

# Reflections

A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric

*Volume 20, Issue 1, Spring/Summer 2020*

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*Reflections*, a peer reviewed journal, provides a forum for scholarship on public rhetoric, civic writing, service learning, and community literacy. Originally founded as a venue for teachers, researchers, students, and community partners to share research and discuss the theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based writing and writing instruction, *Reflections* publishes a lively collection of scholarship on public rhetoric and civic writing, occasional essays and stories both from and about community writing and literacy projects, interviews with leading workers in the field, and reviews of current scholarship touching on these issues and topics.

We welcome materials that emerge from research; showcase community based and/or student writing; investigate and represent literacy practices in diverse community settings; discuss theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based rhetorical practices; or explore connections among public rhetoric, civic engagement, service learning, and current scholarship in composition studies and related fields.



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# Looking Back to Look Ahead:

## *Reflections* Turns Twenty

**Laurie Grobman,**  
*Penn State Berks*  
**& Deborah Mutnick,**  
*Long Island University*  
*Brooklyn*

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**W**e are thrilled to introduce this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of *Reflections*. Our tenure as coeditors has taught us a great deal about the journal, the growing subfield of community-engaged writing, and the pleasures and pitfalls of editing a biannual publication. As we embarked on editing this issue, we assumed we would learn a lot about the journal's history, but we could not fully appreciate what that meant until we began to review submissions. The first round we got were in response to a call for articles directed mainly to those with a close association with the journal—former editors, contributors, board members, reviewers—or whose own career paths were influenced by reading it. These articles and several interviews, shorter pieces, and a dialogue provide valuable perspectives on the journal.

In addition to the personal perspectives offered by former editors, authors, and readers, two groups of scholars collaborated

to present retrospective appraisals of the journal, one focused on patterns, themes, genres, theories and methods uncovered by a close, critical analysis of its content, and the other on reader responses culled from a fifteen-question survey that tell us about its reception. This anniversary issue proceeds then from *Perspectives* to *Retrospectives* and, finally, to the ongoing work of *Reflections* with two regularly featured genres—a research article on adult learning in the community and a profile on an inclusive summer lunch literacy program—as well as the usual book reviews. In our own reflections on the material that emanated from calls for submissions and from the continuing impact of the journal, we see this issue as a way of looking back to look ahead.

On a more sober note, our celebration of the journal's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary is tempered by intertwining crises in the U.S. and around the world. As we draft this introduction, the recent police and vigilante murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery have underscored, again, the deep, institutionalized racism in the United States and continued state violence against black people. Protests across this country and around the world erupted in what Keenanga-Yamahtta Taylor called a “class rebellion” against systemic failures of American democracy. This protracted, multiracial, international outcry is a hopeful sign of deepening mass struggle for racial and economic justice, even as it was met by White House threats to deploy the U.S. military to quell protests and “dominate the streets.” As members of multiple communities—our own neighborhoods, the places we teach, partnerships we strive to maintain, political, religious, artistic, and other groups to which we belong—we face more profound challenges and uncertainties than perhaps ever before: a global pandemic that has redefined life on the planet for the foreseeable future and a complex political and economic crisis that has both liberatory and fiercely repressive potential.

On the one hand, these crises illuminate the significance of community-engaged writing and rhetoric, resonating with *Reflections'* strong social justice ethos and appeal to activists, practitioners, theorists, and authors to cross academic and community boundaries. On the other, they remind us of the limitations of the work we do in these capacities, instruct us to engage with social movements that are

on the front lines of activist organizing, and call on us to apply those lessons to our own house. Systemic racism, rising levels of inequality, and intensifying police repression require us all to take responsibility for fighting ever more resolutely in professional as well as personal contexts for racial, economic, and gender justice. We write about the pandemic and the racial justice protests here to mark this moment and remind ourselves and our readers of how *Reflections*—perhaps more than most journals—chronicles the broader historical context in which it is published, and in anticipation of future issues of the journal that will grapple with the impact of these fraught times on all that we do.

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

In part 1 of this issue, we begin with founding editor Barbara Roswell's recollections of the journal's history. Starting with a poignant description of a group of young scholars gathered in a large conference room to figure out how best to use a \$5000 grant for community-engaged writing, she goes on to invoke the early days of the journal and the process by which it grew from an 9 x 13 inch newsletter to a well-respected, influential, boundary-crossing publication. Making clear the founding editors' commitment to social justice and the amplification of community voices, she declares: "We recognized community-engaged work as a unique kind of praxis within a field characterized by praxis, and tried to promote an approach to scholarship and inquiry that honored the pragmatic without being theory-less or research-less" (17).

In "*Reflections'* 20th Anniversary Roundtable: What Was, What Is, What's Coming," Isabel Baca, Tom Deans, Tobi Jacobi, and Heather Lang write about the journal as "a home that promotes inclusivity and respect" (Baca, 29), "called into being a place for community within our field," and "created the space" for scholarship on pressing social justice issues like prison literacy (Jacobi, 25; 34). Tom Deans recalls the journal's focus two decades ago on topics like transfer and "writing about writing"—now ubiquitous in composition studies—as "prescient about what counts as writing and which theories can help us make sense of it" (31). *Reflections'* current web editor, Heather Lang, who has been archiving issues and creating abstracts for them, concludes that the journal "provides an example for how scholars,

activists, students, and community organizers, and citizens can come together to make and share knowledge that can make positive impacts in our world” (37).

We then hear again from Tom Deans in an interview conducted by Eric Mason, in which they return to themes from an interview with Deans in the very first issue of the journal to reflect on its history and impact since then. Deans concludes that “Our trajectory as a field has been, and continues to be, hopeful ... and projects like *Reflections* represent our long-term interest in finding the resources to make something more promising happen for the community and for our students” (49).

Next, Linda Flower, first interviewed by *Reflections* in fall of 2000, calls for a “consequential framework” that emphasizes the complementary, rather than conflictive, nature of different theoretical approaches to community-engaged writing in order to mobilize evidence of the impact of engaged learning on students. This need for evidence-based support for the value of community writing for college and high school students as well as community-based writers is ever more urgent in a period of economic contraction and austerity. In “The Consequences of Engaged Education: Building a Public Case,” Flower traces the evolution of approaches to community writing from service learning to community literacy to the public turn to more overtly political, local action, and concludes that an “inclusive perspective can lay the groundwork for a broader public case for engagement as an essential element in contemporary education” (59).

Former editor and ongoing promoter of the journal Steve Parks teams up in a dialogue with Brian Bailie, now an assistant professor of English, then a doctoral student at Syracuse University who served first as a graduate intern and then associate editor. Their aim as editors, they declare, was to ensure that “*Reflections* would continue to offer a broader critique to how the field was structured to try to break the discourse within composition and rhetoric that championed professionalization and disciplinarity” in order to remain true to the democratic values it so often invoked (69).

Echoing Flower's call for an "inclusive perspective" in somewhat different terms, Abbie Levesque DeCamp and Ellen Cushman argue that *Reflections* is well positioned with its more activist orientation than other academic journals to "truly address[ed] what the current formulation of 'community' as it currently stands may elide" (90-91). In "Intersectional Community Thinking: New Possibilities for Thinking about Community," the authors make a case for resisting "binary understandings" of community and embracing intersectionality "to unearth how discussions of power, senses of belonging, and erasures of intra-community difference within communities shape their writing practices" (91). To do so, they conclude, "can help to better express the experiences of multiply marginalized people, and to work toward empowerment through difference and collective liberation" (101).

In another interview, Shane Wood interviews Paul Mathieu, best known for her book *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* and briefly a *Reflections* editor. In recalling the journal's history, Mathieu remarks that "you have to mention Barbara Roswell, who ... was *Reflections*." She goes on: "It was really the first place where I saw people doing work like what I was doing. I thought it was amazing" (113).

Finally in this section, in "Community Engagement for the Graduate Student Soul: Ruminations on *Reflections*," Ashanka Kumari, a relative newcomer to the journal, recalls her initial encounter with community writing at the Clyde Malone Community Center and Matt Talbot Kitchen and Outreach in Lincoln, Nebraska. This formative experience as a master's degree student "contributed to my growth as a teacher-scholar" (125). She also notes that *Reflections* "offers space to make oft-invisible and undervalued labor visible and valued" (126). Reva E. Sias rounds out part 1, recollecting her experience as a doctoral student at Syracuse University, where she served as a guest editor with Beverly Moss on a special issue on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Community Literacy Partnerships (Volume 10, Issue 2)—experiences, she concludes, that allowed her "to locate my editorial and intellectual self" (141).

## RETROSPECTIVES

Part 2 of this issue includes two collaborative articles that offer retrospective analyses of *Reflections'* twenty years. Roger Chao, Deb Dimond Young, Johanna Phelps, David Stock, and Alex Wulff offer a critical reading and analysis of the journal's twenty years of articles, poems, book reviews, editors introductions, and calls for articles. They present in-depth analyses of the journal's history, methods, significance of non-traditional academic genres, the relationship between *Reflections* and first-year composition, and issues of power and privilege, "marking patterns and shifts in perspective, the ways that later issues complicated earlier issues" and "the ways that the journal has sometimes led and sometimes grappled with the wider field of Writing Studies" (148). Importantly, as the authors write, their "map of *Reflections*" (147) is one group's perspective—a map, not *the* map—of the journal. The authors conclude their deep dive into the journal by suggesting that *Reflections* "has shown a deep and abiding commitment to wrestling with issues of power and privilege in community-engaged writing and rhetoric," and that "[t]his twenty-year history should serve as a call for all readers to continue that work" (180).

In the second article in part 2, coauthors Noah Patton and Rachel Presley utilize Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's method of "*strategic contemplation*" to analyze reader responses culled from a fifteen-question survey on memorable theories, methodologies, and perspectives, and their impact on readers' lives as students, as educators, as researchers, and as community citizens. Patton and Presley identify four prominent themes noted by respondents: inclusivity; challenge to power and privilege; innovative, transformative pedagogies; and boundary pushing. To understand the journal's impact on readers, Patton and Presley employ Jenny Edbauer's conceptualization of rhetorical ecologies to suggest that it's readership participates in "a mutually-constituted site of flux and transformation" (206). Participants emphasized the journal's "most vital contribution to the discipline: cultivating a space of inquiry that legitimizes and validates community-based writing in a multiplicity of forms" (207).

## THE ONGOING WORK OF *REFLECTIONS*

Part 3, The Ongoing Work of *Reflections*, includes two regularly featured genres—a research article on adult learning in the community and a profile on an inclusive summer lunch literacy program—as well as the usual book reviews. Both “look back” to the discipline’s long commitment to community literacy programs, and “look forward” by sharing new models and extending disciplinary knowledge. In “A Curriculum of the Self: Students’ Experiences with Prescriptive Writing in Low and No-Cost Adult Education Programs,” Alison Turner analyzes interviews she conducted with instructors and students at six low or no-cost adult education programs, identifying differences in the ways instructors and students perceive the students’ writing experiences. Arguing that this study informs adult literacy programs, Turner offers “a concept called the ‘curriculum of the self’ to identify students’ use of prescriptive modes to enjoy and engage with writing” (215), highlighting how it speaks to other tensions in community literacy, such as “turbulent flow” and sustainable practices of reciprocity.

“More than a Sandwich: Developing an Inclusive Summer Lunch Literacy Program in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania,” coauthored by Laurie Cella, Michael Lyman, Liz Fisher, Sysha Irot, and Gabrielle Binando, profiles a Summer Lunch Program (SLP), sponsored by the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC), a collaboration between Shippensburg University and local community social service organizations, including the local library. Building on research on best practices, this SLP combines free lunch with fun activities and provides dynamic literacy programming in a camp-like program, and is open to all children of all socioeconomic statuses. The authors hope their profile “serves as a useful model to practitioners who are interested in replicating our work in other communities” because “[t]hese camp-like activities work to erase the stigma associated with a free Summer Lunch program with an emphasis on community rather than need” (247).

Part 3 ends with two timely book reviews. Charlotte Kupsh reviews *Writing Suburban Citizenship: Place Conscious Education and the Conundrum of Suburbia* (Syracuse UP, 2015), edited by Robert E. Brooke. Next, Brian McShane reviews *Writing Democracy: The*

*Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era* (Routledge 2020), coedited by Shannon Carter, Deborah Mutnick, Stephen Parks, and Jessica Pauszek.

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Finally, returning to the reason for this special issue of *Reflections*, we note that if we were to pick a single, critical takeaway from what we have learned from the articles, interviews, and dialogues that follow, it is a reminder that the history of a journal is like any other history: though linear in some respects, it is also recursive, reiterative, and dialectical. There is no simple trajectory from 2000 to 2020 about which we can say, ah, this marks the development of the field, or upon which we can look back and boast that we have gone beyond the untheorized, uncritical approaches to community-engaged writing that our predecessors took back then. Instead, we see patterns of change that circle back, intersect, and reflect the discoveries of one theory of community writing or another in multiple, sometimes minor, sometimes transformative refractions of the field. We argue that the conflicts, tensions, or differences that surface in this interrogation of the journal's history are the productive debates that define us—and will continue to define us—as we move into *Reflections'* next twenty years.



## REFERENCE

Taylor, Keenanga-Yamahtta. 2020. "A Class Rebellion: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor on How Racism & Racial Terrorism Fueled Nationwide Anger." *Democracy Now*. June 1. [https://www.democracynow.org/2020/6/1/keeanga\\_yamahtta\\_taylor\\_protests\\_class\\_rebellion](https://www.democracynow.org/2020/6/1/keeanga_yamahtta_taylor_protests_class_rebellion)



# **Historical Perspectives: 20 Years of *Reflections***



# The Art of Learning Our Place

**Barbara Roswell,**  
*Goucher College*

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*This essay recounts the origins of Reflections and considers the first seven years of the journal's publication from the perspective of its first editor. Arguing that Reflections serves as a barometer of changes in our field, the academy, and the production of knowledge over the past two decades, it recounts the journal's initial mandate to provide a forum for communication and inquiry and characterizes the unique ethos of the journal. It assesses the generative role of special issues in using a community organizing approach to publication to connect scholars, practitioners, and participants around a theme, developing many of the now-thriving subfields of community-engaged writing. The journal, it concludes, thanks to its inclusive, experimental, and multigenerational approach and deep roots in communities where we have built lasting relationships, provides a mirror in which we can see our field deepen our questions and extend our reach. It celebrates Reflections for cultivating the brave space we continue to need to collaboratively and critically craft our crucial places within and beyond the university.*

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It is June 15, 2020. As I have, on and off, for several months, I let my eyes pass one last time over the two collections of journals on my desk. The first set includes the issues I shepherded as *Reflections'* editor from 1999-2007, initially in 8 1/2 x11 format, and then in the basic layout that continues to govern the journal's design today. The second constellation of issues bursts into bold color, as the journal, guided by Steve Parks, Paula Mathieu, Diana George, Cristina Kirklighter, Laurie Grobman, and Deborah Mutnick, reaches beyond print genres to explore dialogue, activist documentaries, sustainable communities, and veterans' writing, probing the relationships, pedagogies, tactics, networks, and theoretical commitments that complicate and make them possible.

Like a family photo album, each individual issue beckons. Every time I leaf through one, I'm struck by a different theme—the ambitious reach of the journal, the unlikely affordances of hosting an independent journal at a small liberal arts college, the mix of high editorial standards and humility that rooted our success, the materiality of editing a journal when email was still novel and PageMaker was our state of the art publishing platform, the let's-put-on-a-play entrepreneurial spirit that animated our work, and, of course, the generous, durable coalition of community-engaged writers who, in the exchanges of manuscripts, reviews, and revisions, have woven the fabric of our shared commitments together.

I'll explore some of these themes in the pages that follow. Today, though, I may have finally identified what feels most profound about what our *Reflections* community has built together. With images of the protests of past weeks scrolling before my eyes and my inbox overrun with institutional declarations of humility and solidarity, I applaud the fruits of our twenty-year long collaborative inquiry into critically, carefully, learning our place.

