

Reflections from the Editorial Team: The Importance of Being Author-centric

Darlyne Bailey, Monica Leisey, F. Ellen Netting, and Kelly McNally Koney

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 26 Number 1 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. This issue introduces an author-centric approach to the journal's culture and shares updated criteria to be used in the manuscript review process. Most importantly we highlight the articles herein that express the overriding themes of balancing professional and personal boundaries, identifying underlying assumptions, and promoting self-awareness.

Keywords: professional boundaries, self-awareness, underlying assumptions, empowerment, review process

It is hard to believe that a full year has gone by since we became the Editorial Leadership Team for this incredible journal! What a privilege it is to serve in this role, and how much we have learned in the process!

We want to begin by thanking so many people who have made the publication of *Reflections* possible, followed by our thoughts about the importance of being author-centric. Finally, we will provide a brief overview of the themes that emerge in this issue.

Thanking and Welcoming Team Members

We have so many people to thank, and we have new team members to introduce. First, we want to pay homage, once again, to our founding editors, Sonia and Paul Abels. Sonia's first Editorial Letter, reprinted at the end of this issue, so beautifully lays out what *Reflections* was created to be. As was true when Sonia wrote that first letter in 1995, *Reflections* provides a space wherein the narrative form is embraced as the vehicle for centering personal experience in the process of knowledge building around professional helping and social change. Much has transpired in the last 25 years, and yet, our commitment to this purpose has not wavered. We are indebted to Sonia and Paul for their vision and the dedication it took to usher this journal into being. It is our privilege to carry forward this mission so all of us may keep fitting together others' stories with our own in ways that ground our knowing and grow our work.

We are thrilled with the response our guest editors Beth Russell, Pam Viggiani, and Debra Fromm Faria received from their call for manuscripts on Cultural Humility, leading to two full issues on this important subject. Their first special issue was published this fall and the second one will be released soon. In addition, much appreciation goes to Patricia Gray, Lead Guest Editor for a Special Issue on Continuing Education slated to come out in 2020.

Many thanks to those team members who work so diligently behind-the-scenes in the copyediting and production functions of *Reflections*. Our deepest gratitude goes to 2018-2019

Graduate Assistant Rebecca Krenz and to Tara Peters—the 2017-2018 Graduate Assistant—who served as Copy Editor through Volume 25 Number 1, after graduating with her MSW in May 2018. They moved articles through copyediting into the summer of 2019. Rebecca has written a beautiful piece in this issue that will be invaluable to anyone who wants to better understand narrative writing (we think Sonia would be proud). And we can't thank Tara Peters enough for simply and quickly saying "Yes!" when we asked her to rejoin us to do the copyediting "lift" in July and August. With Tara's help, we were able to seamlessly move the first Cultural Humility issue to our Production/Publishing team.

Given Michael Dover's ability to recruit talented people, we are happy to welcome three new student team members this fall. Zoey Pincelli joins us as Copy Editor. Zoey has two years of experience with the Cleveland State University (CSU) Writing Center and has her own copyediting business. Zoey is an English and Computer Science major. Geetha Somarouthu is Assistant Copy Editor. Geetha, a psychology and pre-med student, has been working at the CSU Tutoring and Student Success Center and will be in charge of readying manuscripts for copyediting, APA style checking, and initial proofreading. Sarah Valek is Mike's Graduate Assistant. A former editor of *Cool Cleveland* and a student in the CSU MSW program's clinical concentration, Sarah works with Mike on getting out the issues (producing and reading final article and issue galley proofs). Welcome Zoey, Geetha, and Sarah! And thank you, Mike, for helping us build and manage such a talented team.

Our Section Editors—Julie Cooper Altman, Jon Christopher Hall, Carol Langer, and Beth Lewis—continue to volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. Theirs is a never-ending vigilance as they assign manuscripts to reviewers, keep track of reviews as they come in, and correspond with authors. We want to acknowledge the significance of what they do because we know they have so many other demands in their respective work environments. Theirs are gifts of dedication and commitment to *Reflections*.

But *Reflections* would not exist were it not for our authors and reviewers. In this issue alone, at least 22 anonymous reviewers provided feedback to authors. The importance of the peer review process cannot be over-stated and dedicated reviewers are critical players in the editorial process. Thank you for the quality and timeliness of your reviews!

What It Means to be Author-centric

We called our first editorial "Honoring the Past, Embracing the Future," and this, our second editorial, is called "The Importance of Being Author-centric." We coined this word during a conference call and hope that it will make sense once we've tried to explain!

Over the last months we have talked with the Editorial Board—the Section and Guest Editors—about the purpose and the mission of *Reflections*. This has engaged us in an ongoing sense-making process in which we have learned from the rich history of this journal, trusting the emergent process and grasping the AHAs and insights to guide our collaboration. It has become clear that *Reflections* provides a unique vehicle for authors to write about what they have learned as they have engaged in professional helping. This begs two questions: Who are considered

helping professionals and what roles do they play?

