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Editors’ Introduction

Tracing the Movement of Literacies Across, Within, and Around

Ellen Cushman  
Mary Juzwik  
Michigan State University

As we introduce the inaugural issue of our editorship, we extend our thanks on behalf of the broader literacy research community to former editors Mark Dressman, Sarah McCarthey, and Paul Prior for their remarkable stewardship of the journal. More personally, we have appreciated their graciousness and generosity—which have taken many different forms over the past two years—throughout the editorial transition process.

In the spirit of Professors Dressman, McCarthey, and Prior, we conceptualize research in the teaching of English as a global enterprise. The teaching of English has always involved a carefully balanced act of honoring the diversity of local languages and practices while cultivating a repertoire of reading and writing strategies shown to be effective across contexts. Today this balancing act is unfolding on a global scale. As more and more countries compel citizens to teach and learn English, the language of the global economy, they also seek to maintain heritage languages—often through digitized, hybridized, remixed, and code-meshed World Englishes. The meanings and values of languages and literacies, moreover, differ widely in the many different settings where they are taught globally. While one community may associate the learning of English with social uplift, another may experience it as an imperialist tool for colonization. We seek to continue making RTE responsive to the tensions and complexities unfolding in classrooms and communities around the world that are engaged in the teaching and learning of English.

RTE has a long and distinguished tradition of publishing papers on critical questions related to such topics as English teacher education and professional development, reading and writing practices and pedagogies in PreK–12 and post-secondary school settings, the impact of new technologies on students’ literacy practices, students’ literacy development, semiotics and grammar, and the teaching and interpretation of literary and other texts. Such work has been, and will continue to be, part of the research appearing in the pages of RTE, and as an editorial team, we seek submissions in line with these traditions.

We also want to continue widening the lens, again extending the work of the previous editorial team, to include research addressing what it means to be a teacher and learner of English in today’s global and linked classrooms. We envision the journal providing discussions about emerging trends and developments in the

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field. For example, standardization, testing, and student accountability measures are now considered status quo. Standards and practices for English teacher education are contested and shifting, even as alternative pathways for professional certification and new proposals for measuring teacher quality proliferate. Tenure and unions are fading in influence, while technological mediations of literacy teaching and learning grow rapidly and are increasingly, if uncritically, held up as a panacea for education’s ills. Language diversity, rather than being exceptional, now characterizes the lived experiences of many—if not most—global citizens. As Rebecca Lorimer Leonard puts it in this issue, “the constant movement among languages … is the norm for literate practice for much of the world” (p. 32). Despite this reality, we live in a time when language policies, such as English Only legislation in the United States, are influentially shaping the global literacy educational landscape. We envision RTE addressing new and pressing questions for teachers and researchers around the globe.

How RTE responds to these challenges will impact not only its home organization, the National Council of Teachers of English (and especially the research community within NCTE), but also the international advancement of literacy scholarship, research, theory, policy, and practice. We seek to better position RTE globally by continuing to expand the diversity of contributors; by supporting diverse worldviews in educational research; by exploring new, creative, and divergent methods and ideas in RTE manuscripts; and by building the research and review-writing capacities of authors and reviewers. As the knowledge base and backgrounds of authors represented in RTE expand, as more globally relevant ideas are published, as article abstracts become accessible to scholars in more languages, RTE will grow in global impact. The editorial board we have selected will support our efforts to develop the international reach of the journal. A related goal of our editorship, not yet realized in this first issue, is to begin making article abstracts available in languages beyond English.

In keeping with RTE’s legacy, we encourage submissions that explore the internal diversity of the United States as it emerges in the teaching and learning of English, conceptualized in terms of race, class/socioeconomic status, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religious faith, nationality, and beyond. We aim to increase publications by scholars from historically marginalized groups—for example, by scholars working in post-colonial settings. We also strive to continue diversifying the knowledge base of RTE by including voices of researchers in contexts where the teaching and learning of English has happened alongside the teaching and learning of native languages.

