

Editors' Farewell

Laurie Grobman,
Penn State Berks
& Deborah Mutnick,
Long Island University
Brooklyn

More often than not, coming to the end of things is bittersweet. As we look back on our three years co-editing *Reflections*, we are proud of the issues we published, the authors we came to know, the amazing editorial and production team we assembled, and the effort we put into developing a set of tangible guidelines to pass along to our successor(s). We are especially happy about this year's anniversary issue, which we feel makes a unique contribution to the field. At the same time, we regret what we did not or could not do: the manuscripts we failed to solicit, the possibilities we did not realize, the energies that went untapped. And while we look forward to a bit more time, released from the hard labor of editing a journal, we will miss the excitement and rewards of working with authors, copy editors, our graphic designer, and everyone else who participates in bringing an issue into the world.

Top of our list of priorities for our final editorial is to congratulate the guest editors of this issue— Maria Novotny, Lori Beth De Hertogh, and Erin Frost—for an exceptional special issue that could not be more timely on the rhetorics of reproductive justice. Next is to reflect on what we learned these past three years and can share with *Reflections* readers about the state of community-engaged writing and rhetoric, the rewards and challenges of editing a pioneering journal in the field, and the questions the experience has raised for us. Last is to thank the many people who have made our work as co-editors possible, contributed to improving the journal's quality and impact, and continually reminded us what we love best about writing in, about, and with communities.

We came on board with the primary goals of (1) increasing readership; (2) exploring the possibilities of online access based on research on benefits and drawbacks; (3) maintaining the quality of published articles and essays and the integrity of the peer review process; (4) working more closely with the *Reflection's* Editorial Board, consulting with board members on questions like the name change of the journal's subtitle and recruiting new members; and (5) editing the 20th anniversary issue of the journal (Spring 2020), which we knew would come at the end of our three-year term. To what extent did we achieve these goals? There are some objective measures, such as the fact that *Reflections* is now an open access journal and there are new names on the list of Board members. Some analytical data about readership and quality of published work was gathered in two excellent articles in the anniversary issue by [Chao et al.](#) and [Patton and Presley](#). How well we realized other goals will be best assessed by authors, reviewers, guest editors, and readers.

What did we learn these past three years as editors of *Reflections*? Perhaps the hardest lesson was the trial-by-error knowledge we had to acquire to edit a non-flagship journal with little supporting infrastructure. We were fortunate that our immediate predecessor, Cristina Kirklighter, was always there to offer assistance even before we asked, and we are truly grateful for her help. We were also helped by Jess Pauszek, who stayed on as Associate Editor and brought two of her graduate students on as assistant editors: Megan Opperman and Trenton Judson. We added Katelyn Lusher as an assistant editor,

and we lucked out when Heather Lang answered our call for a web editor: her redesign of the website and assistance in the transition to becoming an open access journal have been invaluable. Tobi Jacobi, who stayed on as book review editor for one issue, guided the transition to Romeo Garcia's leadership as book review editor; Romeo has consistently worked with writers to continue the journal's strong record of book reviews. Finally, we are indebted to graphic designer Elizabeth Parks, whose long association with the journal accounts for its consistently excellent design, and our two exceptional copyeditors, Susannah Clark and Anna Fleming. We also strengthened our ties to *Community Literacy Journal* as the Conference on Community Writing emerged as a major force in the subfield, providing a home to both publications.

Yet, it took us almost a year to understand how the journal worked—how to manage subscriptions, EBSCO, PAYPAL, peer review, a timetable, copyediting, design, printing, mailing, the website, passwords, and of course, funding. Probably the trickiest of all was sharing a joint email account; even after we came up with a system (Laurie answers last names A-L; Deborah answers M-Z), we scrambled to keep up with what seemed like an endless stream of electronic correspondence. And have we mentioned how much of our time was spent on emails?

We managed some of these issues—subscriptions, mailing, and to an extent, budget, for example—by transitioning to open access. We are pleased we did so because so many more people have access to the journal, but it was another huge learning curve for both of us. We had no idea the amount of labor required to take that leap into the journal's future. Fortunately, because Laurie is at Penn State, we were able to become part of Penn State University's digital publications, which meant we had tremendous support from Ally Laird, Open Publishing Program Specialist, and others as well as no associated costs.

