

Letter from the Editors

Michael A. Dover and Maureen O'Connor

Abstract: This is the Letter from the Editors for the latest issue of this journal. It announces that this and three other issues from Volume 21, 2015, will be published by the end of May 2016, and plans are underway to bring the journal fully up to date in its publishing schedule by September of 2016.

Keywords: field education, process recordings, peer reviews, cover art

The letter serves to introduce Volume 21#1 of *Reflections*. It is the first of four issues which will be published in May of 2016. These issues will complete Volume 21, which was scheduled to publish in 2015. The publication of the issues in this volume will bring the journal one step closer to being fully up to date in our publishing schedule, since the hiatus from January 2012, V18#1 – the last issue published at California State University Long Beach – and Fall 2013, V18#2, the first issue published online at Cleveland State University.

Back dating issues like this is a standard journal publishing practice. Our website shows exactly when each issue is published as does the inside cover of each issue. That said, we are very much looking forward to being on a normal publishing schedule by Fall 2016. We hope to have Winter and Spring 2016 published by August 2017 and to publish the Summer 2016 issue next September.

The next three issues will include the long-awaited Special Issues on Honoring our Indigenous Elders, Family of Origin: Reflections on Practice, and Dismantling Social and Racial Injustice. These three special issues will represent a wonderful end of the long tradition of special themed issues and the beginning of a new tradition of special themed sections in issues to come.

Using special themed sections will permit the same full attention to special themed content, including guest editors, cover art keyed to the theme, and the same ability to have issue-length special themed sections. But it will leave room for general submissions in each issue as well as the publication of articles in our permanent special sections, including the Field Education Section, Historical Reflections, Research Reflections and Teaching and Learning Reflections. Finally, it will mean that guest editors can include as few or as many articles as are appropriate, with less concern about the length of the

issue.

The journal is succeeding in this accelerated publishing schedule with the full participation of a growing editorial team of journal editors, including the special section editors. Please see the inside cover of the full issue PDF found in the link on the table of contents on the website, or see the website homepage (About/Editorial Team).

In addition, the Narrative Review Board – made up of the most active and highest quality reviewers – has recently had three conference calls in which twenty participated. At this time, we have 260 enrolled reviewers, of whom half have successfully completed a review. A decision has been made to rely more on the Narrative Review Board, on the team of editors, and on published *Reflections* authors as reviewers.

The editors would like to acknowledge and thank several members of the Narrative Review Board who have contributed much but who will no longer be serving on the board due to personal or professional transitions. These include Barry Adams of the United States Navy; Laura Beres of King's University College at Western University; Dana Grossman Leeman of Simmons College; Priscilla Day of University of Minnesota Duluth. We would like to particularly thank John Kayser, a founding reviewer, and Professor Emeritus at University of Denver, who has provided regular advice as part of the transition of the journal to Cleveland State University.

As the above shows, it is all hands on deck for *Reflections* as we strive to become fully up-to-date in our publishing schedule and prepare for the editorial succession, once the term of Michael Dover as editor ends in May 2017.

Readers, authors, and reviewers, should feel secure in the future of the journal. Contributions to *Friends of Reflections* have continued apace, with over \$10,000

in individual donations received since 2012. Our confidence in support of this kind resulted in the journal making an important decision in December 2015 to make the content of the journal freely available as of January 2016. Subscriptions have been suspended for both individuals and journals, and all subscribers were notified that they can enjoy open access to the journal in the future. Accordingly, clicking on Archives at the website now permits access to all PDFs of articles and issues, without logging in, although we encourage readers to register. Soon we will announce a new arrangement to further ensure the long-term fiscal stability of the journal. But the best way to vote for the journal's long-term survival is to join Friends of *Reflections* (please see the link on our website).

In this issue, we publish two general submissions, described next, one article from the Field Education Section, our second article in the Historical Reflections series ("The Settlement years"), and four wonderful articles from the Teaching and Learning Section. Please read the following descriptions of these wonderful issues. We hope you enjoy the thought provoking cover keyed to the first narrative, about the experience of traversing the desert on the way from Mexico to the United States and the work of those who reach out a human hand of help to them.

