

Reflections from the Editorial & Publishing Teams: Our New Publishing Home

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and Beth Massaro

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 29(3) includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and our new Publisher at Salem State University. We follow this update by recognizing how *Reflections* is built around an multidisciplinary community of reviewers, authors, volunteers, students, and educators engaged in the enterprise of supporting a platform for narrative writing and creative expression. In this General Issue we are excited to introduce 13 engaging articles in which stories about personal and professional relationships influence our sense of community and impact every aspect of our lives. Beginning with articles on personal interactions and experiences that form us, our authors take us into educational and practice settings in which it is imperative to form cohesive bonds that sustain us as professional helpers.

Keywords: community-building, engagement, relationships, virtual communities, narrative writing

So much has happened in the last year!! It is with great pleasure that we announce that *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping* has a new publishing home at [Salem State University School of Social Work](#).

Reflections: Our New Home

As of May 2023, Salem State University School of Social Work became the third publishing institution in the 28-year history of *Reflections*. From its inception in 1995, as started by visionary social work professor Sonia Leib Abels and her husband Paul Abels, through Volume 18(1) in 2012, *Reflections* was published by California State University Long Beach School of Social Work. From May 2012 until May 2023, Cleveland State University School of Social Work published the journal, a tenure that spanned Volume 18(2) through Volume 28(3). We are forever grateful to our former publishers who helped *Reflections* become the journal it is today, and we are excited about the journey ahead with Salem State University. We are especially grateful to our former Publisher, Christopher A. Mallett, Director of the Cleveland State School of Social Work, for his valuable support in transitioning us to our new home.

The Salem University School of Social Work, along with Associate Dean and *Reflections* Publisher Beth Massaro, is collaborating with the [Frederick E. Berry Library](#) and departments across the University to continue the journal's multi-disciplinary commitment to individual and collective discovery and action through the power of narrative.

To quote Beth Massaro, our new Publisher:

Salem State University School of Social Work is honored to be stepping into the role of Publisher for *Reflections*. With all the challenges and changes we face today in our

world, it is critical that we share our stories with each other and hear all voices across the array of helping professions and from all social identities. We will maintain that endeavor as Publisher of *Reflections* and strive to expand our opportunities to reach more readers, more contributors, and more supporters. (personal communication, June 13, 2023)

As we continue to transition to our new home, we can't say enough about how our Lead Copyeditor Jack Pincelli presses on, moving articles forward as *Reflections* Issues are prepared for publication. In addition, a special thanks goes to Justin Snow, Salem State's Digital Initiatives Librarian, who is working with us to manage our Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform and to provide the technical expertise that accompanies the publication of an open access journal.

Reflections remains a "labor of love" operating on a "shoestring budget" as we are steadfast in our commitment to making the journal available to anyone without the barrier of subscription prices. Our reviewers, Section Editors, and Editorial Leadership Team are volunteers, helping us keep expenses to a minimum. Therefore, readers, authors, agencies and associations, individual practitioners, and professional schools/programs are invited to serve as **Friends of Reflections** by making a tax deductible donation: salemstate.edu/reflections. Schools, colleges, or universities can become Publishing Partners by making a \$3,000 contribution over a three-year period. Any support you can provide is gratefully appreciated.

Narrative Writing as Community-Building & Engagement

We want to remind everyone that contributions to *Reflections* come in many different forms. Not only do we accept three types of narratives (first-hand accounts of one or more authors' experiences, interviews that highlights another person's experiences, or reviews of one or more books in which their relevancy for the helping professions are integrated into a narrative of the author's experiences); we also encourage *Reflections* authors and readers to submit poetry, artwork, and photography that fit with the journal's purpose and include at least a brief narrative element. We welcome these creative forms of expression that also engage helping professionals in poetic and visual ways to our Calls for Special Themed Issues and our Permanent Sections on Teaching & Learning, Research, Practice, and Practicum Education, formerly known as Field Education. Yes, while we will not require authors to change their language, we are acknowledging the ongoing conversation in the social work community, here and moving forward renaming our Permanent Section to Practicum Education. Moreover, we welcome your suggestions and contributions for future journal covers.

It is exhilarating to read more and more accounts of how reflexive dialogue and narrative writing are being taught in secondary schools as well as in colleges and universities! We are always willing to work with authors who have been schooled in writing for conventionally structured journals. *Reflections* is also a home for those who have not written before for a professional journal. We seek personal narratives which convey interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and felt experiences wherein the author is clear about her/his/their positionality where a story is told that that helps readers discover new ways of thinking.

Just as Spence and colleagues (2021) plead for narrative writing to be a part of middle and high school education, we are encouraged to find resources at the college level that provide guidance on how to advocate for and teach classes about narrative writing. For example, Pawlowski (2019) wrote a chapter on creating a brave space for classroom writing and goes into great detail on developing ground rules.

Remein and colleagues (2022) conducted a study on the increasing popularity of narrative-based education in academic colleges of health sciences in which storytelling “has gained credence across the professional spectrum ... where the emphasis on fact-gathering quantifiable data cannot suffice for the development of qualities such as empathy, communication, teamwork, and professionalism” (pp. 265–266). These authors go on to write about the development of a narrative writing session for interprofessional faculty in health sciences.

At another university, Paige et al. (2020) write about retreating “from the safe space of professionalism to the brave space of community” (p. 19) when a diverse group of students and administrators on one college campus engaged in a writing boot camp in which they grappled “with the complexities of life and work ... coping with grief, navigating personal and professional demands, searching for purpose and celebrating [their] collective resilience” (p. 20).