## THE BIRTH OF THE JOURNAL

A group of scholars gather in a large room at the 1999 Conference of College Composition and Communication in Atlanta to discuss how we might leverage the \$5,000 that Tom Deans and Nora Bacon helped to secure from the now defunct American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). "Our mandate," explains Tom Deans, "is

to provide leadership for, and encourage dialogue among, members interested in connecting service-learning to college writing; to provide the membership with information, forums for communication, and teaching resources on service-learning; to encourage research on how community-based learning informs composition studies; and to encourage reflection and discussion on the ethical and ideological implications of service-learning” (2000, 3).

The discussion is robust and animated. Like the Writing Center subfield that had successfully matured thanks in part to the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Journal*, we, too, need a venue to anchor our scholarship, legitimize it, and make it visible. A journal would make our scholarly work “count” for promotion and tenure, a need we experience acutely given the characterization of our community-based work as “service,” the intensity of its logistical and relational demands, and the contingent status of many of the faculty involved.

But our needs are deeper, too. Even as those of us who are early adopters of the rhetoric and service-learning combination enthusiastically promote community-based work to our universities, partners, and students, we hanker for a space to share misgivings, make sense of contradictions, and learn from others’ endeavors to do the same. We worry that communities will be defined by deficits not assets, that relationships can be exploitative, that unexamined good intentions backfire. We are conflicted about the institutionalization of service-learning. Even at this first meeting, we grasp that the journal can become home to a growing community who “want students to learn in and through unstructured situations to be involved in the production of something of public value...., to recognize that they are members of communities, and that as citizens in a democracy, everything they do has implications for the health of our society” (Zlotkowski 2000, 1). A journal would create the platform for such an association—a reality that would come to full fruition fifteen years later with the founding of the Coalition for Community Writing in 2015.

From the back of the room, I raise my hand and hear my voice not just advocating for the value of a journal but volunteering to join

accomplished scholar Nora Bacon in editing the publication we have collectively begun to imagine.

## **GOUCHER COLLEGE AS *REFLECTIONS* INSTITUTIONAL HOME**

Soon after Four Cs, Nora was asked to assume more leadership of the writing and service learning programs at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Over one of our “trunk calls” that let us talk for hours, long distance—and for just pennies!!—Nora asked me to investigate what it would mean for her to step back and for Goucher College in Baltimore to host *Reflections*.

Goucher, founded in 1885 as an urban women’s college, had joined—and accelerated—white flight out of the heart of Baltimore in the 1950s and now sat on 180 wooded acres in Baltimore County. The school became co-ed in 1986. With 1200 undergraduates and little contact between the undergraduate faculty and the part-time graduate programs, Goucher seemed an unlikely institutional home for an academic journal. Who would fill the role of editorial staff?

On the other hand, Goucher had innovative programs in creative writing and dance, plus one of most well-established Peace Studies programs in the country. Known for strong mentorship of undergraduates, the college’s commitments to feminist pedagogy and social justice ran deep, with more than thirty percent of undergraduates returning to Baltimore City to participate in service learning and community outreach every semester. Could the depth of the institution’s civic mission also support a journal devoted to writing and community engagement? Time would later prove that the flexibility and intimacy of Goucher’s culture would sustain years of collegial faculty-student partnerships, enriching the undergraduate editorial staff immeasurably, serving the journal ably, and providing many of the most satisfying working relationships of my career.

Before fully committing, though, I decided to consult with editors of other small journals. I have a clear memory of calling Mickey Harris, the long-time editor of *Writing Lab Newsletter*. “How many hours a week do you devote to editing *WLN*?” I asked. “If I ever calculated that,” she said, “I’d never do the job.” When I asked Peter



Vandenberg, then editor of *Composition Studies*, he used precisely the same words.

Mickey's and Peter's cautions were overshadowed, though, by their passion for the work and their sage advice. I was forty, with three children, ages eleven, nine and three. Some years earlier, I had temporarily shifted from full- to half-time teaching, and, happily, my requests for an additional course release to edit the journal and for in-kind support from Goucher were granted. Goucher became *Reflections'* home.

## THE ETHOS OF THE JOURNAL

Over the next months, Nora Bacon and I cast a wide net, inviting manuscripts not only from the group who had assembled at Cs, but also from K-12 teachers responsible for courses with required service-learning components, graduate students eager to share work in progress, undergraduates blending creative nonfiction with social action to witness their engagement with communities, and experienced practitioner-scholars able to glean lessons from theoretically rich, mature programs. This hybrid formula became our hallmark, enabling us over the next years to include the voices of Linda Adler-Kassner, Linda Flower, Diana George, Joe Harris, Bruce Herzberg, John Saltmarsh, Ira Shor, and Edward Zlotkowski alongside the rapidly developing emerging scholarship that continues to fuel *Reflections'* best work.

We recognized community-engaged work as a unique kind of praxis within a field characterized by praxis, and tried to promote an approach to scholarship and inquiry that honored the pragmatic without being theory-less or research-less. We wrestled with how to tap into the hunger for new approaches that animated our special interest groups without devolving into a recipe swap ourselves. In this way, *Reflections* supported the fledgling subdiscipline of community-engaged work with the manuscripts that moved between authors, reviewers, and readers creating its warp and its woof.

We were after something that was welcoming, introspective, and honest, that could navigate critically between self-congratulatory

and confessional, and, somehow, authors embraced this vision. It was no accident that our initial name was “Reflections on Community-Based Writing *Instruction*.” Tom Deans and Nora Bacon, the de facto “senior editors” of the journal throughout my editorship, are elegant stylists who love language, value logic, and prize revision. We—and the editorial board we formally announced in the second issue—deeply identified as teachers committed to helping all writers achieve their most ambitious intentions. One of the great joys of editing a journal is learning to pair a manuscript with the right reader, and then supporting that author to embrace the challenges the feedback may offer.

Pick up one of the early issues of *Reflections*, and you’ll find that the pieces still read well—crisp, well-edited, neither flabby nor self-indulgent. I credit this to the editorial team’s humility. We had “ridden the van in the dark” with Eli Goldblatt (1994) and appreciated the complex interplay among students, faculty, community partners, neighborhood participants, university staff, transportation systems, and institutional pressures. This humble clarity let us define our scope and purpose as a community *writing* journal that endeavored to make reading about our work itself a pleasure.

## THE MATERIALITY OF A DYI JOURNAL

Looking back, *Reflections* serves as a barometer of changes in our field, the academy, and indeed the social transformation of the production of knowledge over the past two decades. Producing the journal was hard work, much of it devoted to wrangling with the infinite annoyances of the now obsolete PageMaker software. But those twenty years also track how the journal helped build the now thriving coalition of community writing, making us visible to each other in the spaces between conferences, creating space for collective deliberation, and providing a nurturing home for many young scholars who, early on, took leadership roles on our production team and who became better scholars and writers thanks to their work with us.

The materiality of the work itself—the indescribable *frisson* of excitement we felt when we were awarded a good discount at the local Kinko’s—was central to our sense of breaking boundaries,

working at the grassroots, and creating a venue for writing studies that was fundamentally different from the flagship journals. In this and other ways, we operated much like the community organizations whose stories filled the journal's pages.

If each issue was a putative invitation to new authors to contribute to the journal, then each annual CCCC was the actual site of recruitment. Packing for the conference is still embedded in my muscle memory: first, the long banner we draped from the Exhibition Hall table, then the signup sheet for editorial board members to volunteer to staff our booth, then flyers advertising the journal, the subscription forms, the polite "Display Only" stickers, the business cards and push pins for posting notices, the change for people who paid for subscriptions in cash.

Once at the conference, loyal editorial board members Tobi Jacobi, Amy Taggart, Brooke Hessler, Melody Bowdon, Blake Scott, Adrian Wurr, Glenn Hutchinson, and others, infused with a community bake sale spirit, would attend sessions, each of us stacking a small pile of *Reflections* flyers at the back of the room, and inviting people to take one on the way out and then visit our table in the Exhibition Hall.

CCCC was everything to a startup journal like ours—not just a time to share research, but to hawk our wares, host gatherings, develop policy, recruit talent, harvest articles, build relationships, and *sell subscriptions*. We left Four Cs in 2000 with 270 names on our initial mailing list. Later, we got ISSN numbers, arranged for MLA indexing, and struggled to account for revenue and expenses as paid subscriptions and production costs increased.

## **A LIFE-CHANGING TURNING POINT: THE PRISON ISSUE, 2004**

Reflecting on the impact of the 1997 *Writing the Community* collection, Edward Zlotkowski said, "It's hard to overestimate the importance of having something one can rally around and use as a point of departure... *Writing the Community* was always meant to be the starting place for a much more extensive conversation" (2000, 3).

This was the certainly also the case for the 2004 Special Issue on Prison Literacies and Narratives, guest edited by Tobi Jacobi and Patricia O'Connor. For several years, I had attended Tobi's talks at Cs, impressed not only with the innovative writing workshops she led with incarcerated writers but also with her sophisticated questions about the circulation of prison writing and her familiarity with the flourishing work conducted in prisons across the country. It was Tom Deans' suggestion that Tobi, a newly appointed assistant professor at Colorado State University, and Patricia O'Connor, a well-established scholar at Georgetown University who had been teaching in prisons for years, coedit the issue. For me, as well as for our profession and community writ large, the prison issue was life- and career-changing. It advanced the reach of the journal, brought *Reflections* into broader conversations about justice and equity, and firmly established prison teaching and writing as an essential subfield.

From the start, we envisioned a hybrid issue that would showcase writing by people who are incarcerated and place that writing in dialogue with more scholarly sources. To that end, we contacted prison librarians all over the country, asking them to collect and send us manuscripts. These soon arrived in such huge, unexpected quantities that every table, chair, and windowsill in my Goucher office was covered in stacks of prison submissions. Reading these opened a world of experience and insight that commanded my attention. I still remember lines from some of them like "I haven't seen a cat in 37 years." What could it mean not to have seen a cat in thirty-seven years? I feel enormously privileged to have worked closely with Tobi and Patricia in this three-way partnership, which broke new ground for the journal, for the field, and ultimately for my own work in the decades since as a leader in the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program and founder of the Goucher Prison Education Partnership.

The success of the prison issue paved the way for three additional special issues, "Service Learning and Professional Communication," edited by Melody Bowdon and Jim Dubinsky, "Rewriting Community Writing and Rhetoric Courses," edited by Amy Rupiper Taggart and H. Brooke Hessler, and "Exploring Diversity in Community-Based Writing and Literacy Programs," guest edited by Adrian Wurr.

Although much more deserves to be said about these special issues, what seems most salient today is the way each one enacted the dialectical processes traced so brilliantly in Taggart and Hessler's analysis of how experienced teacher-scholars sustain community pedagogy. "Mature community-engaged courses are not merely instituted," Taggart and Hessler remind us. "They are calibrated, requiring constant response and change" (2006, 153). "What makes this possible is the instructor's attention to goals, responsiveness to myriad contextual factors, and pedagogical theory building—a set of strategies best described by Donald Schn as "reflection in and on action" (1983, 154). Tracing experienced practitioners' commitments to critical consciousness, community collaboration, increased civic engagement, and the development of knowledge beyond academe, Taggart and Hessler provide a mirror in which we can see our field deepen our questions and extend our reach.

## THE ART OF LEARNING OUR PLACE

The 2007 Special Issue, *Exploring Diversity in Community-Based Writing and Literacy Programs*, holds a unique place in *Reflections'* evolution. The dissonance could not have been starker between the intersectional arguments for reconceiving community literacy the articles promoted and the still mostly white editorial board—bemoaned for years, of course, but largely unchanged (Mitchell, Donahue, and Young-Law 2012). It was most fitting that the issue called for a new editor who could lead the journal in fresh ways.

The volume, itself, explodes with energy, from Paul Butler's "GED as Transgender Literacy" to Isabel Baca's "Bilingual Service-Learning Workplace Writing Approach," from Michelle Hall Kells' New Mexico-based transformation of Writing Across the *Curriculum* to Writing Across *Communities* to Mary Kay Mulvaney's analysis of oral history recovery within a capstone course devoted to memoir. (With Americans living thirty-five years longer than our grandparents did, and with more than half of today's seventy-four million Boomers likely to live past age eighty-five, I hope that our field continues to engage in the intergenerational work that holds such deep wells of meaning both for students and for the elders with "stories to tell.")

The issue's beating heart, though, is Steve Zimmer's "The Art of Knowing Your Place: White Service Learning Leaders and Urban Community Organizations." Rather than summarizing it, I urge you to reread the essay itself—for the complexities it invites us to navigate, for the nuanced analysis of the slow building of trust, and for the more-urgent-than-ever rules it proposes for white allies and accomplices working in community organizations.

Many of us today are asking, what is our role in transforming this moment into a movement? Looking back on our twenty-year history, perhaps the most valuable gift of our shared enterprise of *Reflections* is the capacity we have developed to learn our place—our *many* places—within and beyond the university.

All of us who have worked on *Reflections* since 2000 can be proud of our ongoing accomplishments. Over and over again, the journal has proven the value of our collective ability to identify a theme, idea, or practice, bring it to the surface, and connect people around it in a kind of community organizing approach to publication. We can be proud, as well, that our work has been inclusive, experimental, and multigenerational, drawing on deep roots in communities where we have built lasting relationships.

The "public turn" we fostered in community-engaged writing requires us, more than ever, to place ourselves on the front lines of social justice in our community projects, research, and writing, and to be sure that the pages of this journal amplify that work. I hope the next decade will continually renew the feeling of those first heady days of the *Reflections* newsletter and its ethos of care, critical awareness, and reflective participation in the world beyond university walls.

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**Barbara Sherr Roswell**, Professor Emerita of Writing at Goucher College, served as Editor of *Reflections* from 1999–2007. Her community-engaged work fueled the creation of the Goucher Prison Education Partnership, which offers a liberal arts degree to over 130 men and women incarcerated in Maryland each year while stimulating meaningful dialogue about justice, incarceration, and educational access ([www.goucher.edu/gpep](http://www.goucher.edu/gpep)). Among her greatest pleasures has been to bring community and scholarly voices into dialogue in such co-edited collections as *Writing and Civic Engagement* (Bedford, 2010), *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education* (Palgrave, 2013), and *View from the Hilltop* (Passager, 2015). Barbara is inspired by the innovative ways writers across communities have responded to quarantine and is hopeful about the role community-engaged writing can play in transforming our current moment into a movement.



# *Reflections'* 20th Anniversary Roundtable:

## What Was, What Is, What's Coming

**Isabel Baca,**

*University of Texas at  
El Paso*

**Tobi Jacobi,**

*Colorado State University*

**Tom Deans,**

*University of Connecticut*

**& Heather Lang,**

*Susquehanna University*

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*In our call for submissions for the Reflections' 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue, we invited shorter considerations about the journal's impact to be published as a textual roundtable. As is usually the case, we got what we asked for: a number of short pieces that praise, situate, look backward in order to predict going forward, illuminate, and otherwise comment on the journal's history, contributions to the field, weaknesses, and strengths. Below are several of these commentaries in conversation with one another. Together, they provide a glimpse into the journal's past and begin to imagine its future.*

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## **REFLECTIONS AS A RADICAL SITE FOR COMMUNITY-INFUSED KNOWING**

*Tobi Jacobi, Colorado State University*

A couple of weeks ago, my eight-year-old came home with stories of a mysterious natural phenomena spilling from his lips: large boulders moving across the desert on their own volition, creating pathways and trails without

human intervention. The “sailing stones” of Death Valley had long captivated the citizen and sanctioned scientist alike as they carved pathways that we couldn’t explain into the California desert floor. While this mystery was answered by research conducted in 2013 and via Google for my son and me, the nature of the mystery stays with me: movements that seem deliberate, directional, explanations just barely visible, here pressing science and art to speculate on the thin and vital layers of seasonal ice that lift and push something new into existence. In its first decade, *Reflections* seemed to operate similarly, moving steadily, stealthily into the entrenched world of writing studies with deliberate movements in myriad directions, allowing the emergent blend of community-based work to amaze, inspire, and provoke scholars into new through lines of inquiry.

*Reflections* called into being a place for community within our field. It highlighted through interviews, book reviews, and feature essays the work being done in the complex spaces writing occupies across campus borders and into third spaces. It valued, welcomed even, the networks and research opportunities created by community-university partnerships. It gave space to graduate students and emerging assistant professors as well as validation to those who had been working for years to recognize a space for community-infused writing work alongside mainstream composition studies. Each editor—Bacon/Roswell—Kirklighter—Parks—and Mutnick/Grobman added significantly to the shape and transformation of the work of community/writing intersections, including interviews with prominent and rising scholars, innovative collaborations, and calls for accountability across language and stakeholders. Essays from the journal have frequently been included in the Best of the Journals in Rhetoric and Composition anthologies published by Parlor Press.