On the Road to Arivaca: A Prose Reflection on a Meeting

Larry Ortiz writes about his experience volunteering as a human rights worker for undocumented travelers near the Mexico/Arizona border. He describes his daily tasks with the Samaritan workers in bringing water and food to stations where the migrants may pass, and looking for foot traffic in the hopes of coming into contact with one of them. Ortiz notes his own internal conflict in working to "save" the immigrants, and the paradox in meeting an undocumented worker of his same Mexican heritage, but without his American privilege. Although Ortiz's volunteer work was in 2009, he notes that immigration remains an important issue today, as many Latino immigrants travel to our country, undocumented or not, to be with family and/or to find better work to support their families back home.

The Complicated Process of Caregiving: The Case of Mr. S (James) and Ms. Q (Sherry)

This narrative explores the tender and complex relationships that social workers develop as they advocate for and get to know their patients in the medical social work field. Nicole Saint-Louis describes the dual roles she serves – counselor to patients and their families and communication facilitator between families and medical staff. She writes how medical social workers work to create a nurturing environment in the medical setting, which can sometimes feel fast paced and impersonal to patients. Nicole's story of the relationships that develop between she and her patients exemplifies how interactions with clients can impact us as social workers. This narrative illustrates the challenges of creating a therapeutic relationship with patients and their families within the medical setting.

Social Work off the Page: Two American Social Worker Students in Vietnam

Atwater and Morrill describe their experiences working with the Da Nang Social Welfare Center, a new social welfare agency that provides housing to homeless adults and children in Vietnam. They observe treatment in the welfare center that would be considered unethical by American standards, but that is considered the best available at the Da Nang Center, given the lack of staff and resources available. As Atwater and Morrill work to develop sustainable practices and recruit more community support for the Center, they note the tension between their American social work values and what is customary for social workers in Vietnamese culture. Atwater and Morrill share their personal feelings and insights from a relationship with Tuấn, a orphaned boy who resides at the Da Nang Center. Inspired by his resiliency and spirit, they each develop fond feelings towards him. They observe how an American model of child development would not fit for this boy's history and current strategies for survival. Instead, they recognize the coping skills he develops as an orphan, and as a resident of the Center. This narrative highlights the conflicts that can arise from always using an American based social work lens to understand and react to social problems in other cultures.

1960 to 1976: The First Sixteen Years of My Career in Social Work: The Settlement Years

McKenna's early years in his social work career encompassed a dynamic and tumultuous time in social work and in society. As a young social worker in his formative years, working with at-risk youth and young adults, he works as a counselor and mentor, helping to divert his clients from choosing paths that might lead to gangs and other risky behavior. As a leader to these young men, McKenna sees the racism that they encounter, as well as the lack of resources available to them. Later on, when promoted to a more administrative position, McKenna learns how to navigate relations with a different population of people, such as those who may serve as board members or contributors to his nonprofit. McKenna discusses the people who influenced him throughout his social work profession, as well as how each of his social work experiences prepared him for the next step in his career.

Seven Self-Care Strategies

Joshua Miller writes of the challenges social work educators and other social workers face in addressing their own needs whilst attending to the needs of their students and clients. He reveals how his own patterns of overwork have led to feelings of burnout and isolation. Miller shares seven ways he has found to be effective in managing his self care and helping to decrease his stress. While some of Miller's strategies may be familiar to some, such as exercise and mindfulness practice, he offers other tools to create better personal/work balance, such as engaging in social action, deepening self-awareness, and building self-acceptance. Joshua provides a brief excerpt from his book, *Psychosocial Capacity Building in Response to Disasters*, that provides greater detail on how to incorporate more self care into one's social work practice (Miller, 2012).

Reflections from an Untenured Chair: Myths and Realities

Donna Wang shares her story of taking an unconventional route from an untenured faculty position to serving as an untenured department chair at a new university. A relatively new Ph.D., embarking on her career in academia, she took a leap

of faith in accepting a position few in her place would take, but finds that there are strengths in her lack of experience. She discusses some of the challenges she faced in balancing her administrative and teaching duties in her new position, as well as the social work skills she drew on while serving in this role. When Wang completes her three years in this position, she finds that she is able to earn tenure as well as move onto the next best professional position for herself. Wang's story of trusting her instincts and taking a non-traditional step in her career, may offer optimism and encouragement for academics new to the field. Wang also advises advocating for one's needs early on at hire, not being too afraid to negotiate for certain conditions, and incorporating a strong self care practice as well.