Part of the move to open access meant archiving all the content in previous issues of *Reflections* (approximately 450 articles)! In another herculean task, Jessica Pauszec and her team of graduate students reached out to as many past *Reflections* authors as possible to obtain

Creative Commons licenses. Heather Lang followed by tagging each article with its specific licensing agreement.

One of the other challenges of editing the journal was that we were totally unprepared for the efforts needed on our part to solicit submissions. We were surprised by how many submissions came in from disciplines unrelated to writing and rhetoric (many of these were reflective essays on service learning projects in other disciplines).

Beyond what we learned about the demanding, sometimes frustrating, ultimately deeply rewarding material labor of editing a small but vital journal, we discovered anew the variety of partnerships, projects, and courses that constitute community engaged writing, the diversity of theoretical approaches and research methods practitioners and researchers utilize, and the ongoing struggles in the field to make good on our own rhetoric of standing up for social and economic justice. Perennial questions remain of how best to develop reciprocal relations with community partners; identify and resist structural racism, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression; and confront asymmetrical power relations as they arise in our institutions, classrooms, journals, and communities.

We also could see the continued, idealistic belief (or hope) that community-engaged writing—and writing studies generally—can render systemic social change. While we would not say that education and teaching writing and writing practices in particular don't work to support social movements, editing the journal reinforced our conviction that, as teachers of writing and as community-engaged writing practitioners, our work in the academy and surrounding communities is not a substitute for engagement in social movements. The energies of such movements don't begin with education—quite the reverse—that is, it is social change movements that transform the academy and us.

At the same time, we highlight the special issue on prison writing, co-edited by Tobi Jacobi and Wendy Hinshaw, which marks the second time the journal published an issue on prison writing—the first issue in 2004 was also co-edited by Tobi. *Reflections'* renewed focus on prison writing underscores the urgency of the work done by members in

our field with incarcerated men and women, reinforced this year both by their vulnerability to COVID-19 and the continuing protests against structural racism and police brutality that arose in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others accompanied by calls to defund and demilitarize police and abolish prisons.

We were delighted by every issue we published and thank all the authors we worked with for their contributions to them. Indeed, undoubtedly our favorite role as editors was in developing relations with authors, particularly graduate students and recently appointed assistant professors on the tenure track, and in the dialogic relations we felt—and we hope they felt—we had in the process of taking a manuscript from the review process to final publication. We enjoyed working closely with our many great authors and we embraced our role as mentors, as Cristina Kirklighter had let us know she had done before us. Many of the submissions we got were from graduate students and junior faculty, and we found it immensely gratifying to be part of emerging scholars' successes.

The anniversary issue had been in the back of our minds since we began our editorship in 2018. When it suddenly came time to put out a call for submissions, that contradictory sense of time—that it goes slowly in the middle and speeds up ridiculously fast at the end of any given period—gave us the advantage of now having edited the journal we had previously only read and contributed to as authors. Nevertheless, we scrambled to assemble articles that would do justice to what was, in our view, a significant anniversary not only for the journal but for the field of community-engaged writing. The results are recent and can be accessed on our website at [*Reflections'* 20th Anniversary Issue](#). All in all, we found the process of working with former editors, especially founding editor Barbara Roswell, and contributors, as well as with authors new to the journal, who read it with fresh, critical eyes, both illuminating and exhilarating.

As we sign off on this last editorial, we also want to note we are both continuing our participation in the excellent work of *Reflections* as board members and look forward to working closely with interim

editors Steve Parks and Jess Pauszec. The search for new editors to succeed us, we are sure, will be responsive to grassroots demands in the field to redress issues of structural racism and lack of diversity among editors, editorial boards, and other power structures in academia, including who gets published and cited and who influences the direction of writing studies and the subfield of community writing. Although we will be leaving our position as editors, we look forward to in-depth conversations about editorship that concretely examine these issues.

Finally, we note that we have been acquaintances for many years, but now we have a deep and abiding friendship. We laughed (and moaned) a lot together, and this kind of connection, too, is one of the rewards of editorship.