If one searches the internet for “helping professionals” this definition pops up: “A profession that nurtures the growth of or addresses the problems of a person’s physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional or spiritual well-being, including medicine, nursing, psychotherapy, psychological counseling, social work, education, life coaching and ministry” (YourDictionary, n.d.). This definition reminds us that we want to attract authors from multiple disciplines and professions. They could be social workers, nurses, counselors, educators, chaplains, physicians, and play a host of other roles in which people want to make a difference in the lives of others. Helping professionals who are practitioners share with readers the humanity of their encounters. Many of the articles published in *Reflections* have been written by educators who teach in professional programs, many of whom are “pracademics,” having one foot in the field of practice and the other in the academy. Their narratives often focus on helping students learn about how to practice in their chosen professions or on how to interface between the field of practice and the educational setting. Students write about what they have learned in the classroom and in the field and reflect on the implications of what they have learned as they prepare to be practitioners.

In short, we want to attract authors from multiple fields and roles to write about their experiences, about what they have learned about themselves and others in their interactions, encounters, and attempts to help. Without their very personal narratives, that reveal the deep learning that occurs in the process of being a helping professional, there would be no *Reflections*.

Being author-centric, then, means the following to us:

- Recruiting and encouraging new and seasoned authors across the generations, across countries, across disciplines/professions to share what they have learned;
- Remembering that we have a responsibility to disseminate quality narratives so that helping professionals can benefit from the experiences of others;
- Recognizing that some authors may need guidance as these may be their first manuscripts written in a narrative style;
- Being sensitive to English not being a first language for some authors and encouraging them as they prepare their manuscripts to cross linguistic barriers;
- Keeping authors informed about the progress of their manuscript through every step in the submission, review, and copyediting process;
- Finding reviewers who will provide timely, appropriate, and thorough reviews that are helpful, constructive, and formative;
- Being sensitive to the invaluable role reviewers perform by making their feedback process as easy as possible for them to complete and for authors to read through;
- Using reviews to guide authors in strengthening their work;
- Getting reviewers’ feedback to authors as quickly as possible and being sensitive to the fact that many authors are in positions that require them to publish and we do not want to hold up their manuscripts any longer than possible.

Thus, being author-centric means communicating with authors in a timely and respectful manner, keeping communication channels open, and being as time sensitive as possible in disseminating authors' narratives to an eager readership who can benefit from their insights. Since timely and meaningful reviews are critically important to authors who send their manuscripts to us, we listened to what reviewers were telling us about what needed to change in the review process. We have spent several months revising the review form so that it is more user-friendly, yet still able to convey quality feedback to authors. The first step was to simplify the review process by providing concise evaluation criteria for Section/Guest Editors, Reviewers, and Authors and to streamline feedback to authors. We wanted to ensure that the criteria used in the review process corresponded directly with submission guidelines provided to our authors. Authors need to know what criteria are being used to evaluate the quality of their manuscripts, so we are listing these below:

- **Narrative**: The author conveys interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and felt experiences in a narrative format and is clear about the author(s)' role (e.g. practitioner, recipient of service, teacher, field instructor, student, researcher, other).
- **Story**: The author places the narrative within the context of a well-told story that helps readers discover new ways of thinking about the personal, the professional, and the political in our lives.
- **Portrayals**: The author roots the narrative in the rich and detailed portrayal of key moments, examples, and vignettes that fully portray the interaction taking place between and among the people involved.
- **Context**: The author places the reflection within an historical context, focusing on the present, and considering the implications of the narrative for the future.
- **References**: The author uses references that might draw connections between the content and the published literature or that might assist the reader in understanding conceptual or theoretical conclusions about the nature of professional practice.
- **Conclusions**: The author draws conclusions about the need for qualitative or quantitative research related to the issues arising from the narrative.

When we unveil the new review process in 2020, reviewers will rate each criterion on a five-point scale, and there will be room for reviewers' comments as well. In short, we hope to make the review process as transparent for authors as possible so that they can use these criteria to assess their manuscripts before they are even submitted.

If you are not currently a reviewer or author with *Reflections*, we hope you will join with us in this ongoing journey to raise the voices of helping professionals. *Reflections* is a unique platform for disseminating compelling, transparent accounts of what can be learned from others who are willing to share their inner-most thoughts about their personal and professional lives.

Highlights of This Issue

Together the narratives in this issue exude humanity. The authors unmask personal feelings and expectations that constantly churn within the professional self in an authentic parallel process. They tell stories in ways that reveal the assumptions that professionals bring to their

interpersonal interactions.

Our first two articles are written in unique formats. The first is an invited review of 27 selected articles from the journal's archives, and the second is a son's interview with a father, a renowned social work educator.

Krenz was asked to select articles from previous issues of *Reflections* that especially resonated with the author. Peeling back the professional mask, Krenz reveals deep insecurities in attempting to understand the difference between expository and narrative writing. The result is a sensitive and beautiful journey through the archives. Similarly, Miller's interview with the author's father, a social work educator, provides an historical window into the life of a man who tells a story with passion, insight, and humor. The father discloses early work with gangs at a Settlement House, talks about facing the impact of a visual disability on a long career, recounts fears felt during the McCarthy era, and reflects on the emergence of Jewish social workers into the profession. In the process, both articles provide reflections on how personal and professional values interface.