Another pathway for continuing to build a diverse knowledge base in the field is through support of methodological pluralism and a widening diversity of scholarly and disciplinary perspectives. Large-scale statistical research, including experimental and quasi-experimental studies, helps the field identify broad trends and the impacts of policy, curricular, and community initiatives. More fine-grained interpretivist research, such as ethnographic case studies and archival work, can richly illuminate particular cases and generate new theory and research about
little-understood phenomena. Methodological diversity should also be reflected in diverse rhetorics of research included in the journal, from traditional, APA manuscripts with strong grounding in psychological studies to manuscripts in interpretivist traditions that make use of narrative and other humanistic modes of reporting. The current issue begins to demonstrate just such methodological diversity, as it moves from Rebecca Lorimer Leonard’s grounded theoretical work with interview data to the analysis of students’ translingual writing strategies in Suresh Canagarajah’s teacher research study, to Victoria Purcell-Gates’s ethnographic study of hidden literacies in migrant farmworker families in the Midwestern US, to the action research partnership enacted by Gerald Campano, María Paul Ghiso, and Lenny Sánchez. In service of expanding the methodological diversity represented in the pages of the journal, we encourage authors to explore generic innovation and hybridity in their writing, while at the same time making manuscripts readable for broad—rather than highly specialized—audiences.

Also in service of diversifying the production of knowledge in the field, we invite experienced and emerging scholars alike to consider submitting shorter pieces (3,000 words or less) to the Forum. We envision the Forum section including, but not being limited to:

- Commentaries about current trends in the research of teaching and learning of English(es),
- Innovations in research methodologies,
- Considerations of connections between research and practice or policy,
- Critical reviews of emerging areas of research and scholarship,
- Book review essays,
- Brief reports on larger empirical studies, and
- Responses to articles published in RTE.

In this issue, Maisha T. Winn launches the Forum conversation by contributing an essay envisioning a Restorative English Education.

In sum, we want RTE to be the place to seek powerful and cutting-edge ideas on literacies, writing, reading, teaching, and learning—work grounded in robust scholarship, inventive research, and rich theory. We want RTE to become a forum for shaping worldwide, scholarly conversations on the teaching and learning of English. Finally, we want RTE to serve as a base for interchange and education among authors and audiences in a manner that pushes issues, theories, and research while also building capacity for scholarship and research in the field.

**In This Issue**

Each of the articles in this issue suggests how global conceptualizations of literacies and English education are reconfiguring the field. We highlight three interwoven questions: a) How do languages and literacies travel, interact with, and change across geographic and institutional locations? b) How do English pedagogies
facilitate and constrain movement and meaning across boundaries? and c) How can studying languages and literacies “on the move” refresh long-standing trajectories of research in the teaching of English, while also proferring new lines of inquiry?

Languages and Literacies “On the Move”

The first theme centers upon movement between spaces and languages and how this migration impacts reading and writing practices. Rebecca Lorimer Leonard’s paper offers the broadest lens on this movement by exploring what she calls the “traveling literacies” of multilingual immigrant writers—the global migrations of their literate lives. While these writers experience gains in their literacy and expressive abilities, they too describe how “stuck, lost, or silent” (p. 21) they feel when institutional structures constrain their writing more than enable it. As Lorimer Leonard so eloquently puts it, ”While literacy and language practices can travel with their writers, their meaning might not make the journey” (p. 31).

The next essay, by Suresh Canagarajah, examines the global translingual literacy practices mobilized by university students writing literacy autobiographies, arguing for the importance of pedagogical spaces where multilingual literate activity becomes manifest. Together, he and his students fight against the monolinguistic assumption of English Only college writing classrooms as they negotiate literacies through a pedagogy of negotiation. Victoria Purcell-Gates’s contribution moves from classroom to community, following the linguistic and literate paths that Spanish-speaking migrant worker families and preschool classrooms might take to best serve preschool-aged children who must migrate with their families. The path of migration reverses in the final article: Gerald Campano and colleagues follow upper-elementary children and teachers in an under-resourced urban school as they organically interact with and in their communities to better understand and mobilize their cultural and linguistic legacies. Maisha T. Winn’s essay points back to the opening paper by highlighting the extreme ways that social structures can limit and confine literate practices, hindering their growth, circulation, and movement. Specifically, she addresses the relationship between schooling and prison wherein reading and writing practices can become rigidly and narrowly defined, barring possible forms of expression. She suggests how English education can alternatively create pathways to freedom of exploration and meaning making.

