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July 18–20, 2013
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Keynote Speakers

- **Gerald Campano**
  - Thursday

- **Chris Soentpiet**
  - Author
  - Friday

- **Lester Laminack**
  - Saturday

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Information: debra.goodman@hofstra.edu

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Neoliberal education policies, global communication technologies, and the increasing numbers of profit-seeking equity funds buying educational companies and materials are among the most powerful factors shaping our current educational landscape. These and other macroscaled forces of normativity are influencing both what we believe we need to know, and how we come to know it. Almost a century ago, John Dewey urged people to consider the possibility of the “community school” as a hub for activities and practices that would support intellectual, social, and emotional growth, powerfully connecting schools with the communities in which they are situated. Social media and the blooming of digitized resources have expanded our understanding of community beyond anything Dewey might have imagined. Today there is a renewed urgency to build school environments that draw on and are bound together by a sense of community, which we will define as a group of people who share values, commitments, and interests within and across places—both brick-and-mortar neighborhoods and virtual contexts.

The large number of articles we received for this issue suggests a growing effort to lower the walls between classroom and non-classroom environments, and to make room for the varied kinds of tools, places, and collaborations currently taken up for teaching and learning reading and writing. In our call for manuscripts, we asked: How have teachers, coaches, administrators, teaching artists, university faculty, parents, and children leveraged school-based literacy learning? What have we learned about literacy learning and development from educational interactions across communities?

As we reviewed manuscripts, we were struck by two tendencies in the scholarship. First was a phenomenological bent: seeking to comprehend how community literacies are understood and enacted in teacher education and professional development settings, researchers have been exploring the ideas and language of teachers and scholars. A second tendency was for researchers to cross boundaries, to go outside of schools and into communities in order to listen and see how communities are built and sustained through language and literacy practices. We think understanding the complexity of community literacies—not just as out-of-school practices but as a domain of study in its own right—means considering both directions. Thus, we have included examples of both kinds of scholarship in this issue.

Gerald Campano, María Paula Ghiso, Mary Yee, and Alicia Pantoja’s article “Toward Community Research and Coalitional Literacy Practices for Educational Justice” pries open space for us to think about how we might foster more meaningful communities in schools if we better understand the kinds of literacy practices that bring people together as they organize for educational justice. They provide a powerful and telling case where members of the Concerned Black Catholics Parish gather around an Indonesian mom “to give her advice” on how to work the system better—get rides, obtain tutoring. The authors show—as does de la Piedra—the power of community-based ways with words—including centering the talking, thinking, mutual counseling, and counsel itself upon...
ways of “getting things done for yourself and your children” that have heretofore been understood as marginal but are actually quite central to the experience of “getting” an education for so many people. The authors remind us that community building must be the basis for school reform efforts that seek to improve teaching and learning. Likewise, they demonstrate both the possibilities for community-based research to bear witness and the transformative potential of collaborative literacy practices to advocate for more inclusive educational practices.

Kaillonie Dunsmore, Rosario Ordoñez-Jasis, and George Herrera, in “Welcoming Their Worlds: Rethinking Literacy Instruction through Community Mapping,” describe how heterogeneous members of a community of practice inquire into family and community literacies through the tools of “community mapping.” This article reminds us that what people “know” about their community (or about reading and writing specifically) might not reflect what outside researchers can learn about a particular community. Conversely, what can be learned might not be reflected in the insider perspectives of community members. Census, demographic, and observational data—about housing, income, migration patterns, education levels, and so forth—might tell stories that differ from what members of the community believe or know as true. The authors discuss the kinds of literacy learning made possible when community mapping is recruited into educational practice and curriculum development. Like others in this issue, this article illustrates that thinking about community literacies is a way of flattening out the traditional divide between the fixed ways of using language at home and in school, often with one perceived as “higher” than another. They remind us of the importance of being transparent about what kind of access is gained through the knowing of this or that way with words.

