

Reflections from the Editorial Team: The Power of Creative Expression

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

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 26 number 3 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. In this issue we are excited to introduce our newly released Permanent Call for Poetry, Art & Photography as yet another way of embracing the power of creative expression for which *Reflections* is so well known. Most importantly we highlight 10 thoughtful and evocative narratives by authors who write from the vantage points of practitioners, students, clients, educators, and researchers. Their rich accounts of lived experiences across diverse settings gather momentum as they engage us in their respective journeys.

Keywords: creative expression, poetry, art, photography, professional development, journey

If there was ever a time for reflection, a craving for justice, and a need to find opportunities for creative expression, that time is now. In the midst of a global “reckoning,” we hope you will join us in reimagining the ways in which *Reflections* can provide a platform for sharing what can be taught and learned and enacted for the betterment of humankind.

We want to begin by thanking so many people who have made the publication of *Reflections* possible, followed by our thoughts on reimagining the ways in which *Reflections* can better serve. Finally, we will provide a brief overview of the articles in this issue and the interconnected themes that emerge.

Thanking and Welcoming Team Members

We have so many people to thank, and we have new team members to introduce. How fortunate we are to be part of *Reflections*!

We are thrilled with the response our Guest Editors Elizabeth “Beth” Russell, Pamela Viggiani, and Debra Fromm Faria received from their Call for Manuscripts on Cultural Humility, leading to two full issues on this important subject. We hope you have had a chance to read these compelling narratives. In addition, much appreciation goes to Patricia Gray, Lead Guest Editor for a Special Issue on Continuing Education slated to come out in late 2020.

Many thanks to those student team members who work so diligently behind-the-scenes in the copyediting and production functions of *Reflections*. Our deepest gratitude goes to Zoey Pincelli (Copyeditor) and Geetha Somarouthu (Assistant Copyeditor) who moved articles through copyediting into the summer of 2020. Special appreciation goes to Sarah Valek, Michael Dover’s Graduate Assistant, who worked with Mike on reading final copy and issuing galley proofs in the production process. Excellent work, Zoey, Geetha, and Sarah!

Continued thanks again to Robin Richesson for her years of service as Art Director for *Reflections* and for the cover of this issue.

A special thanks goes to our Section Editors who volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. Much appreciation goes to Section Editors Jon Christopher Hall (Practice) and Beth Lewis (Field Instruction) who are continuing in their respective roles. Section Editors maintain 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 especially acknowledge the significance of what our Section Editors do because we know they have so many other demands in their respective work environments.

We are indebted to Carol Langer who has served so effectively as Section Editor of Teaching & Learning and just this spring has decided to pass the baton to her colleague, Arlene Reilly-Sandoval. We are delighted that Carol has committed to continuing to support *Reflections* by reviewing manuscripts and so appreciative that Arlene has returned and seamlessly stepped in as Section Editor of Teaching & Learning.

We also want to thank Julie Cooper Altman for her work as Section Editor for Research and wish her well as she steps down from her role to take a well-deserved sabbatical. In the interim, Monica Leisey will fill in for Julie.

Reflections would not exist, however, were it not for our authors and reviewers. The importance of the peer review process cannot be over-stated, and dedicated reviewers are critical players in the editorial process. In this issue alone, at least 20 anonymous reviewers provided feedback to the authors. We have begun listing the names of reviewers for each issue at the end of our editorials as a small way to recognize the behind-the-scenes contributions they make. Thank you for the quality and timeliness of your reviews!

In sum, thanks to all the members of the *Reflections* Team. Yours are gifts of dedication and commitment, and we could not do this without you!

Creative Expression During Times of Reckoning

As your Editorial Leadership Team, we are committed to providing a platform from which the unvarnished truth about the persistence of systemic racism and the disparities and inequities that invade and pervade our communities can be raised. We are reimagining the ways in which our journal can better serve. Our upcoming issues will provide opportunities to look more closely at the impact of the “micro” pandemic of COVID-19 and “macro” disparities and inequities through the lens of race and racism.

We remain hopeful that *all of us* discover new and even more meaningful ways to show up for one another in both our spaces of professional practice and our communities at large.

