

# Editor's Introduction

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

---

---

I will begin this introduction with one of my favorite quotes written by Maya Angelou. I have shared this quote with many friends, family, and colleagues, and I'll share it again. The quote is this one: "Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently." In another quote she says we are not born with courage, but we develop it "by doing small, courageous things." As I reflect on my years of editing this journal, I admit I'm drawn to courageous authors—those willing to take risks and put themselves out there—those who admit to their failures and courageously learn from these failures to better themselves and those around them—those who challenge what we might initially celebrate. Courageous authors help us in our quest for "doing small, courageous things." Courageous authors consistently check their virtues. Courageous authors make up what you'll read in this issue.

Recently, I read a discussion on a listserv concerning whether the personal narrative was appropriate in first-year classrooms focused on argumentation. Some were for it, some were against it, and some were neutral. It's a reoccurring discussion I've seen for many years. I anticipate some of you have noticed a number of *Reflections'* authors intermix narrative and reflections in their scholarly articles as part of their arguments, and you might wonder who encourages them to do so. Well, after reading my introductions, you might not really wonder. As a community engagement journal editor with a personal narrative background both culturally and academically, I do know that narrative elements belong in a journal with the first word of its title "Reflections," and Maya's emphasis on building upon our "small, courageous things" has something to do with it. And, it is scholarly and personal at the same time. Others believe in the power of narrative, reflections, and stories as well. At the recent 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Campus Compact, I attended sessions and a historical keynote session, where the words "stories," "reflections," and "narratives" were emphasized as a critical component to community engagement.

Many of you are familiar with the research and writings of Michelle Hall Kells. You may be familiar with her involvement along with her graduate students in Writing Across Communities (WACommunities) that has blossomed across this country. What you may not know is the deep personal connections of Kells' experiences and her loved ones to this WACommunities journey. The telling of complex journeys such as this one require a complex interweaving of "transgenre resources" as found most often in personal academic essays. When Michelle and I discussed this essay, we both agreed this could be one of her most compelling and strongest writings. When she says that WACommunities had no blueprint in its origins or as it developed, I thought of the personal academic essay which, on the surface, has no blueprint with its journey elements, but there are stark synchronous elements at work just as she said there were in WACommunities. To "interrogate the practice of transcultural citizenship and the transdisciplinary project of Writing Across Communities," another writing form is needed that embraces prose, poetry, criticism, and argument to argue for another kind of rhetoric embedded in WACommunities instead of "neoliberal rhetoric of education as property." Kells and others say the following about WACommunities: "WACommunities is political, seeking to align and

coordinate institutional resources toward enhancing transcultural citizenship and cultivating rhetorical agency among historically excluded groups through writing practices across students' multiple spheres of belonging." She contrasts this with what she saw this past October at the Conference on Community Writing (CCW). Let's go back to Maya's courage quote for a minute. Kells, in her courageous criticism of CCW, was keeping her virtues in check, and we are better for it. Courageous criticism also has a place in improving that which is being criticized, which is her intent. As I've mentioned many times, *Reflections* is about inclusion, and we support those who walk the talk. Michelle is walking in this personal academic essay, so follow her walk as a way of improving what we do in our profession. Others will thank you or eventually thank you for it. Thank you, Michelle, for writing this essay.

As a graduate student, I became enamored with the writings of Paulo Freire. I wasn't just satisfied with reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a work that sometimes academics overuse without paying enough attention to other works, where Freire revises his views on critical literacy and conscientization. Some feminists called him out on his inattentiveness to gender and feminist issues. As an ever evolving human being who readily admitted to his shortcomings in this area, he reflected on his deficiencies/erasures and diligently worked to improve in this area. Those who readily admit to their mistakes also have a good dose of courage and evolve more quickly in taking action to make the necessary changes. We grow as well when we see scholars implement these kinds of revisions to their scholarship and show us how they evolve by listening to those who are different from them.

