Book Review

Review of *A Field Guide to Community Literacy: Case Studies and Tools for Praxis, Evaluation, and Research* (1st ed.)

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In a 1988 mayoral inaugural address, Kurt Schmoke declared Baltimore "The City That Reads." The city's famous benches were painted with Schmoke's moniker along with "READING ZONE" on the top planks (Valentine, 1990). While the slogan was met with internal and external criticism due to the city's perceived "low literacy rate," the moniker was and is accurate. Baltimore is the home of the first free, integrated public library and has a vibrant historic and contemporary tradition of oral and print literacy (Cole, 2010). From one of the oldest independently owned Black publishers in the U.S. (Korrell, 2019) to an NFL team named for an 1845 poem by Edgar Allan Poe (Baltimore Ravens, 2020), Baltimore is an excellent model of how literacy and communities are intrinsically intertwined.

Henry and Stahl's (2022) new edited text, *A Field Guide to Community Literacy: Case Studies and Tools for Praxis, Evaluation, and Research,* invites readers to consider how "literacy can be a conduit to create, support, and strengthen communities" as Perry posits in the forward (p. xiii). Particularly, this guidebook offers an empirically and theoretically grounded and pragmatic approach to learning from community-based literacy initiatives, programs, and practices. Throughout four component sections, the text offers insights into how literacy practitioners and scholars can begin to or expand thinking of literacy and community as rarifying – showcasing how every community is "a city that reads."

In Part 1, *Building Community Through Literacy,* the notion of community as central to the discourse, content, and context of adult and family literacy programs is addressed. In chapter 1, Erik Jacobson anchors relationships as a core component of successful community learning within literacy and other disciplines. He highlights how literacy programs in community spaces showcase the complex nature of creating successful connections through collaboration. In Chapter 2, Bennett expands these conversations around community and connection by discussing how myopic and deficitized views of communities' literacies and resulting policies led to several community literacy programs reclaiming indigenous languages, upholding cultural practices, and
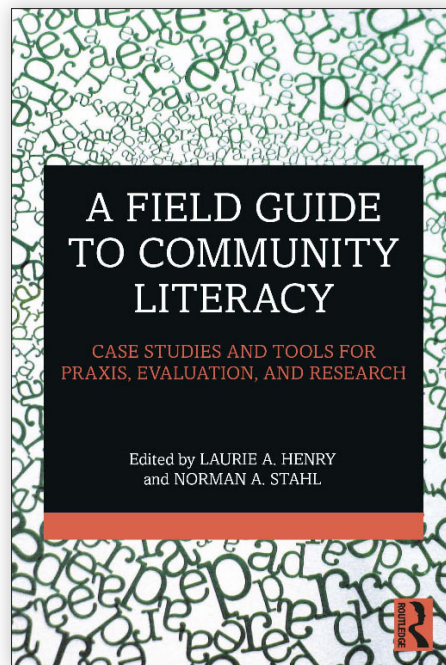
rebuilding paradigms lost to assimilation tactics.

In Chapter 3, Jacobs, Cramer, Mullikin, and Westberg from the National Center for Families Learning outline their tri-tiered engagement model for families. The model is posited by the authors as one which creates community and family social mobility through success in education and occupation. Finally, in Chapter 4, Cooper-Novack and Nordquist critically analyze and research the relationship between the academy and community literacy programs. The authors argue that the academy continues to embody hegemonic practices, reinforcing patriarchy and cultural uniformity towards students, scholars, and faculty.

In Part II, *Setting the Stage for Program Design,* the editors curate a compendium of perspectives and resources for assessing program needs, designing, and maintaining community literacy programs across locales. In Chapters 5 and 6, Bennett and Wilson explore the perspectives and procedures for conducting a community literacy audit to ascertain a community's or program's assets and existing resources as well as needs and opportunities for collaboration. In Chapter 7, Chambers and Teasdell provide insight on how designing and providing sustainable culturally sustaining practices can expand community literacy services for underserved youth in urban environments.

Chapter 8 follows by describing how a collective impact approach can build community capacity for literacy development through a structured action plan. Of particular use to the reader might be the current exemplar of how this type of planning met one rural community's needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, in Chapter 9 with applications inside and *outside* of the community literacy context, Browning demystifies the grant seeking and application process to expand programs and services with an eye toward alignment with potential funders' priorities.

In Part III, Henry and Stahl (2022) present, by way of exemplar, seven diverse community studies profiling evidence-based practices and action research in community literacy programs. From Waldren's Chapter 10 describing a study on the efficacy of Flint's community-wide efforts for literacy which analyzed a framework for

literacy coaching to Marsh's study in Chapter 11 on the Linton Foundation's tutoring center for students with learning disabilities, these case studies employ a myriad of instructional methods and techniques ripe for exploration. Other cases trouble existing notions of community literacy including its domains (like Hughes' Chapter 13 on health literacy), locales (like Semingson and Bezboruah's Chapter 14 about Little Free Libraries or Flores, Meyer, Tignor, and Massey's Chapter 17 on university-based community literacy centers), or foci (like Yee's Chapter 12 and Montero, Denomme-Welch, and Henry's Chapter 15 describing studies focused on issues of social justice and decolonization). Each offers readers opportunities to expand their thinking around what community literacy is or could be.

In Part IV, *Evaluating and Researching Community Literacy Programs,* current customs for program evaluation and their corresponding methods of practice are outlined. In Genareo's Chapter 18, they provide an overview of the contemporary models for program evaluation most often utilized by programs and corresponding funding bodies. Finally, in Chapters 19 (Johnson) and 20 (Holt and Zaleski), community-based qualitative approaches and quantitative methods are examined for studying and evaluating community literacies and associated initiatives.

In summary, Henry and Stahl's (2022) new text, *A Field Guide to Community Literacy: Case Studies and Tools for Praxis, Evaluation, and Research,* is a valuable resource for researchers, program administrators, and educators of community literacies. One of the most unique features of the field guide, the editors' inclusion of a 12-part appendices section, is also one of its most helpful contributions. This section includes exemplars (or prototypes as the editors call them) of a treasure trove of resources for community-based literacy researchers and practitioners. Examples include how to conduct a program audit, checklists for planning and implementing community-based literacy programs, job descriptions, and grant readiness assessments. All have use for community-based literacy researchers and practitioners who are often strapped for time and capital. In short, this field guide is a handy text that makes transparent and obtainable contemporary considerations and innovations in community literacy for novice and seasoned scholar-educators.

References

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