I keep my print collection of *Reflections* in a prominent place in my university office, a jagged row of journals that embody a commitment to respond, to morph, and to grow as each editorial team brought a vision to the evolving needs of our community. Their mentoring and commitments have propelled the journal into its current position as sanctuary, resource, provocateur, community, and home for many scholars. The volumes are positioned deliberately at eye level, ready to grab off the shelf, to lend, to highlight, to encourage students

and colleagues toward an understanding of what research methods, projects, and publications developed through community engagement might enable. This set of texts brings me hope for a more socially just and equitable world, one where many voices are heard, valued, and embraced. We are sailing stones ready to push ahead when conditions are right, claiming space on conference programs, in university press announcements, and within curricular mappings.

## **HONORING A JOURNAL AND ITS EDITORS AS THEY HONOR ITS READERS, ITS CONTRIBUTORS, AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

*Isabel Baca, University of Texas at El Paso*

Inclusive. That's how I would define and describe the journal, *Reflections*, as it celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This journal has become a literary home for me as a community-engaged scholar and educator. It welcomed me in 2007 and, since then, it has paved the way for community-engaged writing and rhetoric, creating a space for social justice and activism in academia.

In 2007, I had my first experience with the journal *Reflections: Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning*, now titled *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*. Adrian Wurr was guest editing a special issue on exploring diversity in community-based writing and literacy programs; my article, "Exploring Diversity, Borders, and Student Identities: A Bilingual Service-Learning Workplace Writing Approach," was accepted and published. It was at that time that I realized the opportunities this journal brings to marginalized scholars and educators. This special issue and the journal's focus on public rhetoric, civic writing, and service learning brought my research interests together and encouraged me to continue my scholarship. At a time of self-doubt and serious impostor syndrome, *Reflections* reassured me that I belong.

In my years (2005-2012) as an assistant professor of English at a Hispanic-serving institution, I was alone in my department as I pursued a research agenda focusing on service-learning in writing studies. Though the university had its own Center for Civic Engagement, I did not find much support within my department. I

was isolated and questioning my own work. *Reflections* rescued me. *Reflections* opened the doors for me and reinforced my scholarship: Public rhetoric, civic writing, and SERVICE-LEARNING matter, both within and outside the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

As a service-learning advocate and practitioner, I believe in community outreach and engagement. When higher education and the community become equal stakeholders, both students' education and the community benefit in many ways. *Reflections* has emphasized the importance of community in our work. *Reflections* values community voices, including voices from the marginalized. Recognizing and valuing these voices have strengthened me inside and outside academia. As a Latina scholar, and one who honors and values community, I thank *Reflections* and its editors for being trailblazers for community-based writing and community projects in rhetoric and composition, and for recognizing that our field is very much connected to community.

In 2013, when I guest co-edited, along with Cristina Kirklighter, the special issue on Latinxs in public rhetoric, civic writing, and service-learning, I worked with extraordinary contributors that taught me and showed me how Latinxs make change and work hard to bring about social justice through art, community engagement, education, and activism. Quoting Cesar Chávez in our introduction to this special issue, Cristina and I emphasized how our gente, Latinxs, contribute to community and fight for social justice through our work. So we quoted Cesar Chávez, "You should know that the education of the heart is very important. This will distinguish you from others. Educating oneself is easy, but educating ourselves to help other human beings to help the community is much more difficult." I believe *Reflections* and its editors are committed to exactly this: to help scholars see the importance of not only doing this ourselves but also teaching others the importance of community engagement, outreach, social responsibility, and social justice.

Since 2007, I have worked with the different journal editors (Cristina Kirklighter, Steve Parks, and now Laurie Grobman and Deborah Mutnick). With these transitions, the journal's focus has evolved more and more by showing the importance of honoring, valuing, and

recognizing the contributions by different communities, particularly communities of color and those who are marginalized. In addition, by making the journal an open access resource, the editors are contributing to a more just and equitable way of making scholarship accessible. Thus, I have found a home in *Reflections*, a home that promotes inclusivity and respect. For the journal and its editors, inclusivity and respect are not just jargon, but a genuine practice, a practice that needs to grow in the fields of rhetoric, writing studies, and literacy.

With its issues focusing on themes such as prison writing, reproductive justice, community justice, resistance, and sustainability, *Reflections* emphasizes our field's concern for, or should I say our field's obligation to strive for, social justice in and outside academia. Social justice comes in many forms: racial, linguistic, cultural, economic, educational, political, medical, etc. *Reflections* provides a venue for scholars to address social (in)justice(s) and describe community-based projects that revolve around the field of rhetoric and writing studies with a focus on the public, on community. It is time for change, and *Reflections* stands as an exemplar to all other journals in the fields.

## REFLECTIONS ON SEEING WHAT'S COMING

*Tom Deans, University of Connecticut*

Twenty years ago, almost no one in composition studies was talking about transfer, although Nora Bacon, a founding editor of *Reflections*, was writing about it, prompted by her experiences teaching and researching first-year students writing for community organizations. At that time, in the mid and late 1990s, taking up transfer of knowledge or competencies as a research priority was out of sorts with then-dominant understandings of critical pedagogy and cultural studies. While transfer had a secure presence in educational research, in rhetoric and composition it was perceived as aligning too much the cognitive paradigm that James Berlin and others had tagged as positivistic and apolitical. Bacon's emphasis on transfer went against the grain, just as I think this journal's founding, while indebted to critical pedagogies, cut against the grain of then-prevailing versions of them, which tended to be long on critique but short on application.

Part of Bacon's effort to explain the dynamics of transfer included coining a student-centered version of the term "theory of writing," which she defined as "a writer's conception of what writing is and what it is for" (Bacon 1999, 58). Working from her empirical study of students in service-learning courses, she analyzed how a student's working theory of writing—among a number of other variables, including rhetorical awareness, writing knowledge, motivation, learning strategies, identity as learner—promoted or impeded writing performance in school or community, as well as transfer across them.

Today, talk of transfer is everywhere in writing studies, and most associate the term "theory of writing" with Kathleen Blake Yancey, Lianne Robertson, and Karen Taczak's 2014 *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Those authors arrived at the term independently, and define it somewhat differently as the "student's definition of writing emerging from explicitly developed knowledge about writing (as articulated through the key terms of the course, e.g., genre, discourse community, context) and from their own experiences in the course and often beyond the course" (Kathleen Blake Yancey, personal email communication, January 8, 2020). Bacon's "theory of writing," framed more as implicit than explicit, may be closer to what Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak call the student writer's "point of departure." But parsing terms is not what I'm after here. Instead, I want to propose that the early service-learning advocates, many of them pivotal to founding *Reflections*, were prescient in valuing a cluster of then-marginal concepts—like attending to how the theories of writing that students carry with them influence transfer across contexts—that would, about a decade later, become mainstream in writing studies.

Another case in point: twenty years ago, no one was using the term "writing about writing" (WAW). David Russell had introduced the idea (though not that phrasing) in 1995, but the signature article on WAW by Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle did not appear until 2007, and their textbook/reader not until 2011. However, WAW-like pedagogy was emergent among many early service-learning practitioners and theorists. The materiality of having novice writers compose in workplace and civic genres forced us to confront the very

nature of writing in ways that typical classroom genres, practices, and exigencies did not. For example, some chapters of my 2003 *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric and Reader* mirror that approach and even reprint some of the very same readings we now see in writing-about-writing anthologies. I was just trying to give students concepts and strategies for navigating the dual demands of academic and community writing. Several articles in the early issues of *Reflections* hew to this same habit of drawing attention to the utility composition theory—and the value of explicitly teaching students such theory—to help make sense of the contradictions of writing at once within and beyond the university (Chaden et al. 2002; Chappell 2005; Gabor 2006). I could point to other patterns of prescience, such as how *Reflections* readers, writers, and editors have prioritized circulation from the start—though rarely calling it that or drawing special attention to it—long before that became a hot term in writing studies.

I suppose I'm waving my hands and saying "Hey, we were there first!" on some important disciplinary trends, but the more telling upshot, I think, is that when you're deliberately working on the edges of the academy and bringing students there with you, you're bound to more immediately face the press of how the larger culture is negotiating writing and social action. This means that there's good reason to believe that *Reflections* will continue to be prescient about what counts as writing and which theories can help us make sense of it.

## MUSINGS ON SERVING AS THE *REFLECTIONS* BOOK EDITOR

*Tom Deans, University of Connecticut*

*Tobi Jacobi, Colorado State University*

Soon after *Reflections* transitioned from newsletter to peer-reviewed journal, it established a book review section. For the first four years, Tom Deans served as book review editor; for the next five, it was Tobi Jacobi. The current review editor is Romeo Garcia.

Tom: When seeking out reviewers, I always tried to balance early career folks with senior scholars. The widely known figures were generous, ever quick to say "yes," and their work appeared right alongside many who were seeing their first publication come into

print. That, to me, felt right for the ethos of a young journal establishing itself as both rigorous and inclusive, as wanting to insist that we need something of a shared knowledge base but also new energy and fresh perspectives.

Tobi: I look back on my time as editor with mixed emotions. I collected books from key presses, reached out to prospective reviewers via listservs, conference sign-ups, and emails to key scholars with rising graduate students. I privileged graduate student reviewers, remembering my own experiences, lectures about how and when to publish. I stood at tables, passed out copies of prospective review texts, developed guidelines, and edited lightly. I worked with special issue editors to find the books that would most intrigue and delight their readers. I invited junior colleagues and students of my own who feigned interest.

Tom: When it came to the actual back-and-forth of editing, I found myself pretty heavy-handed, maybe prioritizing consistency over creativity! Thinking that readers expected brief and brisk reviews, I pushed for compression. Lots of crossing out. With the graduate students, I often tried to unschool their prose and have them speed up the summary sections; at the same time, I wanted them to speak with confidence and a point of view. I occasionally worried that all our reviews were so nice, so affirming, but then would check that impulse—we were trying to build something here.

Tobi: Surely there were books I missed, community texts I could have highlighted, my own failure to resist a culture of busyness and “never-quite-enough” infiltrating my ability to be set and reach the goals I might have set for a book editor who privileged community, reciprocity, and non-traditional texts. It is that last part where I have twinges of regret, wishing I had made space to bring more community-based texts into the journal—and then I wonder if this is even a desire. Do community-based writers want review space for their publications in academic journals? Might such space improve circulation or energize material resources and/or human capacities? Would displacing a potential academic text with a collaborative, community, or experimental book advance work toward language-based justice? Economic equity? Would it privilege community



labor, or would such attention likely advance only university partners? These are some of the questions that linger as I reflect upon the work of editing book reviews across over a dozen issues of *Reflections* and imagine future issues curated by current and future editorial guidance.

## **MAKING SPACE FOR RESEARCH ON PRISON WRITING, LITERACY, AND TEACHING**

*Tobi Jacobi, Colorado State University*

Essays begging educational programming. Love letters. Poems about children. Poems praising god. Flash fictions of absence. Snapshots of abuse, painful to write, painful to read. Longings for grass, for sunlight. More essays begging programs, classes, anything beyond the stale GED curriculum. Requests for books. Complaints, thinly veiled against staff, officers, bunkmates, the system. Scribbles, nonsense, anything, words just to prove one exists. Epistles about the treatment of prisoners. On and on—they kept arriving long after the deadline for the 2004 *Reflections* special issue on prison literacy and writing had passed. When Patricia O'Connor, Barbara Roswell, and I worked to curate that first special issue, we knew something special was happening. We were flooded by submissions from all over the United States, my office shelves stacked high with the government-issue, pre-stamped envelopes available from prison commissaries.

Sixteen years later, it remains difficult to let go of those writings, the carefully penned hopefulness, so clear in lined pages, that a writer could be recognized, valued, and seen beyond prison walls. So, I honor their space in my university office, and every few years I tell myself it is time to let them go. I know this is the rational thing to do, but recycling those pages also feels like letting go of an important beginning, one of the edges of the scholar-activist that so many community writers have helped me to become. Those submissions—even those we couldn't print—propelled me deeper into a subfield I hardly knew existed.

In the 1990s, scholarship on prison literacy and education was scattered across the fields of adult education, sociology, criminology,

philosophy, and women's studies; by the early 2000s community literacy studies was gaining recognition within rhetoric and composition—and prison literacy and writing studies were emerging along with it. The special issue in *Reflections* allowed teacher-scholar-activists (now known as engaged scholars) space to extend writing theory and pedagogy behind bars and to grapple with the complexity, discomfort, and complicities of working with and within often repressive carceral institutions. This is one of the great strengths of *Reflections*: its commitment to bringing into conversation contexts and spaces of writing that are vexed, invisible, relegated to the margins.

When Wendy Hinshaw and I issued the call for a second special issue on prison work more than a decade later, we understood that the landscape had deepened, that the scholarship extended, critiqued, and sometimes corrected those early efforts. We received many more submissions from outside academics and far fewer from currently incarcerated writer-scholars. The outside academics were eager to reflect, report, critique, and interrogate. The inside writers offered testimony, argument, and reflection through short essays, narratives, and poetry. It is difficult to know with certainty how to account for the disparity in submission sources. On one hand, I celebrate the increased attention to carceral education by rhetoricians and literacy scholars; at the same time, I worry about increased repression of the freedom of speech, the circulation limitations that inside writers face in the name of security, our failure to advance writing and expression as a universal human right. *Reflections* created the space to engage those conversations and bring those active, shifting critical concerns into larger dialogues on the role and potential of community literacy work as cross-disciplinary urgencies.

## **THE JOURNAL BEHIND THE CURTAIN: REFLECTIONS ON THE REFLECTIONS ARCHIVE**

*Heather Lang, Susquehanna University*

In the fall of 2018, co-editors Laurie Grobman and Deborah Mutnick invited me to join the *Reflections* team as a web manager and editor. Simply, this appointment was meant to support the editors' goal of transitioning out of a subscription-based publishing model and

into an open-access publishing model. Additionally, the editors also sought to add Creative Commons licensing to as much content as possible. At that time, the editorial team, with the guidance of the Penn State Libraries, began the enormous task of contacting writers, updating permissions, and optimizing PDF files of 19 volumes of content.

As the migration continued, I noticed more difficulties in making *Reflections* content publicly available, namely its limited circulation. The archive was not search engine friendly, and after nearly two decades of grassroots publication, most content had not been indexed on any search engines, such as Google or Bing, or any database (though some content had been annotated in CompPile). In effect, the content was shrouded by a heavy digital curtain. So, I, along with assistant editors, Katelyn Lusher, a PhD student at the University of Cincinnati, and Gabriela Rubino, an undergraduate at Susquehanna University, devised a plan for making the archive more easily accessible to readers and to search engines. This added to our migration the labor-intensive task of providing metadata for every piece published on the website. Now, as we near the end of the migration, we can trace how one, or sometimes two or all three, of us has interacted with every piece of *Reflections* content—each journal article has been marked with copyright permissions, uploaded to the *Reflections* archive, indexed on our website, registered for a Direct Object Identifier, and submitted for inclusion in CompPile.

As I look back on this deep dive into the *Reflections* archive, I'm left with three observations: first, I observed that *Reflections* constitutes a living history of the field and the United States. In many ways, the archive picks up where histories of the field of composition end, reveals volumes that react to, process, and theorize major events and movements in the U.S. over the last two decades, and illustrates the ways that the field has evolved to invite community and student collaboration beyond the classroom. Indeed, Tobi Jacobi notes, some of *Reflections*' most valuable contributions to the field omit the classroom altogether to focus on other sites of writing and rhetoric, such as prisons, while still other issues focus on Veterans Affairs offices, after-school programs, post-Katrina New Orleans, community organizations, and museums, to name a few. Moreover, as

an independent journal, *Reflections* has maintained an agile editorial structure that enables writers and editors to respond to national events—the events that make a nation and shape its culture—and community spaces—those nonacademic sites of writing and rhetoric—in a timely and thoughtful fashion.

