



Introduction

Reflections: Defining Community/Building Theories

Community is a tricky word: although it often connotes an inclusive and harmonious collaborative space, too often it signifies a site of struggle and negotiation, an attempt to find a common framework for conflicting and seemingly contradictory impulses. One of the marks of those active in “community literacy studies,” “service-learning” and “engaged scholarship” is the desire to place themselves in the struggle to build a common framework for collaboration and, within that architecture, to move forward towards building a shared notion of educational, social, and/or political rights.

Over the past six years, the United States has seen its sense of community imploded, rebuilt, fractured, and potentially rebuilt again. For many in our field, these challenges have called us to rethink our identities as scholars, teachers, community members, and citizens. The work which has resulted speaks not only to the ability of individuals working in common to respond to crises large and small, but also to the ability of our field to revise its pedagogical, scholarly, and programmatic commitments.

For the next three issues, *Reflections* will focus on the work undertaken in response to the recent national crises that have tested our understanding of community and community responsibility – Hurricanes Katrina/Rita, the War on Terror, and the debates over undocumented workers. While it is impossible to capture the full complexity of each moment, we hope to publish work that speaks to the multiple ways in which individuals and programs responded. In the process, we hope *Reflections* can demonstrate how the immediate and the long-term can stand in productive dialogue with each other. By juxtaposing efforts in response to sudden and dramatic needs, such as the crisis of Hurricane Katrina/Rita, with community-based work undertaken over a longer trajectory, we hope it becomes clear that each immediate crisis also speaks to systemic issues that precede and

unfortunately extend beyond the current moment. In this way, we hope that *Reflections* will demonstrate the multiple levels on which we must consistently act.

This focus on national crises will culminate with a special issue focused on theorizing the nature of community-based work in the current moment, edited by Ellen Cushman and Jeff Grabill. We will also publish a special on-line issue, edited by the Publicly Active Graduate Education Collective, focused on how the next generation of scholars understands its civic role as professors and citizens. (To see full descriptions of each issue, visit our website at <http://reflections.syr.edu>.)

Throughout each issue, we will aim to represent the full scope of intellectual work that emerges out of community/public school/university projects. For this reason, *Reflections* will continue its tradition of publishing a wide range of materials – scholarly articles, community studies, personal memoir, and photography – by a wide range of writers and individuals who are based in public school, academic, and community settings. In conjunction with traditional academic articles, we intend to feature student papers, photographic projects, oral histories, and other artifacts that represent the power of a particular project. By doing so, we believe *Reflections* can demonstrate the variety of voices, genres, and styles that mark community literacy.

As you read this issue on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and reflect upon the topics of four forthcoming issues, we hope you will consider not only work you might have produced in response to these national events, but also how other aspects of your work related to such longer-term issues as public schools, queer politics, urban poverty, disability rights, and homelessness might also intersect with and expand our understanding of community. We hope that *Reflections* can provide a forum for all the competing and complimentary elements that distinguish our efforts to build community.

None of these plans would be possible, however, without the efforts of departing *Reflections* Editor Barbara Roswell. As *Reflections* looks

forward, then, I want to acknowledge and express my gratitude to Barbara for work as Editor and to recognize her success in making *Reflections* a nationally respected journal. As I begin my term as Editor, I hope to work with the *Reflections* Editorial Board to ensure this progress continues. I am also very happy to welcome August Tarrier as Associate Editor and I want to express my gratitude for her willingness to sign on to the work ahead.

I also want to acknowledge Jan Cohen-Cruz, James McDonald, and Nancy Richard, without whose support in reaching out to the wide range of individuals and institutions this particular issue would not have been possible. I am also grateful to the *Journal of College Writing* and *South Central Review* and the *Journal for Civic Commitment* for allowing us to republish several articles. I hope the generosity and sense of collaboration demonstrated by these individuals and organizations will inform the spirit and ethos of *Reflections* in the years to come.

Kristi Johnson, George Rhinehart, Chris Palmer, Louanne Payne, and Beth Wagner have been vital in developing a solid infrastructure for the journal. As you visit our website, explore our online archive, read announcements on our listserv, pay your subscription dues on-line, and receive the journal in the mail, you should know their hard work and problem solving capabilities made this smooth operation possible. Denise Valdes, *Reflections* Graduate Intern, has also provided valuable insight into the emerging intellectual vision of the journal. I am grateful for all their efforts

Finally, I want to thank Eileen Schell, who as Chair of the Writing Program ensured that the institutional support necessary to take on this work was made available, and through her work at Nottingham Senior Living Community, has demonstrated how community-partnership work should be undertaken.

Steve Parks
Editor, *Reflections*