Next are three articles that focus on how challenging it can be to balance professional boundaries with personal feelings. Radis honors the memory of another father (a mental health case management supervisor) in a narrative that reveals how vulnerable the author feels when the father is dying and the social worker who comes to the bedside is a field student. Feize joins Radis in agonizing over being cast in the light of vulnerability while desperately wanting to keep professional boundaries intact. Having immigrated to the United States from a war-torn Middle Eastern country Feize is no stranger to conflict, yet in writing a dissertation this author experiences a surprising resistance to coming face-to-face with self-awareness. The tension between personal and professional boundaries is met at every turn in Nguyen's article on Hurricane Florence's impact on Wilmington, North Carolina. Not only does Nguyen's family have to evacuate the city, but when they return students, faculty, field agencies, and clients are in disarray as they seek to return to any semblance of normalcy. All three articles illustrate the incredible flexibility it takes to deal with balancing professional and personal needs in the face of human hardship.

The next three articles demonstrate how underlying assumptions frame the work that helping professionals do, and how critical it is to recognize what those assumptions are. Faubert calls us to dig deeply, to explore how epistemology, which concerns the study of knowledge and the sources of knowledge, is relevant to helping professionals. Epistemology reflects how the beliefs individuals hold regarding the certainty of knowledge, the process of knowing, and the justification of claimed knowledge have an impact on actions and behaviors. Clay provides the reader with an excellent example of how assumptions inform the world of policy practice. Using interviews with providers to highlight how assumptions underlying a business model differ from those undergirding a person-centered care approach, Clay reflects on the role of fee-for-service in behavioral health and the unintended consequences that occur on the frontlines as practitioners negotiate the need to meet new regulatory standards. O'Meara provides a brief, engaging narrative on experiential learning during the summer months between school years and brings the theme of underlying assumptions into focus at the local level. O'Meara's description

reveals what can happen during the summer when assumptions about different forms of learning are used to enrich meaningful engagement in naturally occurring environments outside traditional school settings.

Articles by Olson, Jarolson, and Eltaiba offer insight into crossing cultural boundaries. Taking an auto-ethnographical approach and grounding the narrative in the literature on studying abroad, Olson sets a context in which BSW students and faculty members spend a six-week summer session in Japan. Attempting to teach in a very different environment from the traditional classroom, Olson is pushed to examine long-held assumptions about teaching and learning. Jarolmen uses experience in traveling in South Africa for an international groupwork conference on bridging racial divides to reflect on the nature of culture and the beliefs that form one's worldview. Seeing social work as respecting individual autonomy, yet formed around collectivistic orientations, Jarolmen combines historical background and present experience in South Africa to reflect on different ways of knowing. Having taught in Australia and the Middle East, Eltaiba offers a perspective on teaching in diverse cultures. The author reveals methods and approaches to teaching social work practice, respecting diversity and being in touch with the values Eltaiba brings to the educational and practice experience. Deeply rooted in understanding the importance of cultural values, these three articles highlight interactions and experiences that lead to unforgettable insights.

All these articles are about the empowerment that comes from self awareness. The authors share their personal fears and revelations as they move in and out of personal and professional roles. They offer the reader an opportunity to reflect on their own approaches to helping as they engage in the parallel process of respecting professional boundaries and disclosing their own humanity. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!

References

Helping-profession. (n.d.). In YourDictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.yourdictionary.com/helping-profession>

About the Authors: Darlyne Bailey, PhD, LISW is Editor-in-Chief, *Reflections*, Professor and Dean Emeritus; Director, Social Justice Initiative, Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, Bryn Mawr, PA (dbailey01@brynmawr.edu); Monica Leisey, PhD is Associate Editor, *Reflections* and Associate Professor, Salem State University, School of Social Work, Salem, MA (mleisey@salemstate.edu); F. Ellen Netting, PhD is Associate Editor, *Reflections* and Professor Emerita, Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Social Work, Richmond, VA (enetting@vcu.edu); Kelly McNally Koney, MSSA is Assistant Editor, *Reflections* (kmkoney@msn.com).

With Gratitude...

We would like to recognize and thank the reviewers who contributed their time and invaluable assistance to *Reflections* V26(1):

Julie Cooper Altman; Zakia Clay; James Angelo Forte; Annette Grape; Merav Moshe Grodofsky; Michele Hanna; Peggy Jo Proudfoot Harman; Sarah Louise Hessenauer; Meagan Ann Hoff; Lana Sue Ilima Ka'opua; Carol L. Langer; Patricia Levy; Andre L. Lewis; Beth M. Lewis; Brenda McQuillan; Sarah Moore; Arlene Reilly-Sandoval; Alankaar Sharma; Allen Joseph Vogt; Robin Wiley

We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors.

Supporting *Reflections*

Ways to contribute to the publishing of *Reflections*:

- \$\$ (any amount) — FRIEND OF *REFLECTIONS*
- \$250 or more — FRIEND FOR LIFE
- \$1000 or more — A THOUSAND THANKS

Please visit: <https://www.csuohio.edu/class/reflections/friends-reflections>. Thank You!