In this way, *Reflections* not only makes good on its mission to support teachers, scholars, and activists engaging with public rhetoric by tethering its content to current events, but also further demonstrates the connection between what we do in our research or teaching and the impact we can make on the world around us, if and when we choose to make it. The *Reflections* archive demonstrates that rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies are linked to the world, and also models how we might make positive interventions in the world—many of which remain relevant—by addressing the ways that compositionists can respond to the need to foster non-violence, address violence against women, challenge racism and homophobia, and foster diversity in our academic and non-academic lives and communities.

Second, *Reflections'* history of publishing non-academic genres alongside academic genres demonstrates an expansive understanding of scholarly community and the ways that the journal can support research, broadly construed. It is axiomatic that a scholarly journal supports a scholarly community and, as a result of that connection, its genres instantiate that community's values; simply put, the generic forms of a journal dictate what is, and is not, a field's body of knowledge. Many academic fields have been limited by and criticized for their veneration of the academic article and their disregard for artistic, workplace, practical, and everyday genres. Too, this generic restriction is particularly problematic for the exploration of public and civic writing, in which many potential writers compose outside of academic institutions. In addressing this tension, *Reflections* has published scholarly articles, critiques, interviews, and reviews alongside visual art, such as photographs and sketches, poetry, narrative essays, reflective essays, lesson plans, and community action documents. Works composed by students, people experiencing incarceration, veterans, lovers, immigrants, community organizers, activists, and undergraduate students appear alongside emerging and

prominent scholars in the field. Moving beyond the scholarly article and making room for a wide variety of genres challenges traditional notions of who might be included in a research community and expands our notions of what might count as evidence, knowledge, or data. In this way, *Reflections* stands as a powerful example of how compositionists might make their research more accessible to the field as well as to the communities that contribute to, collaborate in, or benefit from our research.

Finally, I observe that *Reflections'* impact on the field is limited by its previously limited circulation. Throughout its history, *Reflections* has addressed difficult and pressing topics (see, for instance, Tom Deans' previous comments on teaching-for-transfer and writing-about-writing pedagogies), but much of this excellent work has been missed as a result of its limited circulation. Because *Reflections* has not been indexed or optimized for search engines, its visibility and availability have been significantly limited. It is also difficult to quantify via the number of citations the impact the journal has made on subsequent scholarship. Though I don't mean to imply that quantification, citation, or indexing are the best measures of the success of research-driven projects, I believe *Reflections* is uniquely positioned to provoke and continue conversations focused on social justice, but that potential cannot be realized without engaging the more open circulatory networks. Too, making the work of the journal visible in and beyond the field is a laborious endeavor. Though the digital editorial team has begun to push aside the curtain, sharing the work of *Reflections*, and maintaining and updating the digital archive as ideas, content, and platforms continue to change, is a long-term endeavor. It is my hope that our efforts in this area will increase the reach of *Reflections* so that the journal might more fully realize its goals of promoting civically-engaged writing and rhetorical practice.

In all these ways, *Reflections* provides an example of how scholars, activists, students, community organizers, and citizens can come together to make and share knowledge that can make positive impacts in our world. The journal's editorial agility in focusing on current events demonstrates the important ways that researchers can engage with communities, rather than hiding away in the Ivory Tower. Its generic diversity asks important questions about what is and

is not legitimate research or scholarship and makes permeable the sometimes-exclusive boundaries of research communities. Further, *Reflections*' new commitment to open access publishing also makes it possible to establish a broader reading and writing community with a variety of stakeholders. After indexing twenty years of *Reflections* content, I believe we need *Reflections* and its community now more than ever, and I hope to see *Reflections* emerge from behind its curtain as a field leader for promoting social change.

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# “You’re Not Alone”:

## An Interview with Tom Deans about Supporting Community Engagement

**Eric Mason,**  
*Nova Southeastern  
University*

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*This interview is not the first in Reflections for Tom Deans, a Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at the University of Connecticut. His first interview appeared in issue 1.1 of Reflections and focused on his work as chair of the recently created CCCC national service-learning committee dedicated to creating “disciplinary momentum” around service learning. He has a career-long interest in community-engaged writing and research, and served as both a Senior Editor and the Book Review Editor for Reflections over several years. In this interview, he reflects on the beginning of Reflections, the emergence of composition’s interest in service learning, and the growth of institutional support and recognition of community engagement. Overall, he finds that despite its early modest aspirations, the field’s trajectory has resulted in a large amount of exciting and important work, and provided a “real viable pathway” for educators who want to build a career around community engagement.*

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**T**om Deans was interviewed for the first issue of *Reflections*, as he was the chair of the recently formed CCCC Service-Learning Committee

established in 1999 and the author of *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition*, which had just been published by NCTE. In later years, he was Book Review Editor for *Reflections*, and he is currently a Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at the University of Connecticut. He has a career-long interest in community-engaged writing and research. For this *Reflections* 20<sup>th</sup>-anniversary issue, we thought it would be interesting to return to the questions and themes from that original interview to reflect on the beginning of this journal, as well as changes since then in how we think about and practice community engagement.

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Eric Mason (EM): In the first issue of *Reflections*, you were not listed as part of the editorial team, but you were involved in the journal's creation, and you were interviewed based on your chairing the recently created CCCC national service-learning committee. Can you first tell us how that committee came to be?

Tom Deans (TD): In the 1990s, there was a lot of excitement across higher education about community engagement. There were national groups like Campus Compact, and locally, universities were founding or expanding campus outreach centers. Terms like "service learning" and the related research were mainly coming out of education, and there wasn't much going on in composition studies, despite our being socially minded due to our roots in rhetoric, and a few early articles having been published by scholars such as Bruce Herzberg. I had done some service learning in the classroom and, when a committee formed at UMass, my name was forwarded by my dissertation director, and I found myself in a very cross-disciplinary group including people from public health, education, and chemical engineering. I ended up writing a dissertation on community-engaged pedagogies, and Nora Bacon, who was one of the first editors of *Reflections* (along with Barbara Roswell), was likewise doing her dissertation in service learning.

We early adopters weren't trying to become a major force in rhetoric and composition; we just wanted to reach that threshold

where we could find ways of connecting with others—sharing research, teaching materials, and curriculum models. A call was put out for those interested in the CCCC national service-learning committee being created under the leadership of then CCCC chair Victor Villanueva, and Nora and I were among those selected to be on it, along with Rosemary Arca, Louise Rodriguez Connal, Barbara Roswell, and Linda Flower, who we were fortunate to have as a member due to the gravitas she brought. The committee operated from 1999-2005 and was a diverse and energetic group.

EM: Can you describe what that committee accomplished and the role it and any other groups played in the creation of *Reflections*?

TD: The field of rhetoric and composition was excited at that time about critical pedagogies with a strong social justice impulse, and we were hearing enthusiasm from campuses and organizations excited to do more community-based work. In trying to build on these energies to create something that was really customized to our field, the committee advocated to quite literally put us on the program at the CCCC conventions from 1999 to 2001 in more formal ways through a special interest group, special plenary sessions, and workshops. We also launched a website that gathered links to resources for those interested in service learning in composition. Though we drafted a position statement on service learning, we didn't get that over the finish line; however, a CCCC committee formed years later succeeded in getting that done, and it continues to be part of the resources that people can use today.

The real credit for creating *Reflections* goes to its first editors, Barbara Roswell and Nora Bacon, and those who worked with them. The committee's role in *Reflections* was mainly in helping to secure a grant from the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) to support its creation by funding printing and the design of a website. The AAHE—a fairly big player in higher ed at the time, but now defunct—was part of a national conversation trying to create disciplinary momentum around service learning. They made grants and also supported a series of edited collections on service learning in the disciplines, the

first of which was *Writing the Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Composition*, a text published in cooperation with NCTE and Campus Compact.

EM: I remember the resource website you mentioned, though, to my knowledge, it is no longer available online. What are the most important repositories today for community-engaged teaching, research, and writing?

TD: Emerging fields often have relatively few resources. For instance, you might have a few edited collections rather than lots of monographs, or you might have one or two websites that are trying to aggregate what everyone across the country is doing—and that’s what that initial website was. It was just basically saying to people: “You’re not alone; there are people and programs out there you can look to even if they’re in Washington state and you’re in South Carolina.” At that time, there was a scarcity of resources, so centralizing made sense. Nowadays, there’s an abundance of resources, so I never point people to one source anymore. Rather, I say, “Go to the Conference on Community Writing; read *Reflections*; read the *Community Literacy Journal* (CLJ); read the books coming out; read the dissertations coming out.” I’m perfectly fine with things like that website becoming obsolete because it meant we grew a much more robust and diverse set of resources, ones that are now almost too abundant to keep track of. But I think it’s characteristic of early movements to have a more centralized place to share information, and that’s part of what *Reflections* was as well.

Remember, too, that *Reflections* started as a newsletter, and when momentum started building and people were doing more research, we followed the path of academic legitimacy by thinking, “Well, journals have more prestige than newsletters.” But I think newsletters and upstart websites are also good grassroots modes of organizing and networking—so that first website was important, but it was quite ad hoc as I posted links people were sending me and curated it as best I could. But at a certain point it became a bit futile because there was too much for one website.

EM: The title of that first interview was “CCCC Institutionalizes Service-Learning,” and you remarked in it that establishing the CCCC committee was one way to “foster the institutionalization of service-learning.” What, in your view, are the most important markers that this process has been successful?

TD: I am less excited today about the word “institutionalization” than I was when I was twenty-nine years old or so and trying to figure out how to make my way in a profession. But that bid for respectability and recognition—where you’re saying, “Take me seriously”—is really important developmentally for movements as well as for individuals. If you could have told me twenty years ago that there would be not just one journal—*Reflections*—but that the *CLJ* would be founded a few years later, and then there would be a very vibrant Conference on Community Writing every other year, and that there would be enough books out there to have an annual outstanding book award in civic engagement and community literacy, I would have said: that’s more institutionalization than I would have expected.

Our aspirations were pretty modest at the time, and I couldn’t be happier with how the field’s trajectory has led to a real viable pathway for newcomers to find their way into community-engaged research and teaching. I pretty regularly now mentor graduate students who want to build a career around community engagement, and once you get to the point of having journals, conferences, books, and interested Ph.D. students, you have an academic subspecialty where the real issue becomes sustaining it and continuing to grow it in ways that may be somewhat unpredictable, but where, hopefully, newcomers can become leaders and take us in interesting directions. There are certainly some avenues of community engagement that I wouldn’t have expected twenty years ago, and that I’ve since become really excited about, like the community publishing work that Steve Parks and Eli Goldblatt started in Philadelphia.

EM: In the same year that *Reflections* was first published, your book *Writing Partnerships* came out in which you described three paradigms for community-engaged writing: writing for

the community, writing *about* the community, and writing *with* the community. How has your thinking about these paradigms changed since that time?

TD: It was kind of the interviewer to ask about that book in the original interview, and talking about it now may seem a bit self-indulgent, but I think those categories of for/about/with have held up pretty well. But they're also just a heuristic, a tool for sharpening our thinking about assumptions embedded in practice and to prompt questions about how different kinds of courses and programs embody different forms of literacy, social action, and ideology as well as different definitions of authorship, collaboration, change, process, and audience.

Here's the origin story for those paradigms: a few years before that interview, I attended a CCCC workshop on service learning being held by folks from Carnegie Mellon, Bentley, and Stanford, and, while I was really energized by the workshop, I was also confused because there were very different courses being presented to us under the same heading of "service learning." I remember just sitting down in the hallway during one of the breaks and trying to sketch something out that would help me understand how all of these projects could be animated by the same impulses toward social action but still operate so differently. In classical terms, the categories became for me a mode of invention to help think through these different models and interrogate why someone might default to a certain model. We have choices to make as we teach and work with community groups, choices that depend on our goals and our values, and if those categories help us be more self-conscious and deliberate about those choices, they've done their job. I think the for/about/with heuristic doesn't hold up as well once you move away from the scene of the classroom and the semester-long course to other kinds of projects and networks, which has become more common in community engagement.

EM: At the time of the original interview, you were using community-engaged writing in various courses. Do you continue to use these approaches in courses you teach, and, if so, how has your use of them changed?

TD: I teach less now than I did when that interview was published because I became a writing program administrator and have been so for all of the last twenty years. But I try to teach first-year writing with some degree of regularity and, when I do teach it, I teach it with a community component. Since those early days, genre and circulation have become bigger themes in my courses, as they have in the field, but the same basic arrangement holds in that I gather my students into teams to work for organizations, and then shepherd them through that writing process as they negotiate both the academic and the community expectations for those projects. The “writing for the community” model is one that I also use in some advanced classes too, but I’m also teaching more grad classes nowadays and have not done as much service learning in those because fewer take up the theme of community engagement.

EM: You mentioned your work as a writing administrator, and you are currently the Director of the University Writing Center at the University of Connecticut. Has your experience in community-engaged writing affected your approach to operating a writing center?

TD: Very much so. When I became a writing center director in 2005, I spent a lot of my time and energy thinking about how a writing center can do community engagement. There were already some models emerging in the early 2000s for this, such as community writing centers that welcome citizens onto campus and into libraries. At the University of Connecticut, we’ve developed an approach that focuses on partnering with secondary schools to assist them in launching a peer writing center. We’ve worked with fifty to sixty middle and high schools across the state, and more intensively with about a dozen schools, to help them start their own writing centers. If interested in that model, you can read its history and practices in an article I co-authored with Jason Courtmanche (*WPA Journal*, issue 42.2). That’s where a lot of my community engagement efforts have been—not focused on any particular course, but instead on building a network in partnership with our local National Writing Project chapter, which has long been working with local teachers who value how students can use writing as a tool for learning and action.



EM: What do you believe are currently the most pressing issues for scholars and teachers of community-engaged writing?

TD: Something I was naive about twenty years ago but now strikes me as central is how important labor issues are in a field where we have majority part-timers or graduate students teaching first-year writing. Community-engaged writing pedagogies involve relationship-intensive work that is best done over the long term. This work is really hard to do under the best of circumstances but becomes untenable under conditions of precarity. Even established, secure faculty can get drawn away from developing quality sustainable partnerships and courses by research or administrative demands, but I'm more concerned about the majority of first-year writing instructors who don't really have the opportunity to do this work because of labor conditions, even though they have the impulses to do this kind of work.

EM: Our trajectory as a field has been, and continues to be, hopeful, however, and projects like *Reflections* represent our long-term interest in finding the resources to make something more promising happen for the community and for our students. Being reminded that we are not alone in these hopes and endeavors is an important part of why these projects were created in the first place.

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# The Consequences of Engaged Education: Building a Public Case

**Linda Flower,**  
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*As the reach of community engaged writing has expanded, it has come to offer a uniquely powerful contribution to a college education, well beyond service. We have the opportunity to make a visible, cross-disciplinary case that embraces this remarkable diversity in a compelling public argument—one that can link vision with new evidence of genuine educational consequences for students. This paper sketches a framework for both articulating that social, ethical, and intellectual contribution and supporting it with theory-driven and data-based evidence of shared, valued outcomes.*

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In their invitation to join this issue, Laurie Grobman and Deborah Mutnick celebrated a progression from “service learning” to “community-engaged writing and rhetoric.” The breadth of this new identity was inescapable at the 2019 CCW, Coalition for Community Writing conference. It featured sessions on our standard-bearing agendas, from “Community Partnerships and Pedagogy,” or “Community Accountability” to the “Documentary Impulse,” “Circulating

Stories of Homelessness,” or “DIY Community Publishing.” At the same time, you might enter the playing field of unresolved challenges, whether it was “Balancing Authority and Advocacy in Community” and “Food Justice” or learning how to “Explore Urban Space,” or even move out of our disciplinary comfort zone with science-based research to address “Food and Environment” or amass data that builds “Capacity for Advocacy.” Some discussions delved into “Theoretical Approaches” while others called for research on the “Long-term Impacts of Engaged Learning.” And down the hall, colleagues were advocating action in the wider public arena by “Cultivating Local Publics,” building partnerships for “Justice Entrepreneurship,” and (in the concluding session) by taking on “Grassroots Community Organizing, Impacting Policy and Legislation.”

