

SALUTATORY¹

By Sonia Leib Abels



Welcome to the first edition of **REFLECTIONS**. We celebrate the journal and its readers. A year ago this week we moved from a two month old status as an independent journal to sponsorship by The University Press and Department of Social Work, CSULB. According to some publishers, a year is a relatively short time to move from concept to reality. We think the appeal of narratives about practice for helping professionals was the primary reason it happened so quickly. Another incentive has been the genuine interest of our charter subscribers.

As journal editor, I feel especially obligated to produce a perfect product. Surely I'm not much different than others engaged in new ventures. My apprehension tuned to perfection relates to the journal's narrative focus.

The articles we publish, personal accounts of practice differ significantly from those of other journals. Our single mission is to publish narratives with good literary quality that contribute knowledge on ways of helping others and creating social change. At this time there are no other such periodicals.

There is a burgeoning literature about the use of narratives as interventions in nursing, teaching, social work,

family therapy, clinical psychology, as modes of reasoning in bio-ethics, and as tools of analysis in organizational behavior and administration.

Searching for perfection guarantees anxiety. A colleague recently suggested I should take a Talmudic perspective in publishing this journal. It must contain an error to acknowledge that it is a human endeavor, signifying only G-D is perfect. I am confident that **REFLECTIONS** will acquire a reputation for its quality and distinct literary appeal.

The idea for this journal came out of a history of story telling encounters with academics and practitioners. Two events focused the possibilities for the journal. After an exchange of stories with others about the different experiences we each had teaching and effecting social policy in Lithuania, we realized that if these personal accounts remained as sophisticated gossip, the knowledge lodged in the accounts would be lost. We knew the story tellers would write on social change, but they would not write an article, a narrative that described and explained their affect and reasoning; the ways their behavior, interactions, and those of the officials changed over time, and what happened when they failed. In their expository writing knowledge of the

¹b. A greeting addressed to the readers of the first issue of a periodical. . Brown, L.(Ed) (1993). *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p.2676) Oxford, Clarendon Press.

process of their practice would be lost.

The second event occurred after the journal was started. Richard A. Cloward and Frances Fox Piven presented a paper on organizing voter registration at a conference on social work with groups. Several months later we realized their presentation was a narrative, a descriptive and explanatory personal account of their experience. (In this edition)

This journal is engaged in building a public platform for narratives about practice, a platform guided by the canons of logic, verisimilitude and good writing; and the judgment, not of friends in particular, but of masked peers and an audience from the communities of professional helpers.

We hope this journal will persuade academics, researchers and practitioners that narrative inquiry is another, albeit different, legitimate way to generate knowledge about practice. One internal obstacle is my concern with the views of empirical researchers, who hold that "truth can only be known through scientific research methodology." The helping professions have devoted energy and resources to develop well designed scientific studies that produce knowledge to guide and inform practice. A critical and significant thrust of the helping professions has been development of a strong empirical base. Now along comes a journal inviting and publishing personal accounts of experience in practice.

The narratives in

REFLECTIONS convey a mode of inquiry as a way of knowing practice in a new, yet familiar way.

Narratives are ubiquitous; everyone tells stories. We do not claim that narrative inquiry leads to universal or generalizable truths. However it is likely that cumulative narratives will provide empirical researchers with a potential data base for culling generalizable practice knowledge.

A strong motivation of this journal is to offer stories of practice in a pluralistic context, exemplars that document the experience with diverse populations. Much of the helping professions' literature examines and illuminates the differences and similarities in cultural responses and behaviors. Missing from the literature is the discernment of practice within populations. In an informal study of articles on cultural diversity from several professional journals we found most articles advocated cultural sensitivity without differentiating helping strategies and identifying the outcomes.

Explanations of experience constructed into narratives is the classic genre for sharing human experience. Narratives afford the means to understand our own actions and those of others. We tend to fit together their stories with our own. A narrative is contextually embedded within the individual's larger life story. Standing on its own the narrative voice does not teach or explicate practice implications, or tell readers what they ought to learn. The

purpose of a narrative is to tell a "good" story, to make things present.

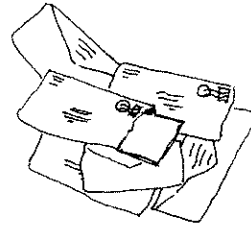
The narratives in this first issue convey the meaningfulness of human engagement. Each authors' personal account reinforces the value of storied experiences for describing and explaining professional action. Passion and commitment to engagement in social change and human development shaped all of these authors' narrative structure. We recognize in each story the tone of the author's self-conscious change as he/she describes the process affecting individual and social events. A theme throughout the stories is the unexpected, the force of happenstance on well planned action. Good news and bad are described as the authors fail and sometimes secure better individual and social conditions.

We hope that these narratives rich with descriptive and explanatory power today and in the future serve as a medium for discourse among authors, readers and the community of helping professions; and that this discourse will strengthen and expand community bonds.

Helping professions are moral professions. A story about practice in the context of this journal is a professional's account of her/his experience seeking to enhance the quality of life, strengthen human and social relations and develop a society that fosters these purposes and supports the outcomes. There are many thoughtful practice stories without public platform.

Narrative inquiry can accommodate a wide range and variety of accounts that describe success and failure. We are committed to publishing narratives of all the helping communities.

Certainly a first editorial ought to be welcoming its current and potential readers and blowing its own tuba. Consider this editorial our toot.



Dear Readers :

Usually letters printed on these pages will come from you. We look forward to your responses. As in all human transactions feedback shapes your being and grounds your endeavors. Getting letters is also great fun. We may not always like what you say or use your suggestions, but it is exciting to go to your jam-packed mailbox thick with news, gossip, critical reviews and subscriptions from you.

Sincerely,

Sonia L. Abels

Acknowledgments:

REFLECTIONS came into many persons' hands. The staff of the Social Work Department, Field Coordination and Child Welfare supported its production.

Dr. Patricia Lauer, Laurel Opalinski, Linda Liu, James Ferreira, Pamela Ford and Deborah Repp.
Other Helpers: Dr. Simeon Crowther, Director, University Press, Roman V. Kochan, Assistant Vice President, and Henry J. Dubois, Acting Associate Director, Library.

Printed and designed by CSULB Graphic Communication Services, Eric H. Strauss and Joy Shneider