

Editor's Introduction

Cristina Kirklighter,
*Texas A & M University—
Corpus Christi*

Why do you care to do this work?" from Eli Goldblatt's presentation was one quote of many I wrote down during the Conference on Community Writing. "What would it mean to build an engaged infrastructure that cultivates a flow milieu even while connected to institutions that tend to disrupt it?" was another after listening to Paul Feigenbaum's keynote address. He used the word "serendipity" that I referred to in a previous introduction and took it to another level by saying our community engagement interactions fueled by our passions lead to more than happy coincidences. I couldn't agree more. When we care about our work as engaged scholars, teachers, and activists, when we participate and collaborate in the "flow milieu" of engaged voices, when we find ourselves connecting with like-minded passionate folks, something beautiful and meaningful happens. After experiencing all of this, not just at the Conference on Community Writing in Colorado, but a few weeks earlier in an interdisciplinary setting at the Engaged

Scholarship Consortium Conference hosted by Penn State, I have determined we have another word that describes what happens in these spaces. It takes a form of synchronicity—something Carl Jung, physicists, musicians, dancers, Native Americans, and others think about. Maybe, the birds with their mysterious synchronicities in flight provide clues. Maybe, it's a synchronicity we might hear with music—jazz in particular—a feeling of synchronicity not to be so intellectualized as to why it's happening among community engaged folks but knowing intuitively it's there and responding to it. And, we seem to be fine with just feeling the energy, the connections, the flow, and experiencing this synchronicity. Maybe, such conferences and other community engaged settings have these elements because we are interested in fusions of many communities and enjoy participating in the synchronous interactions whether in the form of storytelling, our live discussions before/during/after conference sessions, social media interactions, research, writings, and, dare I say it, our "reflections." I'm sure there are many more I haven't mentioned. Are there disruptions that temporarily throw us off a bit? Yes, but this is inevitable and sometimes spawns new synchronicities. Does it make us different? Yes, but gauging from the smiles meter, we seem happy in these environments and in our synchronous elements.

Synchronicity also happens working with others on a community engagement journal or an issue. So, join us as I and others participate/describe/reflect on a synchronous journey.

A little over two years ago, I attended my first Engaged Scholarship Consortium Conference in Lubbock, Texas as part of a community engagement journal editors' panel. Had I ever met community engagement journal editors outside my discipline before I attended this conference? Shamefully, I had not until this conference, but I was intrigued sitting in that room—wondering what they were going to say. I had a feeling I was the new kid on this journal panel's block and folks in this room probably didn't know much about *Reflections*. Turned out, for the most part, I was right. I was sitting next to a well-dressed, relaxed, African American woman who had this composure and confidence about her I wanted to have as I nervously scanned my paper. Yes, she could see this over prepared relatively new journal editor overcompensating in unfamiliar surroundings,

and I remember she smiled at me, joked a bit, and put me at ease. Her name was Dr. Cassandra Simon from the University of Alabama, and everyone at that conference knew her journal, *The Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, distributed to every member of this conference. I thought to myself—well this must be some journal to have this kind of support and distribution. Turned out I was right and astonished when I heard it's only been in existence since 2008. Turned out she was the founding editor, and she was going on her fifth year as editor when I met her. When she described her journal emphasizing the importance of including community voices, student voices, and encouraging community engagement scholars to write in accessible and reflective ways for their multiple audiences, as well as her vision of giving voice to those who believed in social justice, the synchronicity between us began. Our relationship became a series of synchronous moments each time we presented and talked. Her responses to the questions added more synchronicity. Here's just a few of her responses that I anticipate will especially resonate with readers:

“How much do we value community partners and students in the telling of their stories?”

“A critical part of our approach is making sure that not only can the academic community be a consumer of our research, but also can those whom this research is often written.”

“I've made it clear that I think the primary purpose of the work that we do is to contribute in positive ways to society and the world we live in.”

“So, thanks to my mother who continues to counsel and support me, who made me feel proud of each difficulty we overcame in our lives, and who showed me how to make a difference in the world.”

“It is because of her that I dare not let my work be separate from me and my life experiences, no matter how far I might ‘improve’ my circumstances.”

I would say that “the first Black valedictorian in the history of Lake Charles High School” from Lake Charles, Louisiana has continued to break barriers and serves as a role model for folks aspiring to create bridges between community engagement partners, students, and faculty in scholarship as we work to redefine this area within and outside of academia.