As the vision and reach of the movement suggests, community engaged education based in writing and rhetoric has come of age. It has undergone an expansive transformation, evident in the journals *Reflections* and *Community Literacy* and in a wave of books and publications. And its reach has extended beyond a family of projects to a broader vision of what education itself should accomplish. More importantly, with this expanding family of practices, it has established an identity that is no longer limited to the vaguely commendable act of service or to specific programs, projects, or practices. Rather, the wider public case for community engaged education, I will suggest, rests on the unique contribution it makes to the social significance of a college education more broadly. That is, it can give students an intellectually and experientially grounded preparation for a form of citizenship that works with and across cultural and social differences guided by ethical commitments.

To help envision *this* sort of citizenship (in a world where it is a contested notion), I would like to start with a brief historical look at important ways the agendas of community projects *differed* in the early days of this movement. I do this in order to argue for focusing on the critical point at which they *converge* around a richer, integrated model of citizenship. Secondly, I believe this multi-faceted foundation offers us a way to build a broader, even more public case, combined with new kinds of evidence, for the consequential nature

such learning has that extends beyond writing, the classroom, or a discipline.

## THE MULTIPLE FACES OF ENGAGEMENT: HOW WE GOT HERE

In its early years, a movement like this grows by staking out new territory, or as Michael Warner's study (2005) of emerging counterpublics puts it, you say "not only 'Let a public exist' but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way. ... Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes'" (114). And you must also make a case for why this flag is so significant. Why *should* we do this, often in light of other options in education, research, social or civic engagement? In the early years of writing about *community* engagement and the Community Literacy Center (CLC) in Pittsburgh, for instance, I understood them in part as an alternative to the model of service learning growing out of Campus Compact (founded in 1985 by the presidents of three prestigious universities and an education commissioner).

To put this response in context, the Community Literacy Center began work in 1990 as a collaboratively initiated and designed partnership without outside funding (although it later garnered more substantial outside support). It saw itself as an alternative to the trend Paula Mathieu saw in her 2005 critique of universities' move "toward creating long-term, top-down, institutionalized service-learning programs" designed to privilege the universities' own broader strategic goals (96).

Reviews written nearly thirty years later reveal the continued usefulness service-learning has had to academic institutions, noting its wide uptake in social studies, although community staff themselves may not see the difference between service, volunteerism and internships (Davis 2019). And in international, especially Asian institutions, it had been widely adopted in disciplinary education in medical and nursing sciences, business and economics, computer and social sciences, where it is often equated with an experiential learning activity in a disciplinary practice or a prologue to an Internship, and prized for its training in interpersonal relations (Salam 2019). In American educational studies, service-learning tends to be evaluated in terms of the support it gives to learning classroom material

(Currie-Muller and Littlefield 2018). However, these reviews are also showing an expanded concern with a wider set of values and career goals (Pritchard and Bowen 2019).

With a special focus on composition students, Iverson (2019/2020) picks up this thread reviewing service-learning outcome studies since 2000 and the shift in terms (as exemplified in the new subtitle of *Reflections*) to “community engaged writing and rhetoric.” Though, as he notes, these studies are few in number, they continue to support the effect on social awareness and individual growth broadly defined, and on writing in particular. They also note a link to later professional choice, although that might be hard to separate from initial self-selection. His own longitudinal study of ten students helps illustrate some of the strengths and limitations of typical “service-learning” projects, as when this student reflects “that a sort of first-year writing experience that focuses on service-oriented stuff is important” and helpful “like if you have to, later on in life write grants...I don’t know, write a newsletter or anything” (17). Iverson also noted that the student did not recall any particulars of the classroom or readings and appeared most influenced by the focus on writing in the disciplines. Using three (of his ten) case studies, Iverson makes a strong and nuanced case for the value that a writing-plus-service-course like this can have on students, especially when reflection raises their ethical, political, or civic awareness. However, the path I wish to focus on, which I will call *community engaged education*, will differ in its more intensely intellectual and outcome-oriented focus, which will in turn make additional demands on both the community partners, the teachers, and the students.

Community literacy, as my colleagues and I envisioned it in 1990, had a different logic. To begin with, it was a very strategic partnership—helping urban teenagers who were typically not school comfortable develop rhetorical problem-solving strategies in order to write publicly circulated documents discussing urban issues (e.g., police enforced curfews, job options, risk and stress, or school suspension policies) and to do so from their own “expert/ insider” point of view (Peck et al 1995). This version of community literacy was also strategically designed as a process of inquiry into both community writing and our own approach. The Community Literacy Center

(CLC) itself grew out of a somewhat unlikely union. Our home, Pittsburgh's Community House, was a neighborhood center built in 1890 as part of a large, downtown Presbyterian church, but as demographics changed, it became identified with its racially mixed, inner-city neighborhood. In that established presence of midnight basketball and small group neighborhood meetings, the CLC project added a new discourse. Its literacy program, based more on thinking than writing instruction, combined an ethical, intercultural agenda with insights from problem-solving research. It was energized by the visionary acumen of its director, Rev. Dr. Wayne Peck (with Harvard Divinity school and Carnegie Mellon degrees), the wisdom of Ms. Joyce Baskins, a magnetic and motivating African-American mother to all in this urban neighborhood and a representative voice in city planning, and by my desire to learn by doing. As a consequence, the CLC's strategic educational vision grew up in a contact zone where decidedly cross-cultural insights and three kinds of leadership operated within a shared commitment (Flower, *Construction*). Within that understanding of engagement, community literacy worked as a knowledge-building space for all of its participants. Later, the lessons and practices of the CLC would morph into an ongoing series of Community Think Tanks which drew cross cultural, cross hierarchy groups into focused problem-solving dialogues. In that instantiation, college students collected interviews and data to document alternative and often competing versions of a local problem which they brought to Round Tables that could include welfare recipients, nursing aides, high school students with an LD (learning disability), or the Independent (first-generation and self-supporting) college students, and the relevant administrators, policy makers, CEOs, counselors, educators, or students. There they explored different perspectives on the problem, considered options, and tested them against possible outcomes, all of which was documented in published *Findings* (Flower, n.d.). So even as the contexts and projects changed, the agenda and community literacy's rhetorical practices continued to develop.

However, the early CLC was clearly not the only agenda emerging in the academy. In composition, for instance, the "social turn" was asserting its own turn away from the individual and their inner or cognitive experience, mounting a needed critique of power and ideology. Community work, on the other hand, was also making it



clear that one would have to deal with the *interaction* of all these social, cognitive, affective, material, and embodied forces and practices. When you walk out of theory or the classroom, interaction—including politics—is how things get done. Meanwhile, yet another set of agendas began to surface in the muddy, competing waters of institutional relations. For ten years, the Community Literacy Center (in its collaboration with the National Center for the Study of Writing at Berkeley and CMU) was able to also conduct research supported by the N.I.E. (the National Institute for Education). But by the end of that period, the inquiry-friendly N.I.E. was replaced with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, an institutional machine dictated by the conservative politics of the time and its agenda to impose standardized testing on struggling schools.

So, when Paula Mathieu (2005) mounted her criticism of how institutionally shaped service-learning was insulated from the needs of, or communication with the community, I felt we were concerned about many of the same problems. Yet, in defining her approach as “tactical,” and in fact excluding “strategic” thinking, we seemed to be operating with competing value systems. Building on Foucault, who equated “strategic” practices with self-interested, oppressive institutional agendas, this dichotomizing argument called for an explicitly non-strategic, opportunistic, and subversive set of methods and practices, operating under-the-institutional-radar wherever possible. And compared to a more research-based, try-study-and-revise style of development, these “tactical” projects were not designed to be repeated. Yet, at the same time, Mathieu was giving us impressive case studies of homeless newspaper sellers giving voice to their reality through journalism—an action that seemed inescapably related to the strategic problem-solving valued in cognitive rhetoric. This raises the question, were these two approaches, seen as at odds in the academic literature, necessarily *contradictory* to one another? Or were they just differently *situated* with some equally valuable but different short-term *goals*? How were they, in fact, related?

Another more recent example raises its public-calling flag with a still different agenda in Steve Parks’s strongly argued 2014 essay, “Sinners Welcome: The Limits of Rhetorical Agency.” Of special relevance here, he offers a very insightful analysis of the Community

Literacy Center's approach to community engagement and its vision of helping silenced people take rhetorical agency. He then (politely) rejects this model to make his strongly alternative, "we should" case for moving to much more local, politically engaged organizing, focusing on specific action items. The goal and test of value of such a project is its local results. And like Mathieu's, his own work shows that social impact is indeed possible.

So, I want to question whether these cogent assertions of the significance of a particular agenda can support a claim for what is *necessarily* the right or even *best* course for community engagement. In each of these alternatives we reach different goals and reveal different limitations. The CLC, with its link to college courses on literacy or leadership, for instance, is unlikely to make immediate political change, although its educational focus for *all* the participants can promote intercultural and local as well as academic and professional forms of engagement (Flower 2016). The practice of developing, testing, and then adapting one's own approaches helps build on each experience in a more considered way. Yet whatever effect this agenda has on "changing the conversation" around a local police-enforced curfew, for instance, it does not then enter the ongoing tangled web of city politics and policy. As I expect Steve Parks would say, it is more likely to circulate words *from* the street than it is to be out *on* it. In short, each of these complex agendas seemed to define and make a difference in its own way.

## THE SOCIAL CASE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How then might we build a coherent case that recognizes alternative agendas, including today's impressive array of yet more paths to community engagement? For example, one path might be the choice to replace the efficiency of packaged literacy training with the slowness and uncertainty of learning to listen (e.g., what are the "real" needs of an internally conflicted diaspora community in Phoenix?). And only then, from there, to create a new collaborative "rhetorical response" (Long 2018). Another path appropriate to an established Indigenous context might involve creating a sustainable technological presence for the Cherokee nation through a community constructed web site (Cushman 2013). Or, like the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, one might use their special expertise to develop a collection

of research on pollution in the Delaware Water Gap, designing it as ammunition for others, such as a coalition of multiple local activist trying to protect the river (Kroll 2016). And in North Philadelphia, the path has become a stream of collaborative community/university projects arising from a wide network of collaborators, maintained by mutual respect and face-to-face relationships (Golddblatt 2007).

What these radically different paths draw attention to are the multifaceted goals and methods of community engagement which work as an ethical and intellectual vision and a force for change. However, taking an inclusive perspective can lay the groundwork for a broader public case for engagement as an essential element in contemporary education. Even as our colleagues jump aboard the train for STEM, it is a case we need to make. The particular framework sketched here argues for an educational significance beyond the humanities built on two lines of argument: our unique contribution to citizenship and the persuasive power of consequences.

When we represent the paths to engaged education with an inclusive roadmap, we see that one place these paths converge is around a conscious commitment to pressing social concerns—in particular, to crossing divisive social boundaries, guided by the need for moral clarity, and motivated by the desire to make change happen. Being grounded in writing and rhetoric also means that our ideas and methods are well articulated and are themselves open to reflection, challenge, and change. And linking the goals of engagement to social impact moves us from out of the classroom and into a larger community. Consider a suggestive parallel to the ancient Greek’s ideal of *kosmopolitēs*. There one strives to become a cosmopolitan, “a citizen of the world,” not limited by the identities your culture offers (e.g., being a Greek, an Athenian, or a member of your city-state). This means you identify as a member of a single community to which all people belong, linked with a shared moral vision. It is the sort of citizenship that prepares one to walk into a new local community, listen, learn, and participate.

Being immersed in this as a felt experience can prepare students for the kind of collaborative community building Eli Goldblatt describes in *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the Curriculum* (2007).

The “Here” may be Philadelphia, but the community is built around a common cause. In the same sense, community engaged education places a student within a larger narrative of social commitment that seeks not only to understand these social differences, but also how to use them for change. For instance, working with community writers—whether they be the homeless journalists of Boston, urban teenagers in Pittsburgh, or the school kids, immigrants, and disabled publishing their stories with Philadelphia’s New City Community Press—their writing becomes a way to put their strengths as well as the unrecognized and often harsh realities they face into public circulation. It happens through the *interplay* of town and gown in divided communities, or when the well-off (with the standing or means to be heard) collaborate with the expertise and insight of the poor, marginalized, or voiceless. And for the college student, classroom concepts are not simply “learned” but re-represented as actions in context with complications and consequences. Their personal engagement with difference, ethical choice, and change lets education become, in Burke’s words, “equipment for living” (1973)

The case for citizenship as part of a core curriculum is, however, less likely to be successful if it rests on an abstraction—even if it has classical credentials. How will educators in other disciplines see it as relevant to their work? We might take one lesson from the research on “transfer” which started by arguing for competing *definitions* of the phenomenon. When the results of these studies, however, are interpreted within their context—as a response to different settings, expectations, personal goals, dispositions etc.—definitions are replaced with a more expansive, contextualized understanding of the different ways transfer *can work*. The same logic applies to the arguments for the educational value of engagement. When a community project is represented as a response to its particular, richly contextualized rhetorical space, it gives presence to adaptive, goal-directed choices engagement demands. Equally important, it also directs our attention to a central strength of local engagement—its potential for explicit, adaptive, socially valued outcomes. Such outcomes, often tied to rhetorical and social interaction, can range from an individual student’s new capacity for cultural understanding, for reading difference, taking agency, or working in collaboration (whether one is in business, engineering, medicine or marketing). Or it may show up in the capacity a small group, coalition, or counterpublic

must develop to “change the conversation” in its rhetorical space, or the power to actually modify practices or policies (in a city council, community, or corporation).

I also recognize that the notion of “education for engaged citizenship” may not have an immediate appeal to the perceived needs institutions, administrators, educators, funders, families, or students now face. For many, the so called “crisis in the humanities” raises the need to attract students and to build a case for relevance, impact, or funding. In contrast to STEM enterprises, we rarely produce patented objects, procedures, or data, forcing us to argue for significance with limited evidence. But does that mean it isn’t there? As William James (1981) would say, “there can be no difference that doesn’t make a difference” (45). This is something to which community writing projects have had a front seat. However, John Dewey (1988), who sees even our best ideas as “hypothetical,” sets the stakes even higher. The worth of ideas, theories, or beliefs, such as those which support engaged education, is “conditional; they have to be tested by the consequences of the operations they define and direct.” Their “final value is not determined by their internal elaboration and consistency, but by the consequences they effect in existence as that is perceptibly experienced” (132).

In standard academic practice, our observable or documented outcomes typically take the form of grades or papers, based on an assumption of (or hope for?) transfer to subsequent classes or perhaps internships—again, typically measured by grades. But community writing and civic engagement can have consequences well beyond the classroom in peoples’ lives—not just in the transfer of learning, but in the choices urban teenagers make “on the street” or in school. It can show up in college students’ articulation of experienced-based insights into intercultural collaboration and later in professional performance as socially strategic team leaders, embedded activists, or teachers. We have each seen this impact in part and believe in the reality of its reach.

Yet how good is our understanding, not to mention evidence, for how this form of education works in practice beyond the project? To build a public case for the “perceptibly experienced” impact of community

engaged education would mean both tracking those outcomes and interpreting their significance. One traditional approach involves satisfaction surveys or collecting data on school retention, job placement, contact hours, and publications, all complemented by an engaging narrative of a case in point. College programs tend to use grades, surveys, or reflections. I expect we have all used some of these at some time. But will they constitute a persuasive set of “perceptibly experienced” consequences?

## **BUILDING A CONSEQUENTIAL CASE**

The framework sketched here would combine the social case for citizenship through community engagement with the persuasive power of a “consequential case.” Building such a case, I suggest, would call for:

1. a more complex form of evidence
2. focused on how this experiential learning has been *put to use* in people’s lives,
3. gathered when possible over longer periods of time,
4. with informal but sophisticated, theory-conscious methods,
5. interpreted and circulated in terms of both abstract values and persuasive ways of measuring its grounded, working significance.

In my own experience, this sort of inquiry has revealed some surprisingly different ways this sort of learning is put to use and the scope of its impact. In an ongoing set of case studies, one particularly useful method started with making college students’ final written reflections not only a significant and shared part of a course as many of us do, but by requesting a direct focus on ways their learning had actually been *put to use in their lives*. An even more probing picture of outcomes emerged when students used a challenging course concept or theory to develop a data-based analysis of one of their own unexamined (problematic) strategies for engagement. Their analysis created some explicit, workable options for change, developed to apply in their teaching, in student government, or personal relations. An informal follow-up confirmed this analysis had real consequences.