Over the last months we have talked with the Editorial Board—the Section and Guest Editors—about how to open our hearts and minds to an array of creative expressions. In a time when we

are engaged in a worldwide pandemic, heightened racial tensions, and political turmoil, finding multiple ways to express ourselves is critically important. Those expressions are not only meaningful to the readers of *Reflections* but join a multitude of voices of helping professionals who want and need to reach out beyond themselves to share their deepest convictions, feelings, and lived experiences with others. Silence is not an option.

Embracing multiple ways of creative expression caused us to consider the diversity of narrative types that we have always welcomed but have not always fully delineated. Thus, we reframed our instructions for authors to include three types of narratives:

- A first-hand account of one or more authors' experiences
- An interview that highlights another person's experiences
- A review of one or more books in which their relevancy for the helping professions is integrated into a narrative of the author's experiences

Although we have published all three types over the years, it seemed important to recognize that writing for *Reflections* is inclusive of interviews and book reviews as the core around which a narrative emerges. In a [previous editorial](#) on being author-centric, we published guidelines for writing successful narratives, and these guidelines pertain to all three types.

As we talked with Section Editors, Guest Editors, readers, and colleagues during this tragically real and yet surreal time in world and national history, we heard about a proliferation of creative forms of expression in which they and others are engaging. Helping professionals are writing poetry, working on pieces of art, and taking photographs to capture a profusion of emotions crying to be heard. The nurse who is covered in protective equipment, the social worker who is trying to keep long-term care patients safe, the chaplain who trains as a CNA to do "hands-on" care, the physician who watches patients die alone, the immigration attorney who volunteers critical services, the protester who marches during a pandemic, the student who sees their educational experience transformed overnight all have stories to tell. Narratives capture many of those feelings, interactions, and experiences, but it became clear to us that we need to be open to multiple ways of conveying the overwhelming need to connect to others in a world constrained by social distancing and uncertainty. From these realizations and the need to capture these alternative forms of creative expression emerged a new Permanent Call for Poetry, Art & Photography.

Reflections, then, can serve as a vehicle to give prose as well as poetry, narrative as well as art, and writing as well as photography a platform. The poem expressing the heaviness of oppression could join the poetry of hope, the watercolor painting with monochromatic contrast could join the profusion of acrylic color, the photograph of protestors tear-gassed while marching for justice could join a photo of natural beauty that links the environment to the human experience and reminds us that in our ecosystem all life is interconnected. We concluded that all of these expressions could be enwrapped in a contextual paragraph (a mini-narrative) that gives voice to why this creative expression is relevant to the helping professionals.

The Permanent Call for Poetry, Art & Photography is being posted on the *Reflections* website, and these guidelines are provided. This work:

- Is original imaginative work, not yet published in a refereed journal
- Conveys a theme relevant to the helping professions
- Portrays interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, or felt experiences in a creative format
- Sparks engagement, reflection, and meaning-making
- Contains a narrative paragraph that provides the reader with an understanding of what inspired the poet/artist/photographer to produce this creative expression

A review form with these five evaluative criteria has been constructed especially for these submissions. We are so excited to launch this new Permanent Call!

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. If you are using poetry, art, or photography to express yourself, consider submitting your work to *Reflections*. If you know of others who are expressing themselves in creative ways and need an outlet to connect beyond themselves, tell them about our new Call. We want *Reflections* to be a home for an increasingly diverse array of professionals whose lived experiences need to be shared and whose collective wisdom can inspire change.

Highlights of This Issue

Reflections calls for manuscripts by helping professionals who play numerous roles. In this issue, authors write about their experiences as practitioners, students, clients, educators, and researchers. The authors write narratives in which they simultaneously play multiple roles or journey from being a student or client to becoming a practitioner, educator, or researcher. It is through the interface of these roles and the people they meet along the way that their narratives gather momentum and engage us in their journeys.