A few months back I was pondering whether to do a special issue focused on Katrina 10 years later, but I had this back log of submissions and realized a general issue was best given these circumstances. Before I became editor, I contributed an essay eight years earlier to a special issue devoted to Katrina. My research over these past few years has focused on New Orleans and the Latino/a communities there, many of whom experienced Katrina. My research also led me to work with Willma Harvey, our Associate Editor, who left Gulfport, Mississippi and went to Corpus Christi after Katrina. Throughout the years, our interests have grown for researching and getting to know Afro-Latinos/as and Latinos/as from this area. Over the years, we’ve encountered fascinating synchronicities with these communities. Around this time of agonizing on how important Katrina was and how it should be represented in this issue, Daphne Cain submitted a manuscript entitled “Katrina: Reflections on a Social Work Career 10 Years Later.” I read it immediately and discovered it was not only beautifully written, but well researched and a manuscript that resonated with our *Reflections* identity. I sent it out and, as expected, others thought so too. What is her article about? She says it best in these two sentences: “I was asked to volunteer in a local hospital emergency room with highly traumatized evacuees, and I, not unlike many other relief workers, developed Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) symptoms. To cope and heal, I turned to scholarship and research.” After I read her experiences with STS and the healing process from her scholarship and research focusing on the traumatized, as well as the help provided by many religious communities in the area including her synagogue, I couldn’t help but think how her journey might help some of our readers dedicated to working with certain communities who also have PTSD. I thought about Jeff Duncan-Andrade, an Oakland, California high school English teacher and activist, who spoke at my campus a couple of years ago. What resonated with me most was when he said some of his Oakland students had higher rates of PTSD than veterans. This

community and similar communities consistently re-experience the traumas of gun violence, poverty, gangs, etc. Some of us as part of our social justice identities work closely with communities similar to Oakland, such as prisoners, the homeless, the displaced, the abused through domestic violence, the mentally ill, survivors of disasters—natural and manmade, and the list goes on. We are most likely not immune from some level of STS as social justice activist writers, communicators, rhetoricians, documentarians, and educators. Most of the readers of *Reflections* cannot claim to be experts in this area. However, Daphne Cain, in her expertise in social work, has something to teach us about disasters and STS through her scholarly and personal journey mentoring us with her “personal and professional growth.” As she says at the end of her article

I cannot say I'm thankful for Katrina. I cannot say that I escaped the trauma of that disaster—natural and manmade. And, I cannot say that I am the same person as I was on August 28, 2005. Katrina has defined my professional life for the past 10 years, and it has been 10 years of growth.

Reading her article provides us ways to learn, reflect, grow, and heal.

Healing also comes from Benji Perin's poem, “My One Good Thing.” As he says in his biography, “In his preclinical years, he was fortunate to have a service opportunity at Bailey-Boushay House, a skilled nursing facility in Seattle, WA.” While Perin was there, he worked with a particular patient, Mr. J. Perin warmed the heart of this patient and his own by singing him country tunes. As he says in his poem, these special moments are something that remind us why we do this work:

It was only a moment I tipped the balance,
But I've been warming my soul on that day
like a secret ember, ever since.

The next article entitled “Assimilative Rhetorics in 19th Century African American Literacy Manuals,” is an archival piece with the three literacy manuals analyzed by Amanda Athon readily available

online. We have included these online manuals on the featured page of our website. During the late 19th century, a large percentage of African Americans in the South were subjected to the gross underfunding of their educations by Southern state governments and thus were at their mercy in many ways. The fear of the educated African American was deeply engrained in the mindset of Southern whites. It wouldn't be until 20 years later until the beginnings of the eventual 5,000 African American Rosenwald schools that eventually dotted the Southern landscape from Maryland to Texas. These schools were funded by African American communities and Julius Rosenwald, who Booker T. Washington encouraged to partially fund these schools. These schools had an important role in providing much more opportunities for an improved African American formal education, especially in rural Southern communities. It wouldn't be until approximately ten years later that the NAACP was formed to begin their long-standing advocacy for African American equality in education. Oftentimes, during the late 19th century, African Americans with limited money and education sought other ways to enhance their education. African American literacy manuals were one way to do so. Amanda Athon's study of these 19th century literacy manuals adds to the important scholarship focused on African American literacy. Unfortunately, as she shows, white publishers had an influence on two of the three literacy manuals and thus these manuals had the purpose of assimilating readers "regarding family, politics, and religion" to the dominant white culture. However, when African Americans had sole authority over the content and publishing during this time, we see far less assimilation: "*Sparkling Gems of Race Knowledge* (1897), written and published solely by James T. Haley, an African American publisher, seems to be the exception, emphasizing a sense of community through point-counterpoints on language used to reference African Americans." African American archival work not only informs us of this significant historical past, but it also helps us understand the present. As Athon states in her article, "The texts raise questions of how our current teaching methods and materials assimilate students to a dominant culture through the idea of bettering oneself through education."