Satisfaction surveys can be a limited tool for gauging impact or the usefulness a project has for community partners or participants. More formal “critical incident” interviews, on the other hand, can create focused, even codable accounts of when or if a person actually called on or used what they learned in a project (Flanagan 1954). My own experience with this method of follow-up with college students, up to ten years after a community engaged course, is revealing the remarkable staying power of knowledge when academic and experiential learning interact, as well as its creative transformation as they take it into their personal and professional lives. Yet another way of assessing impact can track the circulation of not only texts but of interpretative frames that may have changed the “conversation” on a campus, in a union, or department.

There are, of course, a range of interpretive lenses with which to analyze the text and talk we collect, such as coding it for students’ ability to interpret cultural difference, engage in intercultural dialogue, entertain rival hypothesis, or engage in productive conflict. We can use activity analysis to let us step back and tease out the dynamics of the larger “activity system” operating in a classroom, a project, a university, community, or organization, revealing some of its rules, mediational tools, and divisions of labor or status and how they interact with its goals or wider context. It can help us articulate some of the “contradictions” embedded within such a system when, say, the goal of equitable town/gown relations confronts the established institutional methods or tools for delivering a “service.” More importantly, uncovering embedded contradictions locates the sites warm for innovation and change (Engeström 1933).

A theory-conscious interpretation of case studies may depend on grounded-theory, a feminist analysis, or a material, cognitive, or cultural lens. It can use coding and even non-parametric (small sample) statistics to test an interpretation. And it can draw on powerful concepts from studies of transfer, framing, or decision making. The point is, we have a wealth of “mediational” tools that can let us discover more of the underarticulated impact of our work and build a stronger, more sophisticated case for the diverse, distinctive, and significant, “perceptibly experienced” outcomes and

the personal, social, and public consequences of community engaged learning.

This research has another endearing quality. Because these methods typically involve face-to-face interaction or writing, they create a unique reflective space. When participants are asked to articulate formative or vivid experiences, they begin seeing them again (or maybe for the first time) through the lens of consequences in their own lives. In doing so, they find themselves discovering their own capacities, potential for agency, struggles, and unresolved challenges. Inquiry has its own unexpected outcomes.



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**Linda Flower** is a Professor of Rhetoric at Carnegie Mellon whose work combines inquiry into cognition and local public rhetoric. Her initial research into social-cognitive processes and teaching the art of rhetorical problem-solving, in turn raised the question: what are these students actually doing when they face of new problems or strategies? (*The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing; Learning to Rival*).

With the creation of Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, Flower and her collaborators applied these insights to supporting community writers as rhetorical agents engaged in social action (*Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*). The CLC's practices of intercultural inquiry led to new work organizing deliberative local publics on problems in urban workplaces, schools and colleges. Designed as a cross-hierarchy, cross-cultural practice, these Community Think Tanks have given an articulated presence to the unrecognized expertise of people from nursing aides, to high schoolers dealing with a learning disability, to low income "independent" college students ([www.cmu.edu/thinktank](http://www.cmu.edu/thinktank)). This paper is part of a new study on the outcomes of community engaged education for college students, tracking ways they have gone beyond transfer to self-consciously transforming their experience into publicly valued skills.

# Are We Still an Academic Journal?

## Editing as an Ethical Practice of Change

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I became Editor of *Reflections* in 2008, soon joined by Brian Bailie as a graduate intern in 2008 and, then, as an Associate Editor beginning in 2009. Just prior to this moment, *Reflections* had been transformed from a saddled-stapled publication for engaged dialogue to more formal academic journal binding with more extended articles. The move from an “informal” to a “formal” academic structure also echoed the emerging status of community partnership scholarship in the field. Increasingly, academic and community-based scholars were finding that interest in such work was expanding beyond the capability of traditional journals and series to publish. *Reflections’* expansion was designed to meet that need and to provide it a formal “disciplinary” space. Indeed, this moment also marked the emergence of *Community Literacy Journal*. And it speaks to the ethos of community partnership work that, since that time, the two journals have

fostered a collaborative ethos, both finding a home in the Coalition for Community Writing.

Emerging into disciplinary space, even as a “sub-field,” however, brought its own challenges. Would *Reflections* continue its commitment to pushing boundaries or settle into a détente with the larger field? As Baillie and I took on our work as editors, we would be answering this question through what we might count as scholarship, who would be considered scholars, and which voices would form the bedrock of the journal. These were live questions not only in the pages of the journal, but also in composition and rhetoric as well. As evidenced in the discussion that followed, during our time as editors, we tried to make clear that *Reflections* would continue to foreground work that gave equal weight to academic and community scholars. *Reflections* would work to ensure the journal spoke to all constituencies involved in community partnerships/service-learning—adjuncts, non-tenure track faculty, community organizations, as well as HBCU’s, HSIs, and grassroots community organizations. For us, this was a way to continue the journal’s political and scholarly goal of valuing the literacies, knowledge, and traditions of a plural-versality of communities. And in doing so, we also hoped *Reflections* would continue to offer a broader critique to how the field was structured to try to break the discourse within composition and rhetoric that championed professionalization and disciplinarity. Too often, this discourse represented a fetishization of theory and academic discourse, a professionalization that stepped back from the needs of students in its basic writing courses, stepped away from the needs of resource-poor communities, and removed itself from the difficult work of laboring for the inclusive and democratic society often invoked in its scholarship.

This was the disciplinary and scholarly context in which we began our work.

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Parks: My memory is that *Reflections* began as an attempt to bring together all the emergent work occurring under the banner of service-learning and community partnerships. There was a sense

that, at that time, there was no scholarly venue which was focused on such work in composition and rhetoric. I remember when I first saw *Reflections*. It was literally a saddle stapled publication, almost like a 'zine in my mind—a genre of which I'm very fond. I believe that about a year before Barbara Roswell decided to step down, she changed the publication into a journal format with perfect binding for the spine. My memory was that this allowed longer articles as well as added a bit more academic legitimacy to its form, legitimacy which Barbara had already created through its content.

Such changes, though, also created labor issues—you need more infrastructure to manage subscriptions and mailing lists, you have to pay designers and think through mailing costs. Ideally, your journal editor is also given support in the form of a reduced teaching load and graduate assistant help. These topics can seem mundane, but it is exactly such expenses and lack of support that can sink journals, particularly in a period then (and now) when universities are not supporting independent journals. I began hearing about some of the stresses facing independent journals right about the time I also heard Barbara was thinking of stepping down as editor.

My thought was that Syracuse University's Writing Program could be a place that could eliminate some of those structural issues. We had administrative staff like Kristi Johnson, Kristen Krause, and George Rhinehart who could help discover solutions to these issues. We also had graduate students who could help with the daily work of navigating submitted articles. This work would also provide graduate students with the opportunity to see how the field operates. It became a professional development of sorts. So, part of my motivation for getting involved was the thought that beyond the mission of the journal, which I admired, I might be able to figure out a way to make sure that *Reflections* could continue to grow and, ultimately, become self-sustaining.

And here I want to stress two related issues: First, it is not accidental that a privileged place like Syracuse University could support the structure of the journal, which speaks to

the narrow bandwidth of privilege which can support some folks being editors, etc. Second, given the demographics at Research 1 institutions, this also speaks to why editors tend to be overwhelmingly white, typically male—which is also to note the male and white supremacy which marks our field. Recognizing this larger context, as an editor, that is, I felt a responsibility not to exist within that bubble of privilege but to think about how to build *Reflections* in a way that could negate many of the structures that kept academic publishing so contained within a racist/elitist history, opening it up to a larger audience of scholars and activists.

Baillie: I began working on *Reflections* in Fall 2008 with volume 8, issue 1, *Teaching Peace: On the Frontline of Non-Violence*. The year before, in Fall 2007, I had just started in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program (CCR) at Syracuse University (SU). Even a year later, I was still completely a fish out of water in every sense: I was a returning student; I was older than a number of the other grad students in CCR. And I was very shocked by the material differences coming from a state school like Cal State San Bernardino, which was an open-access school for the most part. Even after a year of attending SU/CCR, I remember saying to myself, “I don’t know if this is for me. I don’t know if I can do this anymore.” Because even at the physical, visual level, I felt different. The way I dressed was so different than how other people on campus dressed. I had never realized that people actually dressed in total preppy outfits as daily clothes, not just for some special occasion. In fact, when I showed up for the beginning of school year’s department orientation and business meetings at the start of my second year, I’m still dressed like a gutter punk. I’ve got my shaved head, my long shorts, my black tee shirt with whatever band I was into at the time and my black chucks and my high socks. I completely stick out like a sore thumb.

In fact, my clothes made clear how everything was so different at SU. Most of the students there came from money; and even if they weren’t wealthy, a large percentage were not first gen college students—which I was—and most, even if of modest means, grew up in a higher socio-economic class than I did. Cal

State San Bernardino (at the time) was such a working-class, first gen, Hispanic-serving, open-access school. The faculty in my Comp-Rhet MA program said that Comp-Rhet was a really progressive discipline. It's a space where you can fight for things like social justice. You can do things to help first generation students.

So, when I was at SU, I kept asking myself, "How is that possible here? How would the training necessary for that type of work come from a place like this? And when the *Reflections* internship opened up, that was the space where I could see the chance to get such training and some exposure to work that was about social justice, giving voice to people often excluded from academic discourse. It seemed a space where the type of discourses that needed to be made available in our composition classrooms could be broadcast to Comp-Rhet scholar-teachers, and hopefully, make its way into FYC courses so that first gen students could see their own cultural literacies staring back at them.

Parks: There's resonance between us on that issue. I was a first-generation student as well. When I went to the University of Pittsburgh, the working class was quickly vanishing from Pittsburgh and from the university itself. I was interested in learning what should be done in response. What's my responsibility as someone who comes from a certain community to that community? That's what led me to community partnership work. Then with *Reflections*, I found a place that takes some of these issues and gives them a platform. I mean at that point there wasn't a platform like *Reflections* that would claim (or reclaim) public engagement, politics, and political alignments, or that could respond to the commitments the field seemed to be abandoning. There just wasn't a space like that.

And when I first became editor, I was struck by how the writers in the journal wrote with real commitment about their community partners. My fear was that, in becoming an 'academic journal,' the community voices would be excluded. I was also worried that *Reflections* might take on the demographics of a lot of academic journals, publishing and speaking to mainly white Research 1



institution faculty. (In this sense, I believe the recent critiques by Eric Pritchard and Carmen Kynard at the Conference on Community Writing several years ago are dead on.) Those were two of the things that I was very interested in working on. I expect we will talk a lot about the workings of the journal, but we would both say that what makes a journal important, useful, is the work of the authors. The question, for an editor, is how to ensure the broadest range of authors feel welcomed into the project of your publication. I wanted *Reflections* to be seen as a welcoming, inclusive community of scholar-activists.

Baillie: When I first started, I didn't really know what to expect or think. Even when Collette Caton and I did the special issue together (*Social Change through Digital Means*, 10, 1, 2010), I still wasn't sure what the journal should be doing. But the more I read submissions, I realized I really wanted to bring in the voice of the people from the various communities; I also began to notice there was a lot of writing about the community. Remember, I was grinding my way through coursework, reading more of the discipline's journals. I was realizing that those voices—community partners' writing—weren't something you were going to see in established journals like *College English* or *College Composition and Communication*. I mean, even in journals like *JAC* that were supposed to be radical and edgy, you would never read something written by someone from *outside* the academic community. In a lot of journals at the time, you'd read the work of academics who might be writing about a community outside the academy they had worked with, but for all intents and purposes, given what was expected of academic articles and tenure processes (single author, heavy with citations from the field), academics were almost forced into writing as if they spoke for the community.

I thought about Tom Deans' work—who also worked on *Reflections* as the Book Review editor. We didn't just want writing about the community, we wanted writing by the community. We wanted work that helped elevate a voice in the community, aligned with a community goal. We were not interested in pieces written solely for tenure files. Of course, that's a part of the game that we

play in the academy, writing for economic stability. I just didn't believe it should shape the concerns in a journal like *Reflections*. I wanted to see more writing by the community, people who were doing the work *with* the community, or even better, the voices of the people from the community—community partners having a voice in the journal itself.

Parks: That's dead on. It speaks to the way *Reflections* had been offering a different notion of professional tracks than a lot of journals at that point. Because a lot of journals were going bankrupt or having to shrink page numbers because they were losing resources. And the argument went (and still goes), since we're here to support people getting tenure in the field, we have to put our resources there. A decision which made community voices get pushed out. And part of it is that, as most fields professionalize, they leave behind a lot of the people that enable them to be successful. It's like when Kia moves from low end cars to rich cars, or in our case when we leave basic writing students behind so that we can be a "discipline," a "field" with upper division courses and majors. With *Reflections*, as you and I tried to think about it, the goal was to support a different professional identity where the voices of the community were in parallel with and equally respected as those from the academy. Now, that said, I continue to wonder what the community member or organization actually got out of being published in a journal like *Reflections*. I still worry about just co-opting their voices for a seemingly more progressive vision of ourselves.

Bailie: I remember the issue *Democracia, pero ¿quién?*, or *Democracy, but for whom?* (8.2, 2009) that had pieces in both Spanish and in English. In that issue, most of the academics made an effort to let the individual community members speak for themselves, and oftentimes that was in Spanish. The authors set it up so the community stakeholders could just talk, then have their narratives transcribed in Spanish so they could read it later, send it home, or share it with their family and friends. In that case, perhaps, we helped preserve and circulate stories that might get lost—used academic resources for community-driven purposes. We also "strongly suggested" that academic authors include

community artwork, poetry, short stories, or personal narratives. We tried to make it a required material practice and not just paying lip service to community voices in our mission statement or submission guidelines. Our hope was to expand the venues in which creative work might circulate and gain an audience. Again, not sure that was as significant as we hoped.

The other way was that we started doing this work was with covers. You had the idea of making the covers interesting. I remember you telling me “I want every issue to look like a small book—a small book with a cool cover on it. I want to make the journal attractive.” And this emphasis on inclusion worked into the visuals for the covers because I remember asking writers and their community partners for suggestions about what we should use for a given issue. They didn’t have final say because we needed an image that would thematically tie all the articles together, and they weren’t familiar with the content in the other articles going into that issue. It was a practice that wasn’t very formal and was usually just a casual question in an email, but it was a practice that made *Reflections* different. Our readers encountered the community first, on the cover, before they read the work of academics. And this was a practice that continued after we left. Cristina Kirklighter would intentionally use images by community groups, as did Deborah Mutnick and Laurie Grobman. And here, I just want to add, that Jessica Pauszek was particularly important during these transitions, not only for her insights on the journal, but also in her ability to get resources to sustain it. Sometimes, I believe, we tend to look at the “main editors” and forget all the other labor that sustains the intellectual and material success of a journal.

I also remember we were actually a little afraid about the effect of these covers. We’d ask each other, “Wait, is this going to be seen as professional and academic? And if it’s not, will that hurt the reputation, thus circulation, of the journal?” Then, when we would do the table in the exhibitors’ hall at 4Cs, people would just be drawn to our booth. They’d come to the table and say, “Oh, this is amazing! Look at this!” They would just rave on about the look of the journal and hold it up and call their friends.

I remember being at the table during my second or third year working on *Reflections*, and Tim Dougherty and Ben Kuebrich were there with me. We were signing people up to traditional mail subscriptions because they'd tell us, "I want this book." And then we'd explain it was a journal, and they'd get two issues a year—sometimes three if there was a summer issue that year—for \$25.00. The response was always, "Just \$25.00 and I'll get two or three of these? Okay. Fine. Where do I sign up?"

Parks: That was a nice moment. I was worried pretty consistently, though, about the impact of the changes we were making. I can remember the first issue I edited was focused on the aftermath of the hurricanes in New Orleans. That's when I first shrunk the physical size of the journal and changed the cover. Then, as you and I embarked on a whole set of issues where I would say half the writing was community/non-academic, I was wondering if people thought I was killing the journal. There had been all this effort to make it professional and academic, then we pop in there, and we're like, "well, academic is one part, community writing is another." Different voices, different languages, different designs. I wondered to what extent people felt we were squandering what community literacy could be as a field. I remember having that tension inside myself. We could look at sales and argue it seems to be gaining traction, but, still, you can be popular and not respected. It was a real concern.