Traveling, translanguaging, migrating, organically growing and restoring—these movements of language and literacy and the circulations of value that accrue (or do not accrue) from these movements reveal the global forces shaping languages and literacies in people’s lives and communities. The diverse methodological pathways of the articles allow each of the authors or author teams the possibility to chronicle the subtle ways literacy practices accumulate value in local and large-scale economies of production. The pieces collectively testify to readers’ and writers’ ongoing struggles to achieve, make meaning, rewrite histories, and realize hope in everyday acts of linguistic perseverance.

As languages and literacies travel, however, new questions of appropriation, tradition, and standardization are raised. Who has credentials or rights to appropriate from other linguistic, literate, and even pedagogical traditions? Winn’s essay, for example, suggests that restorative circle pedagogies were borrowed from scholars
in criminal justice who drew them from Native American traditions. Such movement of a pedagogical practice across disciplinary and cultural practices unhinges the concept of “circle pedagogies” from actual practices. Which tribes, specifically, practice “circle pedagogies,” in what contexts, and with what ceremonial meanings? Similar issues are raised with the spiritual literacies and legacies that emerge in the pieces by Purcell-Gates, Campano and colleagues, and Winn. While the appropriation of the “gospel impulse” by the teachers in Campano, Ghiso, and Sánchez’s article created a school atmosphere that resisted dehumanizing regimes of testing and qualifying persons, it is also possible that the linguistic and literate legacies of the teachers’ presumably Christian spiritual traditions could further marginalize atheist or agnostic students or those following other faith traditions. Consider, for example, the study and practice of Islam referenced in Winn’s invocation of Malcolm X’s life story. Certainly, as literacies and pedagogies cross boundaries, new appropriations can have unintended, even ethically questionable, consequences.

And finally, what labels most accurately—and ethically—describe such appropriations? And who decides upon those labels? Canagarajah, for example, writes about “Standard Written English,” a term that has been contested by scholars of global multilingualism because of its normative connotations. Others prefer the term “Dominant American English,” because of its recognition of the unequal social markets in which language and literacy practices occur. That term, too, poses problems for scholarship working to account for global Englishes. Considering the question from the perspective of global Englishes unsettles certainty about whether or not a single, globally recognized standard English even exists today.

**Pedagogical Possibilities**

Second, the papers in this issue all address possibilities for empowering pedagogies, built upon students’ and community members’ linguistic and literate assets. Such pedagogies seek to redress histories of linguistic and social intolerance in schools and communities. Such a restorative pedagogical vision is most explicitly detailed in Maisha Winn’s essay, as she outlines a restorative framework for secondary English education that seeks to disrupt the well-documented school-to-prison pipeline. She outlines “a pedagogy of possibilities that employs literature and writing to seek justice and restore (and, in some cases, create) peace that reaches beyond the classroom walls” (p. 126), requiring teachers to “resist zero-tolerance policies that sort, label, and eventually isolate particular youth” (p. 126). In light of the other papers in this issue, that restoration could be framed as an ignition or renewal of social and spiritual mobility that has historically been attached to language and literacy learning (e.g., Cornelius, 1992). The papers offer avenues of pedagogical possibility as people and their literacy practices move—with accompanying shifts in meaning—across and around communities, institutions, locales, and countries.

In the process, the papers collectively demonstrate how different contingencies—including institutional structures, curricula, policies, and family circumstances—can enable or constrain movements within, across, and among linguistic and cultural communities. For the adult women in Lorimer Leonard’s study, for example, the family circumstance of having children shapes the experience and valuing of literate practice. Moreover, instructors’ negative reactions to an im-
migrant woman speaking Tibetan in a college nursing program turn “what might be assumed to be an asset—multilingual fluency—into a barrier” (p. 25). In the portraits of teaching by Canagarajah and Campano and colleagues, by contrast, teachers take responsive, dialogic stances that open spaces for imaginative, engaging, and humanizing literate pathways for students. Specific dialogic invitations—such as the literacy autobiography assigned by Canagarajah or the inquiry project assigned to “The Historians”—a group of budding fifth-grade scholars introduced by Campano and his colleagues—open up possibility for engaged learning through dialogue. As Campano and colleagues argue, “a humane learning environment—one that is nurturing, creatively engaging, and honoring of students’ legacies—should be a precondition, not a reward, for educational growth” (p. 119).

