or bureaucratic burdens like visa restrictions and increasing smuggler fees. In other words, this optic examines why boundaries and borders exist at certain historical moments for some but not for others (Levitt and Khagram), emphasizing the relations among mobile and immobile people, scales, activity, arguments, and ideologies.

This issue uses *movement* to draw attention to how writing is imbricated in labor migration, forced or chosen movements of refugees, back and forth travel of international students, and cross-border connections put into motion by family and community members. While much contemporary movement is a continuation of centuries-old trade, religious, colonial, military, and industrial activity, the “massification” of movement after the early nineteenth century is of a different intensity and quality: changing transportation and communication technology enables frequent and close contact; homelands more closely manage their migrants’ remittances and citizenry by encouraging, for example, dual citizenship; and some contemporary migrants, compared to previous historical migrations, tend to be more highly skilled and better financed (Foner; Moya and McKeown). Thus, though transnational movement is an ordinary rather than exceptional human experience, movement is a vibrant conceptual framework, shedding light on connections or processes previously overlooked.

In particular, *movement* sheds light on how everyday writers (students, workers, government officials, bureaucrats, community stakeholders, family members, and others) and everyday writing (school essays, government publications, course curricula, digital communication, letters, among other kinds of writing) move, and how such movement matters.

## PRINCIPLES OF TRANSNATIONAL INQUIRY FOR LITERACY STUDIES IN COMPOSITION

### 1. *The transnational is a way of looking at literacy.*

This special issue asks readers to approach transnational inquiry not in terms of data collection but in terms of data analysis. That is, we argue that to do transnational work, what matters most is not what researchers look at but *how they look*.

First, the authors in this volume often view the *US itself a transnational space*: For example, even predominantly white institutions in the Midwest, such as the university in Kang’s study,

reveal the consequences of transnational movement for literacy. Kang describes Korean university students negotiating the education-driven migration of their pasts and their geographical, racial, and institutional positions in their present moment. Through what Kang terms “localization,” students reconnect with Korean literacy at the same time as they face the demands of dominant academic monolingualism. In other words, the legacy of transnational movement animates US spaces, with consequences for literate production.

Researchers in this issue also call attention to how *educational institutions* can be viewed transnationally. Rounsaville’s work on Intensive English Language Programs (IEPs), (what she terms “stopovers within the transnational landscape of higher education”) reveals how linguistic trends can drive the internationalization of higher education more broadly. By analyzing institutions transnationally, Rounsaville charts how international students’ valuing of English literacy is as contingent as their temporary placement in a “stopover” institution, which may or may not lead to further formal education, in the US or elsewhere. Educational institutions, that is, mediate governments, economies, and people making their way in the world. In their role amidst these complex global players, education institutions demand transnational analysis.

Finally, the articles in this issue suggest that the transnational is a way of looking at movement *across space, time, and communities*. Lagman, for example, engages in a unique multi-sited ethnography (Marcus) that tracks Filipina labor migrants both in the Philippines and the US. Her insights show how their state-sponsored literacy training prepares (or fails to prepare) them for the formal and informal demands of their occupations, ultimately serving as a site of contestation between migrant, state, and foreign employee. Likewise, through a careful analysis of archival materials, Olson and Reddy track the movement of literacy materials across space, time, and political regimes, as cartoons sponsored by the US government about the importance of literacy are broadcast into the neo-colonial context of Latin America, reinscribing ideologies of literacy that reinforce hemispheric hierarchies. A transnational way of seeing also hones in on people’s use of writing to navigate changing contexts. That is, literacy’s imbrication in movement, a transnational analytic reveals, does not end when one arrives at a destination and learns a dominant language. In the extracurricular spaces of families (Al-Salmi and Smith) and after-school programs (Alvarez), for example, language and literacy reverberate out into communities, who are continuing to use writing to bridge the here and the there.