Bailie: Yeah. And that fear was a real thing, a real concern. I know this because in the *Democracia, pero ¿quién?*... issue, Rachael Shapiro, Collette Caton, and I published an interview we conducted with Victor Villanueva. He talked about when he was the chair of 4Cs, he was telling people doing community literacy or community writing or public rhetorics that they needed to start theorizing what they were doing. He explained he was telling them this because he felt the work done under these monikers was important, yet the only thing the discipline would value was the theory that came from such work or how theory explained the way people were reacting to whatever exigency underpinned a community project. He basically told us that everyday folks talking about their own experiences was good and was needed

to expand the project of humanistic knowledge, but that giving people from outside the academy a space to speak was only going to get these sub-disciplines so far within the discipline, if not the academy. Without theory, these sub-disciplines would eventually lose financial and institutional backing. And, for me, that made this tension we've been talking about real—I mean, Victor Villanueva is laying it out plain as day the danger of what we were doing at *Reflections*. That tension was and still is real. And I'm sure that tension is still experienced at *Reflections* even today.

Parks: Picking up on Villanueva's argument, it's interesting that at the same time as we were publishing different types of writing and different covers, and trying to take seriously the implications of community literacy theories, many of the articles we were receiving didn't often make overt the theories they were using, leaving a lot of folks new to the field unfamiliar with the apparatus informing a lot of the community alliance work being done. Like Villanueva, I wanted *Reflections* to move to pieces which made the theories more explicit, how the work might have been informed by the insights of scholars such as Ellen Cushman or Paula Mathieu. That was a bit of a shift in the journal, and with the move to more community voices, I worried that, as I passed on more traditional articles, we would not get any new writing. There was a period where people were unsure what was happening with the journal. They weren't quite sure what it would mean to publish in *Reflections*.

And that was a period in which I was very consciously thinking that one thing that's keeping all these different moves "legit" (beyond the articles themselves) is that *Reflections* is located in the *Composition and Cultural Rhetoric (CCR) Doctoral Program* and funded by Syracuse University. I thought being housed at CCR gave us a freedom that we wouldn't have in what might, by the field writ large, be considered less of a prestigious program. Which always makes me think about who gets the right to do these experiments? Look, you and I were already two white men with the privilege accorded to that identity in the academy—a privilege that sometimes masks class issues. And you and I could do this at CCR, because it is also a privileged site in the field. But

if you're at a school that doesn't have all that cache, I wonder if you would be able to do it. Could you start a small journal in a different school and push the boundaries this much? Or would you have to play it differently so that it would still count as scholarship in your department, to your dean, your president? Would they fund a radically new venture? It reminds me again that there's always more privilege accorded to the privileged in a sense, you know?

Bailie: I would totally agree with that because, having worked with other journals since *Reflections*, that seems to be an issue elsewhere. If the journal is not at a prestigious institution, not printed on paper, I find people think of it as "slightly less." Consequently, these journals have a harder time pushing boundaries because they need to be seen as legitimate in their institution, which might be more traditional. It seems to me that in that situation, there is really little they can do, format and content and contributor wise, that's pushing the genres in the field. There was good work being published by them, but the journal didn't seem authorized to be different or edgy, despite the goals of the editor/editorial board. Digital publishing has changed this somewhat, but my sense is the overall pattern still holds.

Parks: One of the things we learned is that, when you have to restrict a journal's vision to a "traditional" vision of academic knowledge, not only are community writers not invited, but often other types of scholarship, methodologies, and traditions are also not welcomed. It excludes a diversity of knowledges. To me, it seems unquestionably true when African-American scholars, Latinx scholars, and LGBTQ scholars argue that their scholarship is endlessly blocked from appearing in our journal's fields. That blocking is a direct result of a traditional (read supremacist) definition of knowledge. One of the reasons I worked with Rhea Lathan to create the *Outstanding Composition and Rhetoric Journal Award* was to create criteria which demanded a robust, diverse definition of scholarship in the journal pages, the editor positions, and the editorial board. It was an attempt to use prestige against the confining nature of prestige in the field.

Baillie: That's also a reason we created the *Best of the Independent Journals in Rhetoric and Composition* series: to really draw attention to the journals that were publishing innovative and thought provoking work, often written by folks excluded from the various journals in the field because the space they were working out of was too different or not "prestigious." And I remember our conversations around this work were something like, "well, this is great work, but it just doesn't have the circulation. How can it increase its audience?" That led to how there was also a need to expand who decided what was prestigious work: "what would happen if we let other folks—be they contingent faculty, grad students, junior faculty, faculty from two-year schools or compass point schools"—read a set of articles from smaller journals that we think are just lights out good and let them decide what's the best seven (or eight or nine or ten) articles for a given year?" What if it wasn't the "stars" in the field making these decisions? So that's how we came up with the idea of having "the field" choose the "best" essays.

Parks: Economics was also a part of it. I can remember that we'd been doing *Reflections* together for, I don't know, maybe a year and a half or so, and editors were always coming to me and asking to get more resources for their journals. (Unfortunately, my reputation is that I know how to raise money). That taught me that these journals also weren't getting resources because they often weren't seen as prestigious on their campus—regardless of reputation in the field. That's when we decided if we did the "Best," the proceeds could support a presence at C's, and the editors would use being featured in the volume locally to get more resources from their place. That then might let them do a more robust publishing mission that they probably wanted to do and just couldn't have done before. I can think of instances where this was exactly what happened. Many thanks to Dave Blakesley, by the way, for agreeing to publish "Best" under those above-mentioned strictures.

Looking back, I think it's been, what, a decade since we were involved in *Reflections*? We've both left Syracuse, moved on to other jobs, other editing work. I'm wondering how has your

editorial work changed now that you're in a different space, different labor environment?

Bailie: I now work and teach at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College (UCBA), an open-access, two-year, regional college within the larger University of Cincinnati (UC). There's an established culture of shared governance and service at UCBA, so I also read placement tests; I serve on department-level service committees; as well as college-wide service communities; as well as university-wide service committees (most of those are related to the AAUP UC chapter); and I serve as an AAUP associate at UCBA, which is akin to a shop steward. On top of this, I also teach four classes a semester as well as teach two during the school's summer sessions.

It's much more difficult to find time for editorial work beyond my teaching and service commitments, even though such work is still a component for promotion and tenure. I'm now the interview editor at *Composition Forum*. A part of securing that position was due to an interview I had published there during my time as a grad student, but a larger part was that I'd worked with you on *Reflections*. I was a known quantity when it came to editing, and it was understood that I knew how to work on an academic journal. I have a strong feeling that without being a part of *Reflections*, without that experience, which was an experience built on luck, location, funding, and connections, there's no way someone like me—an assistant professor at a two-year college—would have that editor's position.

Parks: That's very true. It's pretty clear those networks of privilege that some people can participate in for a while—and maybe they fall out of and maybe some people never get access to—make a difference. Being at a private, research-intensive university like Syracuse, being a grad student in CCR, which meant receiving funding for your doctoral studies, working on *Reflections*—I mean, all of it together gave you everything you needed to look “real” to other people in the field. Mind you, I mean “real” as indicative of elitist academic attitudes. One of the things I'm proud of is who we published in the journal: grad students, assistant professors,



non-tenure track faculty, community college professors. It was a way in which we tried to imagine the journal having both an intellectual mission and a political mission to change who was allowed to produce knowledge in the field.

Making that happen, though, took a lot of work. I think we sent out hundreds of emails to caucus and special interest groups in our field. We wrote graduate program chairs for recommendations of students with exciting projects. And, probably to the point of irritation, we wrote friends asking about who we might contact, folks producing work that was important and should be shared. And one of the important lessons I learned from talking to folks across the field was how, too often, publications in our field are not seen as welcoming. Whether through the history of who is (is not) published, or who is (is not) on Editorial Boards, journals are endlessly sending out signals of who they consider “scholars” and what they consider “important work.” So even though we stepped into a journal with progressive and inclusive commitments, a real history, there was still a period where we had to persuade folks to trust us—that we actually wanted their work, not their work filtered through white privileged categories. What I learned was that, without an ongoing engaged discussion and relationship with different communities of scholars, you really have no right to publish their work, to expect them to approach you. Journals are only as inclusive as the network of communities they support and from which they can learn.

As I’ve gone on to edit other things, I continued to think that editors have to break the privileged cycle of access, particularly when it is so easy to forget you’re in it. And by “cycle,” I mean journals keep moving within a very narrow range of institutions as academic homes; editors are consistently drawn from R1 institutions; with some important exceptions, editors also continue to identify predominantly as white, mostly male, and, as public orientation, predominantly cis-gendered (though there is obviously more complexity within any one individual across these categories). And, I think, most journals are still only networked to a very small portion of scholars in the field.

I strongly believe that, if this privilege cycle keeps humming along unchecked, then the field itself is reduced. It's a shallow field if only Research 1 faculty are talking about the field, right? Community literacy teaches you that lesson. You come to realize, working in community literacy, that knowledge isn't exclusive, but who gets to circulate and participate in that knowledge production in the field is an exclusive subject position. Privileged editors, like myself, who fit many of the categories just mentioned don't always turn that lens on ourselves. Based on my own mistakes, I've learned you have to think about your own biases—that, as much as possible, you work against ingrained racist, supremacist, and colonialist attitudes embedded in our field and, as a white male, my personal historical trajectory. And if you don't think about it, and work through your own privilege, and work to solicit the work of those different voices, those often-overlooked but vitally important scholar-educators, then you're just an unethical editor.

I also think that, oftentimes, when there's arguments about inclusivity and publishing different types of scholarship, there's this bigotry of identity politics. Like, "oh we just need to publish more marginalized writers because we're, like, do-gooders or something." That's kind of the rhetoric to it. But what I'm trying to say, to enact, is that our bigotry is stopping the field from learning valuable knowledges, traditions, ethics—that we're failing to fully learn the possibilities of our work if we only publish a small set of scholars. And similarly, if our research comes out of one type of classroom, if the research is not focusing on the community college, two-year classroom, HBCU classroom, or Tribal College classroom, the field is missing all those types of literacies that could help our students.

It was an important move, then, when we published issues from the HBCU context, intentionally sought out community college, non-tenure track, and graduate student writers, attempted to support the work of the field's caucuses and special interest groups. This connects to how we tried to reframe the journal: academic and community writers, research and community writing, poetry and prose, covers that reflected a different set of

values, a different sense of “intellectual community” than other journals. That was the engine that drove a lot of the work that we did in *Reflections*. Our idea was that if we’re serious about this, then it has to look different. I’m not sure we actualized the vision, but that was the goal.

Baillie: I think we did pretty well. If we accept that a discourse from a specific discourse community—once it’s validated by specific organizations—becomes knowledge, then our work building on the legacy of *Reflections* (an established journal with specific organizations and institutions supporting it) as a space where those intellectual communities could be “read” or “seen” as legitimate, was useful; it helped make such work become “knowledge” that could be used by people working within English studies.

For example, in *Beyond Politeness: The Role of Principled Dissent* (volume nine, number one), the grassroots work of Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine (OTR) neighborhood residents to organize and establish its own mutual aid centers (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, the Drop Inn Center, the Peaslee Community Center) eventually resulted in university-community partnerships like the Miami University Center for Community Engagement. When Chris Wilkey (the author of this piece) was able to publish the histories and practices of OTR and make visible what was hitherto unseen by other academics, it became one model for how academics could work *with*, not *for*, community partners in a way that respected and built on and went back to that community’s grassroots work. I think publishing such work helped academics argue in their local situations that such work was “real” because it was published in a peer-reviewed journal. Moreover, since Wilkey discusses how to work with groups like the Over-the-Rhine Peoples Movement to develop creative yet critically literate writing workshops for neighborhood residents or service-learning courses for students from area universities with community defined projects as their focus, he makes social justice work a moment of praxis, not theory, for scholar-teachers in composition and rhetoric. He demonstrates that there are ways to make real the social justice concepts often prized in composition and rhetoric that are also within the wheelhouse of

Comp-Rhet professors—and even better—that the way to do this is to *work with/learn from* everyday folks doing/teaching/making material change in their neighborhoods.

Then, there's Zandra L. Jordan's article, "'Found' Literacy Partnerships: Service and Activism at Spellman College" in the *Historically Black Colleges and Universities* issue (volume 10, number two). In "'Found'...", Jordan explains how it is possible to design and manage elements of an entire institution to work in making students better public citizens and community participants, not just future professionals or consumers. Jordan argues this practice is part-and-parcel of a HBCU like Spellman, and this institutional design promotes a social mindfulness and knowing activism by individual students that continues beyond the classroom. This is important, as it demonstrates two things for other academics: first, a long-term inculcation of a commitment to social change in students is possible through an immersive model; and second, such work does happen in service-learning courses, which is contrary to the critiques of scholars working in and doing community engaged work in predominately white institutions (PWIs). For this last part, Jordan opens the piece by citing the work of Paula Mathieu and Bruce Herzberg, both who discuss a common, troubling move by students at PWIs to see service-learning/community-engaged work as charity, not an attempt at social change. With *Reflections*, Jordan had the platform to make this long-established practice at Spellman visible to a wider, whiter audience of academics. *Reflections* provided that space where Jordan's work would be in the gaze of scholars working in PWIs; and this being in the gaze of scholars at PWIs pointed out this blind spot in community-engaged scholarship. Through publication as the means to make knowledge within a larger discourse community, *Reflections* ensured that what we count as knowledge in the field included the work and teaching and lived professional experience of Jordan.

Both of these articles used the writing of the people involved; that is, the writing of the community involved was directly quoted and deployed as the writing of experts—and rightly so. It demonstrates both Wilkey and Jordan as writing *with* and

using the writing *from* the communities they were engaged with, not as objects of study but as sources of expertise. Additionally, both Wilkey and Jordan pulled on theory and recent academic scholarship to make their arguments. This was important, I think, in the life of the journal, as it demonstrates that our decision to demand more than reports on projects with community partners also helped the work be read (both literally and theoretically) as knowledge.

Similar to books being published at the time on community partnership/literacy and journals such as *Community Literacy Journal*, *Reflections* helped create the motivation for work with the community to be connected to theory and scholarship like Villanueva recommended in my interview. In turn, this allowed the work of the journal to be read as knowledge for academics working in Composition and Rhetoric (with all the baggage associated with that term a la Kuhn or Swales). Overall, this network of publications meant that work in community literacy and service-learning was seen as “real” academic work; that is, a productive site of scholarly work where knowledge was produced, not value-added community service. Even more importantly, it did this through a synthesis of community knowledge and academic knowledge as evidenced by the use of writing from both depositories.

And one final thought: something that’s stuck with me even after my involvement with *Reflections*, having made the choices we did, was that editors have this agency. We have this power to help shape the field. If academic publishing is unjust, to borrow from you, it’s because we let it be. We have the power and the agency to make decisions and choices that move the system towards better, more open, more equitable practices. Editorial boards have the power to choose editors from different constituencies in the field, from different labor or campus environments. We sometimes think of change as being like rocket science. Sometimes it’s as easy as saying yes to this article, asking this person to be editor, having these voices on your editorial board.

Parks: I'm in total agreement. Editing is a deeply ethical and political practice. And you should be judged by the field on whether you are opening up systems and expanding who has a platform not only to speak, but to be heard—not only to publish, but to change the structures of publishing. If you're someone who, as editor, is just interested in reproducing the elite academy, then you should find another line of work.

Baile: Absolutely. This is something that *Reflections*, hopefully, continues to grapple with as it moves into its third decade of publication. As a journal, *Reflections* is already an outsider, but this status is a strength of the journal. The editors shouldn't feel bound to the unspoken norms within our field, especially with its new arrangement with *New City Community Press* and Penn State University Libraries *Open Publishing*, and its use of *Creative Commons* (open access) licenses. I assume this means lower overhead, and therefore, less worry about keeping a large base of subscribers—something I hated about our time with *Reflections*. This means *carte blanche* when it comes to special issues and the editorial teams putting together those special issues. I also hope this means less stress in the behind the scenes work that goes into putting together each issue, and in turn, this means an environment where graduate students who want to learn the ins and outs of working for/publishing an academic journal are invited into the process as part of the editorial team. And I hope those editors and editorial teams are from different constituencies in the field, from different labor or campus environments like you just mentioned. If the folks associated with *Reflections* in the third decade don't do this considering everything the journal currently has going for it, then it's time to shut down the presses and turn off the lights.

