

Guest editorial: Restor(y)ing hopeful socioecological futures

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Climate change is widely recognized as one of the defining challenges of our time (United Nations, 2024), intensifying existing social and ecological injustices (Wilkinson and Johnson, 2021). Yet despite young people's repeated calls for meaningful climate education (Frost, 2022), many educators remain uncertain about how to engage these issues in their classrooms because of limited resources and preparation, concerns about politicization and worries about contributing to students' eco-anxiety (Anchondo, 2019; Ennes *et al.*, 2021; Pikhala, 2020; Winter *et al.*, 2022). In English Language Arts (ELA), these challenges are often compounded by the perception that climate change education belongs primarily within the sciences. Responding to ecological crises, however, requires more than scientific understanding alone. It also requires the capacities that literacy education has long cultivated: understanding diverse perspectives, critically examining narratives and representations, reflecting on histories of injustice and imagining more just futures (Beach *et al.*, 2017, Martusewicz *et al.*, 2014).

This special issue is centrally grounded in the idea that stories matter. Stories shape how we understand relationships among humans, more-than-human beings and the places we inhabit. They influence whose voices are heard and what futures seem possible. At a time when dominant narratives often normalize extraction, inevitability or despair, literacy classrooms can become places where these stories are questioned, expanded and rewritten. We use the term “restor(y)ing” to describe this dual work: restoring relationships among humans, more-than-human beings and the Earth while (and through) restorying the narratives through which we make sense of ecological crisis, responsibility and possibility. Thus, *restor(y)ing* is both an interpretive and a creative practice that invites learners to examine inherited stories while also composing new ones (e.g. Lenters and Mosher, 2024; Stibbe, 2015).

The issue is also driven by conceptualizations of constructive hope involving meaning-focused coping, collective action and the belief that alternative futures can be created even amid uncertainty (Ojala, 2012). We are particularly interested in how reading, writing and multimodal composing can foster practices of hope and give both young people and educators opportunities to explore possibilities, rehearse new ways of living together and imagine futures beyond the limits of the present that are grounded in justice, reciprocity and collective flourishing. In this sense, hope is not certainty about a particular future or a form of simplistic optimism; it is a practice cultivated through inquiry, critique, creativity, relationship-building and collective imagination. These perspectives align with scholarship that sees literacy as a way of interpreting the world and participating in its transformation through imagination, participation and world-building (e.g. Mirra and Garcia, 2022; Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016).

The articles in this special issue position literacy education as far more than a place where young people and their teachers learn *about* ecological crises. Rather, these papers collectively position literacy classrooms and the work of literacy education as among the many places where young people negotiate the stories we should be living by as the climate changes. Across these contributions, reading, writing, composing, walking, photographing, discussing, imagining and making offer ways of examining inherited narratives while also rehearsing and living through more just relationships with the human and more-than-human



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communities of which we are part. Together, the authors demonstrate that restor(y)ing hopeful socioecological futures is fundamentally not about *what* we teach about climate change but about the *practices and ways of being* that build the changing stories we need to understand ourselves, our communities and our responsibilities across local and planetary scales. While the contributions are diverse in their contexts, participants and pedagogical approaches, they are united by a shared commitment to restor(y)ing hopeful socioecological futures through literacy education.

We would like to offer two different ways to consider reading the pieces in this special issue and exploring how they are in conversation with one another. One way to orient your reading – the way we have reflected in the organization of the table of contents, in fact – is by how the pieces focus on learners at different stages (children, adolescents, teachers), or how they analyze language (of curriculum, literature and media) – see [Figure 1](#). We find this organization helpful for cultivating pedagogical and developmental thinking.

A complementary, and we think potentially even more generative, way to explore the pieces is by tracing the conceptual threads that weave across the contributions – see [Figure 2](#). We have organized the articles around six such threads, which we think about as interconnected practices of restor(y)ing. *Outdoor and nature literacy* explores how literacy learning can deepen relationships with place and more-than-human communities. *Transliterations* explore connections of people, media, languages and things across space and time. *Reading between the lines* invites learners to critically examine the stories, assumptions and power relations that shape socioecological understandings. *Multimodal composing* creates opportunities for learners to express care, agency and possibility through diverse forms of meaning-making. *Speculative landscapes* encourage imagining of alternative worlds and futures that challenge the inevitability of ecological decline. Finally, *curriculum analysis and development* considers how these commitments can become sustained and intentional features of literacy education. Together, these conceptual threads demonstrate that restor(y)ing is not a single pedagogical approach but an orientation toward literacy that cultivates constructive hope through critical inquiry, creative expression and collective imagination.