The Meaning of the Cohort Community in Social Work Doctoral Education

The authors combine their stories of how relationships formed during their social work doctoral program helped to fortify their performance and provide critical social support throughout their education. They assert that while many doctoral programs emphasize the importance of research opportunities or administrative support to students, some of these programs lack a supportive community. Non traditional students as well as students from minority backgrounds may struggle to feel a sense of belonging and support at their graduate programs. The authors note that the average graduation rates for doctoral students has remained at 50% for many years, suggesting that improving the support and community at a campus may improve the retention rate. The authors identify common themes from their collective experiences, and outline how their doctoral cohort group impacted their experience and led them to success in completing their doctoral program.

My Journey through Social Work

Often as social workers, our natural attraction or passion for certain issues is shaped by our early encounters in life. Courtney Gazerro writes about how her experience as a student in a lower socio economic school influenced her decision to pursue a social work program. She writes about being aware of the challenges her classmates faced that she did not, such as family violence, housing instability, and drugs. Her awareness of the resources she had, versus what her

classmates lacked, led to her desire to positively impact the lives of at risk students. Once placed in her school internship, she is confronted with her own self doubts and questions whether she has the skills to be a school social worker. Although she is intimidated by some of the traumas and struggles the students encounter, she finds through her engagements with the students that they trust her and feel safe with her. She finds she is able to respond to difficult situations with skill and tact, and her sense of competence grows. Courtney's narrative tracks her initial interest in social work as well as her transition from uncertainty to confidence in her social work internship.

Conclusion

Having read these descriptions, you may very well realize this issue contains many compelling narratives. Like most issues of *Reflections*, this issue is thought provoking. But in addition, reading *Reflections* narratives is often a very difficult, emotionally demanding experience. Just as working with people and communities as helping professionals and social activists can be gut-wrenching, so can reading a *Reflections* narrative.

The same thing is true for those of us who are editors and for our dedicated reviewers. Sometimes we literally have to put down a narrative and come back to it later. And if there is a great deal of emotional labor which goes into serving as an editor or reviewer, imagine how much goes into writing a narrative of one's practice, teaching or research, or sharing important portrayals of the history of helping and of struggles for social justice. Better yet, don't just imagine it, please try it!

In a workshop recently at the Cleveland State University School of Social Work, our Director and Professor Cathleen Lewandowski welcomed to campus Francine Vecchiolla, Dean and Professor at the Springfield College School of Social Work, and Victoria Rizzo, Chairperson and Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton Department of Social Work. They were here as part of a speaker series funded by a bequest from the estate of Winifred Bell, formerly of our faculty (as was, notably, the founding editor of *Reflections*, Sonia Leib Abels.) Although their topic was advanced generalist practice, they discussed the role of process

recordings in social work education. Writing process recordings, they confirmed, is something students find difficult to do, while field instructors and field advisors often sometimes demur from the process of reading and discussing process recordings. But, they agreed, process recordings can be an important part of an optimal social work education. Discussion showed that often, when one goes back to old process recordings and looks back at one's practice in light of subsequent professional experience, great insight can be obtained. If care is taken to fully disguise and make composite as necessary the experience about which one is writing, process recordings and our experience as students in social work can prove to be a rich source of *Reflections* narratives.

No profession can survive without the process of narrative accounts of practice and reflection on practice. This is well established in medicine and psychiatry, with an entire field of narrative medicine having evolved in recent decades. In the helping professions more commonly represented in this journal (social work, psychology, counseling, nursing, community organizer, etc.), the need for narratives of practice is also especially valuable.

This journal's publication agreement requires that authors certify they have taken great care to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the persons involved in the experiences about which they write. We will be taking additional steps in the near future to ensure this, and welcome suggestions from the readers. In the past, the journal and/or authors have asked that selected material from a previous article or even an entire article be withdrawn, and we will continue to take great care. Prospective authors who have concerns in this regard are encouraged to contact the editor. Meanwhile, however, enjoy this issue please!

Miller, J. (2012). *Psychosocial capacity building in response to disasters*. NY: Columbia University Press.

About the Editors: Michael A. Dover, Ph.D., LISW, Cleveland State University School of Social Work, is Editor of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping* (reflections@csuohio.edu); Maureen O'Connor, M.A., MSW-Candidate, is Graduate Assistant, Cleveland State University School of Social Work (m.t.oconnor@vikes.csuohio.edu).