Three articles begin this issue by enlightening us about journeys in which social workers grow and develop in their empathic abilities to provide services to vulnerable population groups and in their callings to work toward change. Maurici recounts witnessing the devastating effects of poverty, oppression, and inequality endured by children and their families, motivating the author to work in child welfare. As a Title VI Child Welfare Stipend student and a worker within the system post-graduation, Maurici offers candid recommendations to address the stress of working within overloaded systems. Best reveals a journey from being a child in a transnational family, enduring the perils of living in the shadows, to becoming a professional helper. As the author's memories erupt during a meeting with 12 DACA recipients gathered to participate in making a documentary, their hopes and fears are palpable. Cross recounts a field placement experience as a BSW social worker in long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the dilemma between keeping residents safe and casting them into forced isolation, Cross offers insights into how interventions such as telehealth must be tempered with humanity. Based on their deep understandings and their emphatic desires to do no harm, all three authors push

forward recommendations for change within human service, education, and health care systems that place clients in peril and perpetuate disparities.

The next three articles focus on journeys in which the importance of community engagement evolves, rich with illustrations of relationship building and self-awareness. Cast in the role of researcher and storyteller, Eady reveals a passion for working with indigenous peoples of Canada and Australia and refers to qualitative research as “data with a soul” (p. 45). Eady likens researchers, who drop into beautiful isolated regions to gather data and leave too quickly, to seagulls flying in and making a mess before they fly away. Drawn to Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Matthew, Ward, and Robinson reflect on the tremendous amount of time it takes to truly engage with community members and the importance of communication and relationship building. Their lived experiences provide a backdrop for illustrations that highlight the depth of their passion and lead to an invitation to dialogue about the alignment of CBPR with professional values. O’Connor and Jones round out this trilogy of articles that focus on a journey into deeper understandings of community. In their narrative they advocate for the incorporation of humane education, in which human rights, environmental preservation, and animal protection are aligned with social work. Infused throughout these three articles is a reverence for humankind, the environment, and all species.

The following two articles beautifully align with the community engagement theme, focusing on the development of curriculum that will engage students as co-learners in their educational journey. Wilfong’s article is particularly relevant in a world that is being propelled into virtual learning, writing about the challenges an educator feels when trying to ensure connectivity in the virtual classroom. Designing a distance education course in macro practice is described with excellent examples of activities that captivate student interest. Similarly, Ward and Daniels find ways to offer field supervision using a more inclusive approach. Faced with the challenge of integrating theory into practice for BSW field students, the authors reach out by developing activities that motivate students to learn. These articles offer sound advice to supervisors and instructors who are searching for ways to enhance BSW and MSW student learning.

The last two articles in this issue are deeply intimate, opening windows along the iterative journey of healing that reveal raw emotions and challenges faced by the authors as they engage in the very personal journey of introspection and what it means for who they are as professional helpers. Woods begins by asking the question: “Who offers the wounded healer a bouquet of roses instead of ashes?” (p. 97). Recounting lived experiences of accumulated loss and trauma, Woods, in the role of client, reinforces the importance of the therapeutic relationship on the road to professionalization and how the healer is transformed to walk beside others on their integrated journey. Equally intimate is Lean’s narrative. Beginning with a beloved father’s inspiration to pursue a career and his death, the author finds “little cause for celebration” (p. 102) in completing a doctoral dissertation. Stepping out of the comfort zone of Lean’s private self, and retrospectively analyzing the experience, reveals how critically important a loving partner is in one’s journey. Both authors reinforce the power of human relationships in the journey of becoming.

Permeating the articles in this issue is a thirst for meaningful relationships—how those relationships influence our development, are embedded in our identities, enwrap us in

community, and sustain us in our journeys. The authors embrace us as readers by revealing their deepest memories and lived experiences in rich detail, telling us about the choices they have made and the insights they have gained. Some are deeply personal, whereas others are loaded with wisdom gained from community engagement and interpersonal collaboration.

We trust that you will find this issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narratives that offer insights that will be useful to educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!!

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 especially thank these reviewers who contributed their time and invaluable assistance to *Reflections* V26(3):

Michel A. Coconis; Harriett L. Cohen; Nancy M. DeCesare; C. Lee Anne Deegan; James Angelo Forte; Michele Hanna; Brenda McQuillan; Felicia M. Mitchell; Sarah Morton; Phu Phan; Edward Randle; Dina A. Gamboni; Arlene Reilly-Sandoval; Bharati Sethi; Johanna Slivinske; Marian Swindell; Amie Thurber; Alma M. O. Trinidad; Lara Vanderhoff; Christine Walsh

We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors!!

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- \$250 or more - FRIEND FOR LIFE
- \$1000 or more - A THOUSAND THANKS

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