Irene Lietz and Erin Tunney take us on another journey—one also critiquing a dominant culture. This particular journey helps us see the positive outcomes of a feminist approach to service learning that

fosters campus community bystander awareness to curtail “violent dating situations among college students.” Campus sexual assault statistics are alarming as shown in a 2012 issue of *Campus Safety* <http://www.campusafetymagazine.com/article/Sexual-Assault-Statistics-and-Myths>, where we see “Between 20% and 25% of women will experience a completed and/or attempted rape during their college career.” The bystander awareness project, Dionne’s Project for Safe Relationships, was developed because of the death of Dionne Scott-White, a Creative Writing major at Carlow College and mother of three, who was murdered by her partner in a domestic violence incident. Specifically, in certain undergraduate service-learning core curriculum courses, students were taught “theory about dating violence, bystander awareness, and research methods, and to develop a practical service-learning pedagogy.” Who stood to benefit was the campus community itself, as well as the students in these classes who were part of this community. Subsequently, surveys of first-year and sophomore year students were conducted at this small campus to gauge the impact of these bystander awareness strategies. The results demonstrated a significant difference between these two years indicating “the possibility that the training and service-learning activities helped create a shift in campus culture.” Those who participated in these service-learning classes also realized the positive outcomes with their increased knowledge and personal commitment to continuing to raise awareness. Ultimately, such a bystander awareness project serves to support students like Dionne and is a fitting memorial to her and those like her.

Another project similar in context, but in digital form, is Rebecca Hayes’ “VisualizingStreet Harassment”: Mapping the “10 Hours of Walking” Street Harassment Meme.” I was at the Conference of Community Writing’s Flashlab listening to various digital poster presentations, and Hayes was presenting her work (see <http://visualizingstreetharassment.matrix.msu.edu>). I watched when she played “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman,” about a woman’s experiences of sexual harassment in NYC wearing jeans and a crewneck t-shirt. I had instant flashbacks of similar experiences of sexual harassment as a young woman during the 70’s walking around the D.C. area. These are unwanted memories that stayed with me years later. As Hayes points out in her introduction, she’s particularly interested in these urban spaces:

As I watched the video go viral, I became especially interested in one type of response: videos that employ the original video's approach of filming someone walking in public places for extended periods of times to problematize the narrative of the original video and its frameworks based in mainstream, non-profit, white, feminist anti-street harassment activism.

I was fascinated when she showed me her "Mapping the Meme," demonstrating how this video went viral across the globe and created new videos focused not just on sexual harassment, but racial, religious, and other forms. Interestingly, we see little interventions calling out these forms of harassment, which takes us back to Lietz and Tunney's article. I am happy this synchronous moment in the Flashlab put these two works together for both the digital project and the article reinforce the concerns on these issues.

This is a good place in the introduction to share a synchronous moment about our cover photo. As I usually do, I reached out to the contributors of the articles and asked for their feedback on a possible idea for the issue cover. We had some challenges for this issue, but Daphne Cain helped us find the perfect one. John Guillory's Katrina photo with the empty chair not only speaks to Daphne Cain's article based on Katrina, but the empty chair also symbolizes those lost to domestic violence, such as Dionne Scott-White. It also speaks to Rebecca Hayes' project as she stated with the hashtag #theemptychair and its emphasis on sexual violence. Finally, the empty chair could speak to the many African-Americans deprived of a decent education in the 19th century and thus addresses the assimilative issues in Amanda Athon's article.

The first lines of Nick Marino's review of *Women, Writing and Prison* edited by Tobi Jacobi and Ann Folwell states: "*Women, Writing and Prison* is a dangerous book." As one imprisoned writer, Boudicca Burning, puts it, "I write to tell my story in hopes that I move people to feel compassion" (Burning 219). As I read these words from Boudicca Burning and this review, I was reminded of the quote by Nelson Mandela: "Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future." I

like how Marino paints his review in the opening paragraphs with a collage of voices from these women prisoners before describing and analyzing the sections of the book. Marino, a graduate student, also takes us through a reflective journey in a class, where they worked with a women's prison through the Exchange for Change program. Each section of the book is also part of his journey and with it comes an interesting analysis and reflection. I wish we would encourage graduate students to write more reflective analytical book reviews like this one for we have much to learn. Marino ends the review with some poignant statements and analysis:

Through discussions of privilege, identity formation, writing as healing and resistance, and through vivid imagery of the indignity of institutional life, this book rethinks the teaching of community writing practices. The selections in this book show how writing becomes a way of communicating across boundaries of privilege.