Collectively, these papers surface dominant stories that are often intangibly shaping literacy education and socioecological practices. In unique ways, they question the normative practices of schools that foreground a simple, functional view of literacy and how

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Figure 1. Table of contents

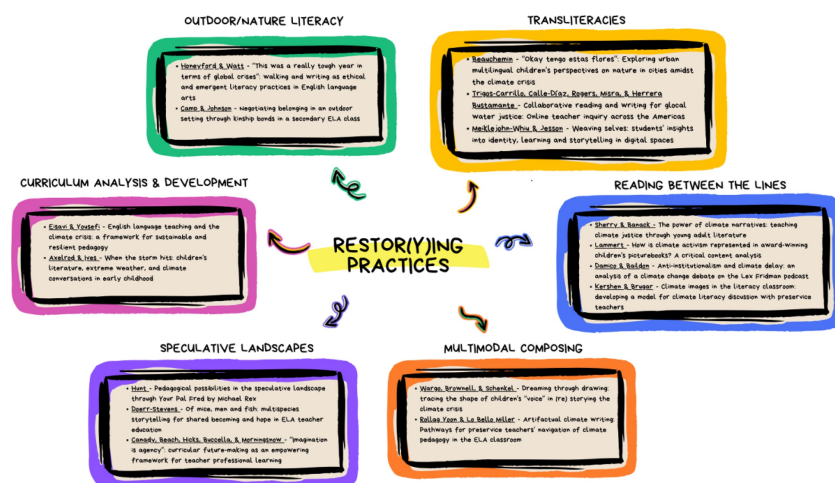


Figure 2. Restor(y)ing practices

people engage with the human and more-than-human communities of which we are all part. Across the papers authors interrogate stories that hold deep assumptions about literacy and life such as the harmful stories that support ways of being where:

- nature exists “elsewhere” (e.g. outside of cities and outside of ourselves);
- weather itself is neutral and apolitical;
- climate activism belongs only to adult activists;
- outdoor spaces belong more to some young people than others;
- institutions are inherently untrustworthy; and
- our futures are fixed, inevitable and hopeless.

These papers do far more than critique dominant narratives, though. Their constructive hopefulness can be found in the many stories they make possible and in the literacy practices through which those stories might actually be lived. We see these authors offering stories where:

- nature is woven through children’s cities, languages, homes and everyday lives;
- people belong to places through their relationships with them and with one another;
- young people can speak back to ecological crisis and act with others to change their worlds;
- how we read the world, and the texts we encounter within it, matters for how we respond to it;
- literacy happens with bodies, places, materials, languages, technologies and other beings;
- we become otherwise through our relationships with more-than-human lives and as part of multispecies communities;
- teaching can be a way of making worlds, not simply preparing students for one already made; and
- the future is something we can imagine and make together.

It is these kinds of stories, practiced across the papers in this issue, that offer an expansion of what counts as literacy work with children, young people, teachers and texts. Photography, drawing, walking, speculation, images, digital storytelling, outdoor learning, multispecies storytelling, translanguaging, collaborative inquiry and artifactual writing all offer ways to push back against damaging, normative and harmful stories and instead toward a *practiced* hopefulness. These papers also show literacy doing much more than helping people learn or communicate about ecological crises. Across different contexts these papers position literacy as a socioecological practice for both trying out and sustaining many ways of being on the planet.

We are elated at the breadth and depth of the 16 papers included in this (very large) special issue. We believe this demonstrates that literacy education has much to contribute to hopeful socioecological futures and a special role to play in restor(y)ing practices across schools, professional learning and community spaces. But we also recognize that within literacy education this work is still emerging – as perhaps it always will be. The articles collected here offer compelling examples of teachers, researchers and young people experimenting with new stories, relationships and practices, while pointing to the reality that this work remains unfinished. Restor(y)ing is an ongoing practice rather than a destination, and as such this special issue represents an invitation to further exploration and work together.

Our invitation is to continue expanding what counts as literacy work. Within this issue, literacy already extends well beyond functional reading and writing of print texts (Lenters *et al.*, 2025), encouraging us to ask what other practices must be central to ELA and literacy education as communities respond to ecological disruption. The planet – its more-than-human and human communities – requires a plurality of ways of knowing, being and doing to sustain futures of any kind, especially hopeful ones (Perry, 2023). Our classrooms and the work educators do with one another and with students must reflect this plurality in ways that we do not currently see broadly in schools and professional learning today. We believe this is an inclusive mandate that is fundamentally about whose knowledge matter and are acknowledged in the reshaping of the world, and the papers in this issue press us to move forward.

A related invitation is to continue broadening the stories available. Dominant educational narratives often position literacy as preparation for individual achievement and workforce accessibility, narrowing the purposes we imagine for literacy education. Climate education, too, is often approached through the transmission of scientific knowledge, even as climate communication research has demonstrated that knowledge alone is insufficient for shaping climate beliefs, engagement and action (Leiserowitz *et al.*, 2023; van der Linden *et al.*, 2015). Within this issue, the authors imagine literacy as a relational, ethical and imaginative practice through which young people and educators learn to live well together. As ecological disruptions intensify and extractivism grows its harms on vulnerable multispecies communities, we should position literacy education as a space that helps learners interpret uncertainty and join the creation of life-sustaining futures for all beings.

Finally, we hope that this collection encourages researchers, teacher educators and classroom teachers to think of hope not as a toxic form of optimism or certainty about what a just future might mean, but as something practiced with others. We read these papers as offering a hope intentionally cultivated through inquiry, critique, creativity, relationship-building and collective imagination and speculation. For the authors of these papers, these are not peripheral dimensions of literacy education; making them central to our work is something we should all strive toward.

As we stated early on in this introduction, this issue – at its heart – is about stories. We cannot escape the stories we inherit. We can tell stories that matter and help shape the planet

that will be inherited by all species into the future. We hope, and believe, that the scholarship in this special issue contributes to an expanding repertoire of stories we can live by and practice so that we can continue to restor(y) more just and hopeful socioecological futures.

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