Fortunately, the encouragement of writing in a narrative form is not confined to students in school and university settings. In the practice arena, Boncori and Smith (2019) do not mince words as they advocate for “honest, embodied, fragile narratives [that] can provide more kaleidoscopic and insightful understanding of life in organizations” (p. 75). And we are heartened to see more and more educators and practitioners elaborating on how narrative writing can be a form of self-care in a format that contains “emotions that can invoke insights and empathy unlike the impersonal descriptions of conventionally structured and written journal articles” (Hurd & Singh, 2021, p. 354).

We want *Reflections* to be a brave space of belonging in which multiple voices are welcomed, where divergent views can be expressed, where emotions can be provoked, and where we are challenged to consider alternative ways of thinking or are introduced to topics we haven’t known about before. Join us as we continue to move *Reflections* into the future!!

Highlights of This Issue

In this issue practitioners, students, and faculty members from social work, occupational therapy, education, and nursing share their stories about personal and professional relationships and how those connections with family members, clients, peers, colleagues, and educators have influenced and continue to influence their lives. Seeds of wisdom about community-building, engagement with others, and how close interpersonal and virtual relationships are formed and sustained are incorporated throughout these rich narratives.

The first three articles in this issue are written by helping professionals who share heart-rending personal experiences that have profoundly shaped their lives and career choices. As the daughter

of a father with mental health challenges Yue embeds the metaphor of roots, blossoms, and seeds into a narrative that moves from uprootedness to blossoming as a pediatric mental health occupational therapist. The author shares seeds of wisdom for professionals dedicated to equitable systems of care. Collins, Walsh, and Tam reflect on the life journey of a partner diagnosed with secondary PTSD desperately searching for healing. Their story is honest in exposing the raw feelings that accompany the painful quest for self-care. Sawyerr shares the depth of emotion evoked when a sister is murdered and the overwhelming grief that surrounds a tragic loss. The nonlinear nature of bereavement ebbs and flows as the story is told. All three articles point to the complexity of life-altering experiences that are tempered by the courage to give voice to their stories so that others may learn from the seeds they have gathered in finding meaning in their journeys.

Facing the disruptions of COVID-19 in the world of practice in social work and in education is a theme in the next three articles. English brings us a narrative poem on how the lockdown of long-term care communities thrust residents and their relationships into a purgatory of isolation. Writing about a reunion with a nursing home resident whom the author first met when conducting dissertation research reminds us of how vital human contact is to quality of life. Allen and Leff elaborate on the experiences social work practitioners faced under unbearable working conditions in long-term care settings as COVID-19 protocols overwhelmed them. They reflect on the importance of healing rituals designed to overcome psychological and emotional stress while simultaneously recognizing how staff are often left without support or a place to share their grief. Similarly, Sars and Laloo recount how a student teacher's introduction into the South African education system during the height of the pandemic transformed their thinking about under-resourced schools and shaped their professional journey. The authors acknowledge how important it is to have strong mentors and professional role models to support growth and development of student learners.

Three articles in this Issue reveal the ways in which professional learning communities were built and sustained even as COVID-19 changed the face of social work education. First, Goldkind, Slayter, Parga, and Shelly write about #SWEDUACTS, a collective designed to deepen experience through digital activism and organizing for social justice issues during the pandemic. Using a roots, sprouts, and seed metaphor, the authors describe the process of developing an engaged community of educators dedicated to anti-racist pedagogies.

Two articles are written by cohorts of social work doctoral students who used narrative writing as a method to convey the importance of community-building and the creativity it took to enter new programs without the benefit of face-to-face interaction. Fogel, Nourie, Rosado, and Gilyard focus on the importance of recruiting diverse students to social work practice and education. Recognizing the importance of cohort cohesion for PhD students, the cohort entering as the pandemic spread were presented with incredible barriers and had to rethink how to build relationships so necessary to the learning process. Similarly, another cohort of PhD students, Woodiwiss, Graves, Pless, Dodd, and Afroz, write a collaborative autoethnography based on their lived experiences as they discovered strategies used to form community when face-to-face contact was not an option. They provide insights into how cohorts found ways to create relationships amid formidable odds.

Sensitivity to diverse learners is the focus of the next two articles in this Issue. Sniatecki and Ashton write about how the pandemic transformed their thinking about access to education and services by persons with disabilities. Acknowledging how comfortable educators can become with the methods they use, the pandemic required creative thinking about how to deliver course content in different ways, ways that were actually more inclusive of persons who had faced accessibility issues when classes only met face-to-face. Recognizing the stress Latinx students were having as the pandemic posed life changes, Feize writes about how the introduction of a new assignment, the drawing of mandalas daily for a month, provided an avenue for self-expression and self-awareness. The voices of Feize's students resound throughout this article and offer a method to practice trauma-informed education.

The specific mental health needs of population groups that reside in rural, often under-resourced areas is addressed in our final two articles. Rosario and Riebschleger reflect on working with rural migrant school children and their families. Particularly attending to the mental health needs of Latinx children and the challenges they face, the authors offer practice recommendations based on their experiences. Hollingsworth, a nurse, focuses on tensions between Native recipients of medical care who neither trust nor wish to engage with a dominant culture's health care system and poses penetrating questions about the need for Native practitioners. Raising awareness of the issues is combined with a recognition of how much work needs to be done to recruit and sustain personnel as well as to build trust between Native patients and white health care providers.

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!!

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With Gratitude...

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