In sum, to study transnational subjects or a non-US site does not necessarily make a study *transnational*. Instead, the transnational inheres in an analysis of movement and of traces of that movement that animate even local sites of everyday literate practice.

### 2. *Transnational inquiry connects micro- and macro-level social practices.*

Transnational inquiry in research on literacy in composition studies also accounts for the interaction of macro- and micro-level social practices. Literacy research that includes these scales highlights the relationality of migration-specific writing activity and globalized cultures, pressures, or ideological shifts. Historians Jose Moya and Adam McKeown, for example, say the interaction of “macrostructural trends and microsocial ... networks,” rather than “the actions of institutions at the

national and colonial levels” alone, created mass migration after the eighteenth century (31). Such a focus on micro/macro connections—which can occur not just in bottom/top spheres but across various scales—can reveal the “constant tension” in the dialectic between immigrant and emigrant movement and between border breakdown and subsequent reification (Waldinger 37). In fact, for many scholars, the relationship of grassroots activity to macro-level processes is constitutive of the term transnational. Capturing the interaction of multiple scales in research requires the methods elaborated above, including approaches that follow the flows and stoppages of movement beyond national, cultural, or language boundaries. It also requires a general stance toward transnational research as the analysis of links between the observed social phenomena and the always-shifting conceptual frameworks of transnationalism.

In this special issue, all of the articles account for the interaction of micro- and macro-level social practices in literacy, but several especially trace practices across scales and spaces. For example, Kang examines how layers of local and global contexts cohere in practices of “localization.” She interviews and observes students, administrators, staff, and faculty in and out of classrooms and analyzes on- and offline institutional documents to account for global forces pressing in on college campuses in the US during a specific historical stage. As she says, she draws out “the salient historical, national, institutional, and ideological contextual layers that flow through local and global boundaries and co-exist specifically for a particular group of students at a particular locality at a particular time in history.” Her insistence on particularity shows the role micro-level practices play in the making of the local even as they are informed by institutionally common global macro-level forces.

Further, Lagman’s article shows how these forces meet up in affective relationships between migrant workers and the state. By examining female migrant workers’ experiences of government-sponsored literacy training initiatives, Lagman shows how “the pressures of global capital, experienced in state-managed transnational labor migration from the Philippines, create a context for literacy learning and practice where emotion, cognition, and embodiment work together in the everyday survival of precarious migrant life.” In this way, the context for literacy is always in-the-making. Lagman traces the movement of literacy not among bounded spatial or chronological contexts, but among a “continuous series of affective attachments and detachments” between the citizen negotiating everyday literacy demands and the state endorsing certain literacy ideologies.

Olson and Reddy’s article on “Literacy, Filmic Pedagogies, and the Hemispheric Projection of US Influence” connects literacy across scales even in the title. As the authors trace literacy pedagogies in films produced by Disney and a US government office across classrooms and offices in the US, Ecuador, and Brazil, and among office documents and Latin American news articles on the project, they find that literacy films “carried the assumption of US expertise in modern life outward to the ‘other American republics.’” Their analysis stands at the intersection of hemispheric, historical, and daily literacy contexts as the “particulars of literacy and pedagogy were subsumed to ideologically inflected matters of modernity, development, and efficiency” exported from the US via Disney in films still circulated and viewed today.

### *3. Transnational literacy transforms the curriculum and extracurriculum.*

Understanding where literacy and its instruction takes place has been one of the enduring

questions in the study and theorization of literacy. While much scholarly attention in recent years has focused on what Anne Ruggles Gere has called the “extracurriculum of composition,” those sites beyond formal educational institutions and systems of schooling, we have also seen a broadening of how literacy is taken up and applied in Deborah Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsors, who are “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19).