This is what attracts me to Chris Worthman's case study in "Figuring identities and taking action: The tension between strategic and practical gender needs within a critical literacy program." The beauty of reflective case studies for readers here is not only are they privy to the rich qualitative descriptions of the two Latinas who are studied in a writing group, but the researcher/writer is also present describing his introspective thoughts as a white male academically-credentialed teacher. As a Freirian scholar, teacher, and writer, Worthman implements a critical eye to his role in this study thus providing readers with important insights on his privilege

and limitations. Such an approach of disclosing the researcher's subjectivities, along with implementing a figured world discourse analysis tool focused on these Latinas' stories, provide readers with more opportunities to objectively analyze this case study. By taking this approach, Worthman has some valuable lessons learned for those in critical literacy programs:

Thus, critical literacy programs might better serve participants by casting transformation as change and change as ripe with contingency, and not as a panacea. Thus, in asking participants to critique their "everyday realities," programs should make it a point of honoring those realities as dynamic and meaningful to who participants are and to who they want to become.

While at Campus Compact, I was inspired by Nadinne Cruz's featured presentation. With a title of "Service-Learning Pioneer, Leader, and Loyal Critic," she clearly deserves it after the powerful speech she gave to a packed audience who gave her a standing ovation. What I particularly admired about her speech was how she fulfilled her title as "Loyal Critic." She stated quite directly and eloquently that many community engagement conferences including Campus Compact were becoming just another academic conference. She remembered in the early days of Campus Compact, where a significant amount of time was spent within groups talking about the challenges and breakthroughs of enacting service-learning, community engagement, etc. at their respective campuses. A lot of sharing, mentoring, and strategizing took place or what she calls intellectual rigor rather than just academic presentations. She said back then it was more of a conference focused on intellectual rigor rather than academic rigor. She asked a poignant question whether we in the audience were part of the problem for the next generation. If some of us in this generation are so bogged down in academic rigor because we wish to prove our or the field's worth to the academy by conforming to their definition of rigor at the expense of intellectual rigor, shouldn't we get out of the way so the next generation can focus more on intellectual rigor to help them navigate these complex matters within academia, the community, etc? I'm with Nadinne Cruz on this one and hope she will shake things up a bit for future conferences at Campus Compact and other community engagement conferences.

All of what I'm saying has to do in poignant ways with Jaclyn Wells' next generation article "Transforming Failures into Threshold Moments: Supporting Faculty through the Challenges of Service-Learning." Wells was fortunate to begin her tenure-track job at a university who offered faculty fellowships in service-learning <http://cesr.ua.edu/initiatives/faculty-fellows-in-service-learning/>. At the University of Alabama, Birmingham, an institution with a long history of reaching out to its community, she had an opportunity to consistently meet with a group of interdisciplinary faculty in a series of meetings to learn and discuss the academic facets of service-learning pedagogy so as to help them engage in interdisciplinary intellectually rigorous discussions on how to develop an effective service-learning course. How many of us from my generation wished we had such an opportunity early on in our careers. Well, we do have some from our generation to thank for creating similar programs, and we applaud them for developing fellowships like these that many of us did not experience.

Through Well's autoethnography of her challenging experiences and breakthroughs in this service-learning fellowship program and the service-learning class she developed, she makes a strong case for why three elements of the program were vital to her: "1. Regular meetings with diverse faculty and program leaders, 2. Inclusion of community members' voices in the conversation, and 3. Assumption of future iterations of service-learning projects." Wells extensively used journal writing after fellowship program, community, and student meetings to help her make sense of her experiences and to develop these critical reflections as a way to analyze "shifts in thinking." All three elements she describes above embody the intellectual rigor described by Nadinne Cruz. Simultaneously, we see in the article academic rigor focused on threshold concepts and more at work when she draws on many scholars who help guide and support her journey within and beyond her experiences in the fellowship program, community, and class. We see a healthy balance between intellectual and academic rigor that speaks to what we should encourage our next generation to strive for and support them in any way we can. We should encourage them to use autoethnography and celebrate it as both intellectual and academic scholarship and challenge those who would question such scholarship as not academically rigorous enough. This is one way of serving our next generation.

Another way to serve our next generation in their service-learning classes and beyond is to encourage them to prepare their students for working with communities where code-meshing might be present. Shane Teague's review of Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Martinez's edited collection *Code-Meshing as World English: Pedagogy, Policy, Performance* is a good resource for this preparation. The books reviewed in *Reflections* do not always focus directly on public rhetoric, civic writing, and service-learning, however, they are nonetheless relevant. Here's one relevancy. I'm at a Campus Compact session entitled *Transforming Institutions: Engagement, Equity, and Inclusion* and listening to Tania D. Mitchell's presentation on her research focused on analyzing 50 service-learning syllabi coming from different Carnegie Community Engagement Classification institutions. She says that 84% (n=42) have community placements in what is considered "marginalized communities" where the majority of this population are people of color. Now what was particularly troublesome was that she discovered fewer than 20% (n=9) of the syllabi mentioned race as a central concept of discussion. The syllabi readings focused on "race" and "racism" were also scanty. Such findings make me realize how important a journal like ours focused on racial and social justice is to the service-learning area. Teague describes the different sections of this edited book that clearly shows its importance to our field:

The pedagogy section speaks to those in the contact zone with students experiencing diverse linguistic development who might traditionally be classified as deficient. The policy section provides administrators and advocates of inclusive literacy practices with methods for enacting code-meshing in the classroom, regardless of the classroom's location. Finally, the practice section shows us what code-meshing really looks like, defining its logic and explaining how student code-meshing transcends error and contributes to the development of identity.

By providing these types of readings to our students, are we diminishing the harm that students might inadvertently be doing in these communities when students and sometimes professors do not have a good grasp of code-meshing? The answer for me is yes. Teague rightly points out that more work is needed in "assessing

code-meshed texts, on deciding what counts as an error and what doesn't," which is a critical factor in implementation. Hopefully, more relevant work in this area will occur to help students and others with these communities.

Sometimes, as we think about how best to serve our next generation, we have to go back and remember what some of us did when we were the next generation. Phyllis Mentzell Ryder helps us understand this in her review of Frank Farmer's *After the Public Turn: Composition, Counterpublics and the Citizen Bricoleur*. I ran into Frank Farmer while at the Conference on Community Writing's Flash lab, where many of our next generation were doing their digital presentations. The beginnings of reviewing his book in *Reflections* began there. Farmer takes us backwards and forwards with his analysis of Punk Zines, cultural counterpublics and Occupy Wall Street. Zines of the past as Farmer points out is not controlled by corporations and non-governmental agencies unlike what we see in the digital world today. There do-it-yourself publications are a testament to this resistance. I like how Ryder focuses on this small section of the book to demonstrate how we need to take on "the problem of public formation in the era of the internet" and how the past modes of resistance offer us this path. Another part of her analysis speaks to what the next generation must take on and harks back to what I said earlier about the next generations' goals to balance intellectual and academic rigor: "What are some of the public identities that universities adopt, and how much do disciplines vary in their embrace of those public roles? How do disciplinary funding streams and the evolving corporate model of universities affect the disciplinary identities, both public and counterpublic?" Some of these roles she describes here suppress intellectual rigor within disciplines and particularly those in composition who are involved in service-learning. Ryder ends her review by demonstrating how Farmer's book provides guidance beyond just students: "However, I see the value of the book as much bigger than what we teach our students. Farmer pushes us to rethink the relationship between composition and public life. Those who want to understand how to be a citizen within the shifting landscape of global and digital public spheres would do well with this book."

Jennifer England's review of *composing (media) = composing (embodiment): bodies, technologies, writing, the teaching of writing* is a perfect next generation ending to the book reviews. So here we have a book that addresses Ryder's call to rethink global and public spheres and provides the future leaders of the next generation (our students) ways of doing this. As England states:

As producers of new media/technologies, we express what matters to us, yet as consumers we are always-already carried into and through a mediated world that dictates to us what matters. This collection attempts to untangle the 'tensions between those feelings [of embodiment] and the knowledge that we are also experienced from outside' (p.3) and further more to situate conversations about media(ted) embodiment within composition studies.

Following the more personal and reflective writings of the articles in this issue, England says Anne Wysocki "begins the collection with a recollection of her personal experiences with media(ted) embodiment." What particularly resonates with Ryder's review of Farmer's book is when England tells us her favorite part of Part 1 focusing on "examine[ing] identities and embodiments that are constructed *within* technologies rather than by technologies." Using digital rhetoric, students have opportunities to uncover and critically analyze "ideologies and cultural formation in digital work." Part 2 Mediating Bodies ^ Mediated Bodies has an ethnographic focus for interrogation "weave[ing] personal narratives with digital analysis" in media spaces/technologies. We're not all new media and digital savy, so England provides a number of resources to "scaffold these activities" in a classroom environment. But, of course, the contents of this edited collection can be of use beyond the classroom as well just as Ryder says about Farmer's book.

Although I'm not considered the next generation, it doesn't mean I'm not excited about what they have to offer us. Many of us believe in reciprocity and reciprocity extends to embracing and learning from many generations. We are better for it.