New Insights and Questions on Research in the Teaching of English

Finally, the papers present fresh insight into, and raise new questions about, long-standing trajectories of research in the teaching of English. Lorimer Leonard mobilizes the critical work of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Luke (2004), among others, to offer “traveling literacies” as one way for the field to begin to chronicle the impact of “globalizing markets for literate resources, those that immigrant writers experience before, after, and along the paths of migration, [which] constantly re-value these resources” (p. 17). As she traces these shifting values, Lorimer Leonard also builds upon Deborah Brandt’s (2001) groundbreaking research on the economies of literacy, a theme recently taken up by Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe (2012) and Heath (2012). To borrow Lorimer Leonard’s phrasing, as readers and writers “on the move” encounter shifting linguistic and cultural markets, so too do their resources rise or fall in value. Her work reveals how “the value of literacy, in one or multiple languages, is always in flux” (p. 17).

The translingualism discussed by Canagarajah operates within this flux of economic and social values associated with shifting meanings of old literacy practices and the emergence of new literacy practices. Canagarajah responds to earlier work in the New Literacy Studies (NLS), including the “second wave” of NLS work of Barton and colleagues (2000) and the critics of that work (e.g., Brandt & Clinton, 2002), by theorizing literacy as negotiation, and negotiation as pedagogy. He argues for a view of “text as co-constructed in time and space—with parity for readers and writers in shaping the meaning and form—and thus performed rather than predefined, making the multimodal and multisensory dimensions of the text fully functional and generative” (p. 45). For researchers, an orientation to negotiated literacies entails identifying both macro-level and micro-level strategies that may be mobilized by readers and writers in the process of such shifts. For teachers, it involves shifting the types of reading and writing practices taught in universities and schools and empowering students to draw upon multiple languages in the interpretation and creation of meaning. More broadly, understanding literacies as negotiated pushes the field to rethink what counts as knowledge work in universities and schools and to move beyond limited and limiting monolingual assumptions that continue to plague literacy instruction in and beyond the United States.

Such assumptions appear in the Head Start program described in Purcell-
Gates’s article. Adding new insights to a substantial line of work on hidden literacies in communities’ everyday reading and writing practices (Guerra, 1998 Heath, 2012), Purcell-Gates demonstrates how the hidden literacies of Mexican migrant family lives—that travel with children to school—fail to be recognized or valued in academic contexts as early as preschool. Purcell-Gates points out that when such hidden literacies do come to light for teachers, they are too often seen as a deficit to overcome, rather than a rich resource for learning.

Just such a shift in stance happens in the action research of Campano, Ghiso, and Sánchez, where teachers collaborate with university researchers to create rich ground—both in and beyond classroom spaces—in which organic critical literate practices flourish. Indeed, Campano and colleagues take scholars a step further in arguing for a fundamental shift in epistemic privilege:

What is perhaps most important is for educators and researchers alike to cultivate a willingness to learn from others’ critically literate traditions and orientations, especially from those whose knowledge has historically been devalued. At its best, the development of critical literacies may involve a creative alchemy of diverse perspectives and practices in learning communities devoted to the full human and intellectual flourishing of students. (p. 120)

The “critically literate traditions and orientations” discussed in the article, furthermore, invoke how interwoven oral and literate traditions within the African American community get mobilized as rhetorical resources for resisting the de-humanization of standardized testing and as tools for constructing more humanizing, more pedagogically effective, and more deeply engaging ways of negotiating literacies with students.

However, we confess being haunted and unsettled—as we think the authors intend us to be—by the image of children hunkering over practice tests in a sweltering schoolroom that frames the essay. That image seems all the more haunting in its juxtaposition with the richly dialogic and deeply humane conversation about the novel *Holes*. How can the “breath of fresh air” created during the partnership between the school and the research team be sustained by teachers and administrators in the face of standardization and high-stakes tests? This question emerges most vividly in this paper, but it travels throughout the other papers in the issue as well.

**Conclusion**

Taken together, the articles in this issue present useful, timely, and much-needed correctives to educational policies, standardized assessment regimes, and curricula that check the full force of hidden, organic literacies taking root in classrooms—despite the well-documented values of these literacies for their learners and communities. These articles richly detail fresh ways to begin to understand and document global conceptualizations of literacies and English education. Braiding together the themes of migration and pedagogical liberations and constraints, these essays all serve to generate and engage new questions, deepen possibilities, and sustain inquiry.
REFERENCES


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