María Teresa de la Piedra’s article “Consejo as a Literacy Event: A Case Study of a Border Mexican Woman” illustrates the highly situated literacy practices of a transnational Latina giving advice in her shop and the implications of these community literacy practices for the language arts classroom. She funnels ideas, readings, beliefs, and experiences into the consejo she distributes. In suggesting important ways we might view literacies embedded within community, de la Piedra prompts us to think about the kinds of knowings that can be brought into play in order to create a multiply resourced teaching-and-learning space that values students’ funds of knowledge. This ethnographic article inspires us by showcasing how getting into the community can trigger a different understanding of context, place, and literacy practices.

In “iPads as Placed Resources: Forging Community in Online and Offline Spaces,” Jennifer Rowsell, Mary Gene Saudelli, Ruth Mcquirt-Scott, and Andrea Bishop demonstrate how technoliteracies can open up new communities of practices among children, teachers, and researchers as they practice word study. Importantly, the authors frame digital and new literacies as placed resources. They illustrate how the experience of the materiality of digital interactions differs from the materiality of the pencil and pen and crayon experiences that formerly happened before and outside of school—in the sense that students really do usually know more and feel more “at home” with these objects than teachers. The products are new, and, almost by definition, are ever and always made newer as consumer commodities develop in a market economy. The teachers show how using the tablet in the classroom lowers the walls between classroom and non-classroom environments, and in that sense makes room for community, including the marketplace. Likewise, teachers discussed in this piece created new digitally mediated communities of practice for themselves by sharing their learning and reflections in a blog.

Barbara Comber’s “Schools as Meeting Places: Critical and Inclusive Literacies in Changing Local Environments” shares the story of a school community grappling with the process of urban renewal. She explores ideas around place theory in relation to the kinds of community literacy/ies available to educators, students, and families when the materiality and spatial qualities of a more porously conceived sense of school are introduced in a particular context. There is important identity-shaping work going on here as members of a school community
shift from being the object-site of renewal to being self-reporting, agentive subjects describing renewal from the inside. This article is a powerful example of the potential of place-based pedagogy that does not ignore the limitations of the local.

While the articles in this issue powerfully focus on how literacy practices—broadly construed—can help build community, they do not discuss how teachers might accommodate practices that are not shared or what happens when their goals are thwarted. What happens when people hold different values and beliefs about community or literacy? What kinds of literacy practices are best suited for building certain kinds of communities? In what ways do teachers create a legitimate space for community literacy practices in their language arts curriculum, especially during an era of Common Core State Standards? Acknowledging some of these questions is a first step toward recreating schools in which students, teachers, and administrators engage in meaningful and communal relationships.

The Professional Book Reviews department offers a column written by Toni Williams, Diane DeFord, Amy Donnelly, Susi Long, Julia López-Robertson, Mary Styslinger, and Nicole Walker called “Understanding Community Literacies as Foundational to Teaching Excellence.” They chose books that “focus on the expertise in communities too often marginalized from the curricular picture, helping us recognize why and how we must engage in educational efforts that liberate and educate rather than alienate and, as a result, oppress opportunities for students to succeed” (p. 372).


The Children’s Literature department provides detailed reviews of favorite children’s book apps by Jonda C. McNair, Alan R. Bailey, Deanna Day, and Karla J. Möller. They demonstrate how the most successful picturebook apps will support children to truly appreciate a piece of literature and its artwork.

In Conversation Currents, JoBeth Allen and Valerie Kinloch encourage us to rethink the depth of our relationships across home, school, and community contexts. Their conversation addresses thought-provoking issues, including: How do we sustain relationships across space and time? How do we learn from community literacy practices in ways that don’t co-opt or oversimplify those practices? What are the possibilities for literacy achievement and community engagements when teachers allow themselves to be truly inspired by their students’ community literacy practices?

The scholars in this issue demonstrate the curricular innovations that are possible in the places where both community and literacies are more broadly conceived. Likewise, they remind us how much can be learned by turning our gaze to naturally occurring community literacy practices. In turn, such practices can help us all develop as co-creators of the educational places where, to borrow a concept from Gunther Kress, everyone is participating in the design of our social future.

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