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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

EDITORIAL

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Methodological imperatives and perplexities for literacy research in uncertain times

When we began the journey to edit this special issue on methodological imperatives and perplexities for literacy research in uncertain times, it was the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, we recognised that methodological approaches we held dear required rethinking, but we could not see far enough ahead to appreciate how profoundly methods and reflexivities would transform, shift, and even face a reckoning of sorts. Two years into the pandemic, it is clear now that comfortable research practices like 'collecting data' and 'entering the field' are not only unhelpful constructs but are also riddled with ethical perplexities. Haraway's notion of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016) may be helpful here in that, as literacy researchers, we need to stay with *the trouble of the moment* to recognise where it moves us and how we must change and shape our methodological orientations and practices around the contours of trouble, uncertainty, and reckonings. Sensitising ourselves to the reality that the world is not, cannot, should not be the same after George Floyd was murdered; after wildfires enveloped communities across the world; after the multitude of deaths due to Covid-19; and after governments have been toppled and threatened by insurgents. Given these changed and changing global circumstances, we need to interrogate and reimagine how we do literacy research, who we are as literacy researchers, and the role of literacy research in troubling how literacy is defined and understood, as well as its interface with precarity. These challenges – methodological and epistemological, but also ethical, emotional and deeply personal – lie at the heart of this special issue.

The vivid instances of ethical moments set out within the articles we bring together in this special issue collectively signal ways that we as researchers must raise our heads above university and institutional parapets, to intensify our gaze onto ethical imperatives and think long and hard about contemporary research methods and methodologies. From the opening article, which explores the boundaries and processes of justice-oriented literacy research as a conduit to healing, the special issue moves through some of the healing work that needs to take place. The articles challenge us as researchers to interrogate the ways in which literacy practices – and, indeed,

literacy research – are complicit in producing and maintaining racial and class inequities, and to foreground everyday literacy practices that disrupt dominant framings of literacy and offer possibilities for social transformation. The articles then present glimpses into ways of being researchers and scholars, participants and students in moments and spaces that exceed easy framings and resist complacency and finalisation. Developing these themes through articles that foreground methodological and theoretical insights, the special issue circles back to challenge us to reimagine who we are and what we do as literacy researchers.

The issue starts with Garcia, Mirra, and the Digital Democratic Dialogue (3d) Teacher Community, who probe the notion of completing and rounding off research that is deeply community-led to consider how researchers ethically conclude such work. Then, Zaino and Bell move into a poetic space to surface reflexivities and subjectivities and foreground their interdependency and their shared sense of being researchers who at times feel othered. The legendary literacy research of Dyson shines in this special issue with her rich account of Ta'Von: in what ways, she asks, can researchers and teachers honour the histories, legacies, racial and social realities of our participants and students? Other articles in the special issue remind us how much we are implicated in the research that we do, conduct, and share with the world. Rackley, Bradford and Peairs' provocative engagements with Glissant's work challenge researchers to turn the page on white disciplinary methods through love and the poetic. Panos, Wessel-Powell, Weir, and Pennington offer the idea of *waypoints* as a route to understanding the intersectional complexities of precarity within their social-justice-oriented, longitudinal, community-engaged research. Becker and another luminary in literacy research, Gutiérrez, disrupt othering and imposed colonial linguistic borders by inviting researchers to enact a more fluid, movement frame to research. Lee then awakens our senses and invites us to reconsider how we attend to children's voices, asking: does ethical research with children have to always be comfortable and managed? English, Newman, Warner, and Williams explore embodiments experienced by doctoral students and their mentors over the course of the pandemic, contemplating how their collaborative conversations helped them to think through the ways in which embodied experiences, relationships, technologies, and place reshape not only research practices but also our stances and relationships as researchers.

Ávila Reyes, Calle-Arango, and Léniz address ethical, methodological, and epistemological concerns that emerged during a crisis and the dramatic shifts that left them grappling as researchers with how to move through the research process as they conducted a study on children's writing during a global pandemic. Abas then draws on voluminous photographic and visual data to confront what can and should be made public in photos, considering the nuances and complexities of participant permission to use images for

dissemination. Kumpulainen, Renland, Byman, and Wong argue for a new emphasis on empathy in literacy research. Leveraging a sociomaterial perspective, they describe the emergence of empathy as children crafted and shared stories about the natural world to create a relational pedagogical space, an empathy that exceeded human experience with implications for socio-ecological justice and advocacy. As a coda to the special issue, Kuby and Rowsell move into close, intimate stories about two individuals and how their compositions throw into relief felt sensibilities of precarity and uncertainty and how this compositional work sustains them in felt, ineluctable ways.

We began by referring to a 'reckoning of sorts', a refusal of complacency and a need to consider how appropriate it is to return to past methods when so much has changed and there is so much more to do. This special issue brings into focus ethical dilemmas and imperatives that researchers need to reckon with in order to move on with their research lives and academic pursuits. It calls on us to examine how the borders we fix around literacy act as tools of racial, spatial, class-related exclusion. It questions how knowledge is generated, located and experienced. Manning (2015)talks about the ways that methods and the experiences of academic study 'must become attuned to how we are contributing to the creation of new orthodoxies in relation to what we understand experience to do' (p. 59). Tools, researcher–participant relationships, rights, permissions, researcher discretion and decisions, co-production, engaged researchers – all of these methodological constructs demand scrutiny. Most of all, perhaps, our own roles, backgrounds, and our privilege within the research process and academic study need greater transparency and disruption. Yet, within this special issue there is also a sense of hope and new opportunities and possibilities for literacy research. The perplexities with which we are dealing in the current precarious times offer opportunities, not to return to comfortable stances and easy methods, but to reimagine who and how we are as researchers and what can happen through our relations with people, places, and the more-than-human world. Taking up this challenge entails an openness to thinking-feeling, trust, healing, magicaling, and unfinalisability. It requires us to examine our assumptions and privilege, and invites us to attend to the affective flows and intensities in encounters between researcher and researched. These motifs thread through the articles that you are about to read.

Disclosure statement

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