In the work included here we see discussions about the complex movement across, between, and within locations where literacy instruction, formal and informal, takes place and is sponsored by a variety of agents. For example, in his examination of the Mexican American Network of Students (MANOS) Alvarez unpacks a complex brokering of relationships between schools and families in this space beyond school where students receive structured mentorship and tutoring to complement their formal literacy in school. Similarly, Rounsaville analyzes how spaces on the periphery of higher education institutions mediate student access to literacy by arguing that IEPs are a multilingual space that can help to shift forms of literacy discourses and move students toward a more complex understanding and use of the literacy resources they bring to their academic writing.

Kang suggests that *localization* provides an extracurricular [or co-curricular] space for identity construction. Here we see an interesting concentric relationship where the Korean Student Association exists not simply in relation to or on the periphery of the campus but in fact coincides with the university in creating the students’ sense of belonging and acting. The focus on the development of digital biliteracy in immigrant mothers by Al-Salmi and Smith shifts our attention from formal or semi-formal institutional locations of literacy instruction to the activity that occurs at home when mothers and their children utilize digital and online technologies to facilitate communication with family and friends in their home countries. We see not only transnational movement but also intergenerational movement as literacy facilitates relationships between parents and children and between grandchildren and grandparents and maintains connections to home cultures. Transnational literacy in these cases exists within and beyond formal schooling and yet moves in ways that expose a more complex web of relationships beyond formal and informal, curricular and extracurricular.

#### 4. *Transnational inquiry moves beyond but still considers language.*

While the study of transnational literacy should not be conflated with nor limited to the study of multilingualism, considering language adds crucial dimension to an analysis of transnational writing activity that is rarely standard. Languages also are strong markers of identity for writers, so including language in analysis can reveal how writers make sense of their own practices or how they position themselves across multiple cultural, linguistic, and political contexts.

For example, both Rounsaville and Kang’s articles on college-level contexts show writers establishing cultural ground from which to write through their language choices. Kang’s participants use Korean on banners and posters and in email communication for cultural affiliation. But this language is treated as unsanctioned on campus and troubles the students’ attempts to create a home away from home in the US. Instructor and staff assumptions about the effect of Korean on students’ writing also shifts how South Korean international students experience college—they receive

clear messages in feedback and grades about how judgments of their English and Korean literacies are judgments of their character. In Rounsaville's piece, students' full language repertoires are all but ignored by their institution. But in her analysis, Rounsaville shows that students' multiple Englishes point back to a landscape of global politics taking root in the immediate literacy context of the IEP. This representation of writers' full, if uneven, language repertoires is the crux of Rounsaville's argument; she shows how the institution privileges certain global Englishes and acts as a mediator of a broader transnational political economy.

In Alvarez's article on a community after-school program, language is central to how participants perceive their life aspirations in New York City. Alvarez narrates the young writers taking "bilingual liberties" based on their awareness of audience, showing their proficiency in using language for rhetorical positioning. Language use is vital throughout the piece as an avenue for understanding social class inequality, interpretation of meritocracy in the US, and constructing *superación* narratives as self-reflexive projects. Alvarez claims that, against the pressure for monolingual English in school, bilingual literacy practices facilitate crucial intergenerational dialogue about life in the US, and argues that considering the "linguistic power in local communities" can open up literacy researchers to richer qualitative detail in their studies of transnational communities.

In composition studies, we are committed to examining the role of writing in lives, histories, and classrooms. How, then, is writing implicated in transnational movement? Taken together, the articles in this issue provide three answers: First, writing imparts ideologies across national borders (Olson and Reddy). Second, writing moves among languages and social worlds (Alvarez; Al-Salmi and Smith; Rounsaville). Finally, writing mediates state policies, standardized curricula, and neoliberal exigencies (Kang; Lagman; Rounsaville). As a result, writing indexes and participates in the larger trends that perpetuate the global movement of money and people. Writing, an economically entrenched form of communication (Brandt, 2001, 2015), produces, transforms, moves. It is these capacities that link it, in ways that have yet to be fully explored, to the transnational movement that characterizes our historical moment.

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