A couple of years ago, Cruz Medina published one of his first articles with *Reflections*. Recently, he published his first book, *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop: Examining the Rhetoric of Cultural Deficiency*, and Victor J. Del Hierro has reviewed his book for *Reflections*. Perhaps, one of the most rewarding parts of being an editor of a journal is to know you and others affiliated with the journal played a role in the early stages of someone else's eventual scholarly success. For unfamiliar readers of the word Poch@, it is important to define it early on as Del Hierro does in his review:

For Medina the Poch@ was a trope that “traditionally signified the negative connotation of a ‘cultural traitor’ in the Mexican dialect of Spanish” but now he is seeking to reclaim the word through the work of self-identifying artists who “negotiate the expectations of mainstream audiences, while often subverting these very same assumptions” (15).

As someone who resided and taught in Corpus Christi, Texas for thirteen years, a few hours from the Mexican border, and the home of the infamous Selena, I find it particularly interesting that Medina sees the *Selena* movie as a representation of a “Proto-Poch@” film.

In a poignant scene in the movie, *Selena*, Selena discovers her acceptance by the Mexican community despite the fears her father expresses and her challenges of speaking Spanish. Living in a location a few hours from the Mexican border and thus not quite la frontera according to some living on the border, a location where her father attended segregated schools for Mexican Americans and where speaking Spanish was often forbidden and punished, her father's fear of the "negative connotation" of Poch@ was steeped in cultural, geographical, and generational harsh realities. Selena had different realities from her father that made her less fearful of pushing the boundaries of the Poch@ identity. Del Hierro, as the reviewer, has another gaze of Poch@ as someone from the Juarez-El Paso Borderland from another more contemporary generation as does Cruz Medina who grew up in Southern California in close proximity to the film industry. Unlike Selena's father rooted in Corpus Christi for most of his life, they migrated to different parts of the U.S. and other countries. Del Hierro, in his review, provides a historical context of the origins of Poch@ deriving when he says "In Pre-Colombian history, the Pochteco was a traveling merchant who changed their appearance and method of speaking to adapt to whomever they were getting ready to sell to on their journey." He wishes Medina would focus more on "migration as a rhetorical practice, particularly since the Pochtecos were traveling merchants" and thus a more expansive view of de-colonization. As we think about Poch@ pop, the Pochteco, rascuache, and others, as we think about the perceptions of Poch@ by Selena's father, Selena, Victor J. Del Hierro, and Cruz Medina, we may wish to re-claim some form of Poch@ for ourselves while also realizing, especially when working with communities, how the Poch@ gaze is historical, generational, contextual, situational, and always in flux. As Del Hierro notes at the end of his review describing the importance of Medina's book: "Because of the myriad of experiences and political leanings within the community, the role of the Poch@ becomes vital towards creating a familiar ground for inter-generational belonging within and for Mexicans within the United States."

We end this journey with Kelly Concannon's review of Frankie Condon's *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric*. What does it mean to be a white ally? A couple of issues earlier, Candace Epps-Robertson explored this focus on a Southern

white ally in her interview with Edward Peeples, an ally during some of the most difficult Civil Rights times during the 50's and 60's in Prince Edward County, Virginia. White allies back then were a rarity, and they served as historical role models for future generations. Concannon's review of Condon's book is important because white allies need to mentor others on how to become one, since "antiracist work is incomplete, messy, disruptive and uncomfortable." Apology and shame are not acceptable forms of being a white ally. Instead, as Concannon notes about Condon's words, white allies need to know "how to be more critical, mindful, open, and present." This reminds me of the different psychological stages of awareness for white allies discussed in Beverly Tatum's article "Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope." Concannon discusses the questions Condon raises for white allies, questions that take us back in a synchronous way to the beginning of this introduction with Eli Goldblatt's words "Why do you care to do this work?" In constructing "their narratives of antiracist activism, [and] she begins the chapter by exploring the following questions: who are you? Why do you do this work?" "Joining the band" requires white ally folks "to be mindful, present, honest, and vulnerable." It also seems like good qualities to allow synchronicity to flourish in oneself and in other folks.

So, I invite you now to read this journal issue and experience your own synchronicities. Enjoy the journey!