Parks: I agree that the new architecture that Deborah Mutnick and Laurie Grobman have put in place for *Reflections* provides immense opportunities for the journal moving forward. And as a former editor, I also want to highlight how Deb and Laurie have really pushed the journal in important political and scholarly ways. When you consider the journal's origins, consider all the labor of editors, writers, and community members during its twenty-

year history; it's such an incredible accomplishment. If I could project any future goals for the journal, at the risk of just coming off completely pompous, I think what actualizes the promise of the new architecture, completes the work of everyone involved these past two decades, is for *Reflections* to establish a community of academic and community scholars where a plural-versality of knowledges and traditions inform the journal. Echoing some insights from a recent dialogue with Iris Ruiz on a slightly different topic, what if *Reflections* became the space where you couldn't locate its dominant intellectual framework, where it wasn't the "white scholar" or "scholars of color" journal? If it were just the space where intersectionality "was"? What might such a framework be able to achieve when considering some of the most divisive and oppressive issues of our time?

To be honest, I'm not even sure I have the wits to articulate such a vision. But in talking to Iris Ruiz, talking to those doing the real work of disciplinary, community, and political change, I can catch glimpses on the horizon. I hope our field will expand its sense of itself and welcome in the new generation of scholar/activist/editors who will make this emerging vision a reality. Which is to say, I hope we can exceed our own limited horizons for a greater sense of justice and equity, both in our field and in the larger world.

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# Intersectional Community Thinking : New Possibilities for Thinking About Community

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**T**he research in the area of community literacy has flourished along the lines of activist and curricular work. The field explores these lines in journals such as *Reflections* and *Community Literacy Journal*, a bi-annual conference *The Conference on Community Writing*, and with the formation of a non-profit professional society *The Coalition of Community Writing*. It has been nearly ten years since Ellen Cushman and Jeffrey T. Grabill published their special issue on “Writing Theories: Changing Communities” in *Reflections*. In the introduction, Cushman and Grabill called for attention to the use of “community,” especially in these activist and curricular areas, a question we wish to pursue further now.

*Reflections* has grown, like much of the field, in its understanding of what community writing means, with a special focus on the activist thread of community engaged writing. However, the field has not yet truly

addressed what the formulation of “community” as it currently stands may elide, and *Reflections*, with its emphasis on activism, is well-poised to tackle this. Essentially, we propose that the use of the word community is deeply entangled with notions of publics and counterpublics, and with them civic and democratic discourse. To introduce intersectionality as an additional or alternative way of thinking about communities could be useful for the discussions of power and the creation of difference. It gives the field of community writing a new way of thinking about community as a term, and through that, new ways of discussing community writing.

Here, we would like to challenge the field to grow to include new ways of articulating community relationships through intersectional ways of thinking. Of course, in our resistance to binary understandings of community, we want to emphasize that communities, publics, and intersectionality are not separate or opposed understandings. Instead, all communities help us understand and form relationships—and all relationships help us understand our sense of community. A deeper usage and understanding of intersectionality in community writing presents an opportunity to unearth how discussions of power, senses of belonging, and erasures of intra-community difference within communities shape their writing practices.

Moving away from binarisms and toward new understandings of community would be a powerful shift toward a new way of thinking about community writing. While Cushman and Grabill first put this forward a decade ago, it seems now is the kairotic moment for this work. Scholars picked up that article more in the latter part of the decade than when it was first published, with many noting the way Cushman and Grabill discuss civic engagement in particular (Brizee 2019; Dorpenyo 2019; Brizee and Wells 2016). While answering their call for civically-oriented work, the field must also respond to their call for new understandings of the field—expanding not just to new sites of research for activist work but also to new ways of thinking about community. These expansions have also been reflected in the title changes to the journal of *Reflections* itself.

*Reflections* has undergone a number of name changes through the years. In 2004, it was *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service*

*Learning, and Community Literacy*, reflecting the connections in the field between these three ideas. In 2012, alongside shifts in the field's interests, the journal changed its name to *Reflections: Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning*. Now, its title is *Reflections: A Journal of Community Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*. This arc of name changes reflects the arc of the field. While community-oriented work in rhetoric and composition has seen the rise of discussions on civic writing, public rhetoric, and service learning, they all came to what we might envision as our shared scholarly home: our community that studies writing about communities.

Two strands of work stand out as particularly durable within the field over the last two decades: service learning and other forms of curricular innovation, and activist research with communities inside and beyond the college classroom. These lines of scholarship reflect core ideals and a shared investment in observing and negotiating power dynamics in community-based literacy practices (Branch 2007; DeGenaro 2007; Duffy 2007; Hogg 2006; Lathan 2015; Lindquist 2002; Mathieu, Parks, Rousculp 2012; Powell 2009 and 2015; Sheridan-Rabideau 2008; Webb-Saundershaus and Donehower 2015), in teaching and creating knowledge with people representing multiple perspectives (Deans 2000; Feigenbaum 2015; Flower 2008; Flower, Long, and Higgins 2006; Goldblatt 2005; Guinsatao-Monberg 2009), and in the pedagogical and ethical practices guiding these ideals (Baca 2012; Canagarajah 2013; Davis and Rosswell 2013; Hull and Shultz 2002; Jacobi 2018; Rose and Weiser 2010; Rousculp 2014). *Reflections* has significant investments in activist, field-based understandings of community engaged writing, particularly (though not exclusively) in the past few years through studies of prison writing (Hinshaw and Jacobi 2019; Kells 2015; *Reflections* 19.1 2019), community writing in Latinx (Bloom-Pojar, Anderson, and Pilloff 2018; Guzmán 2018/2019; Montgomery and O'Neil 2017; Villa and Figuero 2017;) and Black communities (Athon 2015; Browdy 2017/2018; Pruce 2017/2018) and service learning (Druschke, Bolinder, Pittendrigh, Rai 2015; Guler and Goksel 2017; O'Connor 2017; Phelps-Hillen 2017; Lietz and Tunney 2015; Lindenman and Lohr 2018; Shumake and Shah 2017; Wells 2016). Since so many of these works are invested in community writing practices and understanding the ways those are entangled in power dynamics, intersectionality feels like a natural extension of the work in the field.

While we recognize that, at times, there needs to be scholarship that is focused on the formations of groups via a public framework, intersectional community thinking can focus instead on ideas like intra-group difference and power dynamics, the roles of individuals in community formation, and the experiences of the multiply marginalized within communities that do not share their multiple marginalization. Many scholars already show significant interest in these ideas, and adding new hermeneutics of thinking about them in addition to the public turn in composition may help us better describe these areas of interest.

The current scholarship's engagement of intersectionality can also help us think more deeply about Cushman and Grabill's point on what the use of the word community may be leaving out, which hints at the same critiques. How could an intersectional way of thinking complicate our understanding of what a community is? Community, and community engaged writing, has long been entangled with notions of "the public" and of service. What do these entanglements lend us? And can untangling allow us to more adeptly discuss overlaps of race, gender, sexuality, and indigeneity across communities and within them? In common usage, intersectionality stands in for "multiply oppressed," but the field of community writing could gain deeper insights by returning to Kimberlé Crenshaw's nuance, as theorists of intersectionality do.

We use intersectionality as Crenshaw first defined the term. She notes in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,"

The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences...when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (1991, 1242)

Crenshaw and other scholars have been using this term as a form of inquiry for nearly thirty years, including methodological debates around its usage. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall

note in their introduction to the *Signs* special issue on intersectionality (2013) that “the future of intersectionality studies will thus, we argue, be dependent on the rigor with which scholars harness the most effective tools of their trade to illuminate how intersecting axes of power and inequality operate to our collective and individual disadvantage” (795). This is the essence of intersectionality as a way of thinking—it moves from an analysis of identity to an analysis of how identity is entwined with structures of power, and how those structures of power might differently affect those who experience difference within difference (Osborne 2020).

Crenshaw uses intersectionality as a way of articulating differences in identity to claim empowerment, and a way of articulating the experiences of group members when there is intra-group difference. Notably, what Crenshaw wants to emphasize is that intersectionality understands that, for instance, a Black woman does not just experience racism like Black men and misogyny like white women. Instead, a Black woman faces intersectional racism and sexism, which may look or function differently. This can lead to erasure of the racism and misogyny that Black women specifically, or other people with multiple marginalized identities, face. Discourses of the public and the community can be strengthened with a fuller understanding of Crenshaw’s term intersectionality.<sup>1</sup>

It is about acknowledging that oppressions for multiply-marginalized people are sometimes different from but no less valid than the oppressions of others in their community who do not share their multiple marginalizations. It is also about difference as potential for liberation—that is where intersectional thinking in community writing could be most powerful. How does an intersectionality in community writing allow greater potential for empowerment through writing?<sup>2</sup>

## **INTERSECTIONALITY IN *REFLECTIONS***

Some scholars have already been doing this kind of work in *Reflections*. They can help guide us into models of inquiry that take into account the ways communities may face multiple and interlocking oppressions like misogynoir (Bailey 2010), give us ways of discussing difference

even within community groups, and help us better understand the complex ways community writing can play into group identities.

One instance of intersectional frameworks being used in the journal ties into *Reflections'* significant interest in prison literacy, which has long been a part of the journal, and is often informed by feminist and LGBTQ activist stances (Hinshaw and Jacobi 2019). In a special issue on prison writing, Rachel Lewis' "(Anti) Prison Literacy: Abolition and Queer Community Writing" (2019) discusses not just queer prison literacy, but also the inordinate incarceration rates of queer people of color, especially queer Black people. This, to us, indicates a knowledge that the prison and the queer communities are not cohesive—and that it is only through acknowledging intra-community difference that we keep from erasing it and from it going unexpressed in our scholarship. While Lewis does not mention intersectionality specifically, it underlies her understanding of the community she works with.

Another instance of intersectionality in *Reflections* is Lehua Ledbetter's "Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework" (2017/2018). Ledbetter discusses the experiences of multiple marginalized people in both teaching pedagogy and the online beauty community. Her understanding, like Crenshaw's, "embraces and builds from difference and intersectionality" (39). Both of these pieces, Lewis' and Ledbetter's, seek to understand how difference plays a part in community writing, and intersectionality is a way of thinking that values understanding difference. In community literacy studies beyond the journal itself, Eric Pritchard's research in Black LGBTQ communities, for instance, draws upon Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality to fashion what he terms "restorative literacies," an important intervention in the field of literacy studies. Restorative literacies "codify the diversity of methods Black LGBTQ people use to create and sustain their identities and environments in ways that demonstrate and engender self- and communal love" (2017, 246). Together, we see in these studies promising first steps toward the generative use of intersectionality as a framing to better understand the creation of differences within communities and the agency of writers who write from within them.

## THE ENTANGLEMENT OF PUBLIC/CIVIC/DEMOCRATIC

Current conceptions of community deeply intertwine with notions of the public as a civic and democratic concept. This intertwinement presents some opportunities for the field to gain more intersectional understandings of community writing. First, we ask, how do we define community writing? Second, we should consider where the idea of the community is centered—in membership, in relationship, and/or in a feeling of belonging to a group.

First we would like to address definitions of the term community. While, for instance, community literacy scholars often define “community literacy,” community itself gets very little attention as a term. This appears true across community engaged writing more broadly as a field. In some cases, like with Wayne C. Peck, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins (1995), community seems to be in contrast to a university, as they describe the community working alongside the university—implying a separation between the two. (200). Years later, Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, and Linda Flower (2006) would return to a discussion on what exactly community literacy meant to them. While they gave more nuance to the original definitions several of the authors had made in 1995 and spun out more of their own thoughts, they also wrote, referring to Flower’s 2002 and 2004 works, “thus, we were not describing an existing community but aspiring to construct community around this distinct rhetorical agenda, to call into being what Linda Flower described as ‘vernacular local publics’” (9). In this aspect, it appears to some scholars that community literacy is not about observing the literacy practices of a currently existing community at all, but instead about building communities in the public through rhetorical practices. But it is still unclear precisely what a community is to the field of community writing, and how it differs from the public. After all, as Higgins, Long, and Flower write, for them community literacy is “in one sense, an invitation for others in composition/rhetoric to locate the profession’s work more broadly in the public realm” (9).

So, for these scholars, what defines the community is some aspect of public service work where the scholars seek to use university resources to give access to institutional literacies by teaching in these communities. There are other explorations of the public in



community writing, as well. Long, in her 2008 monograph, puts it this way: “local publics are located in time and place. Their potential (as well as limitations) as hosts for ‘actually existing democracy’ makes them important sites for rhetorical inquiry (Fraser 109). More than any other entity, local publics constitute the community of community literacy” (5). Here we see the ways scholars tie their definition of community to the notion of the public, like local publics, counterpublics, and the plural “publics,” implying the possible existence of many smaller publics within the larger concept of “the public.” As we can see even from the name changes and focuses of *Reflections* over the years, community writing is almost intractable from some notion of public writing. The hermeneutic of the community is partially a hermeneutic of “the public.”

Social theorist Michael Warner’s 2005 book *Publics and Counterpublics* significantly shaped how literacy studies as a field discussed “publics” as a way of defining communities. He writes that there are seven principles of a public:

A public is self-organized, a public is a relation among strangers, the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal, a public is constituted through mere attention, a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse, publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation, and a public is poetic world making. (67-114)

The word public was useful shorthand for identifying communities as a phenomenon in community writing. Some notable examples of scholars in composition and rhetoric who have picked up on the conversation on publics in communication studies include Paula Mathieu’s *Tactics of Hope* (2005), Christian Weisser’s “Public Writing and Rhetoric: A New Place for Composition” (2004), and Elenore Long’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetorics of Local Publics* (2008). Media scholar Sidney Dobrin, however, troubles the use of the word public to define the work of the discipline, writing that “simply put, what I want to do here is to take this binary, this potential for collision, to task and argue that the distinction between public and private discourses is both false and limiting in our understanding of communication” (2004, 216). One of the ways the public/

private binary may be limiting, as Dobrin notes it is, is that it keeps scholars from more deeply exploring the ways shared meaning and relationships are a part of how communities practice literacy.

Public as a term also ties deeply into certain ideals of the “citizen,” and with it, ideals of democracy. Part of the fascination with “public” as a term comes from community writing’s roots in the field of rhetoric and composition, where we deeply value service work such as service learning and community outreach projects. A public, as well as publics, are useful terms for discussing that very civically-minded, democratic work. For instance, one can see this utility when Eli Goldblatt utilizes Saul Alinsky’s *Rules for Radicals* as the backbone of his article “Alinsky’s Reveille: A Community-Organizing Model for Neighborhood-Based Literacy Projects” (2005). Goldblatt is specifically interested in organizing for collective power in a neighborhood-based project. He uses the framework of democracy as part of the project of public education specifically for a community organizing project (284). This is how the public/democracy frame functions in service-based community literacy. In this situation, the community can leverage the frameworks of publicness and democracy in order to organize themselves in specific ways for specific goals.

When the field interrogates the terms “community” and “public” more deeply, they reveal that there are some areas where we might consider new hermeneutics for our work. For instance, the public/private binary leaves little room for the nuances of community writing that are closed to a more general public but open to their own members, or the ways information circulates among social media and internet spaces that may appear open but require substantial community knowledge to decode. The public/private binary narrows how the field acknowledges the ways that individuals in communities share meanings within texts, and the reciprocal relationship formed between a text and a community that a public notion of texts elides. It does not acknowledge the ways that communities decide what texts belong to the community — not just the author of the texts, but its audiences, decide what—and by extension, who—belongs to the community. These all represent the possibilities for the field to pursue. Intersectional thinking makes room for new conceptions of community beyond the public with a focus on power and creation

of difference within community groups, giving us new language to express the experiences of community writers and articulate how communities may use belonging as both a method of empowerment and disenfranchisement.

How, precisely, does community writing define a public, which is so much a part of how it defines “community?” Michael Warner notes that, at least for his definitions, a public “exists *by virtue of being addressed*” (2005, 50). This is a circular project of addressers cohering the group by addressing it. We believe this may be one of the factors that rhetorically makes “public” feel like it lacks something community writing seeks, especially when it comes to intersectional analyses. Communities exist regardless of being addressed and are cohered by factors other than being addressed.

A community can exist in many ways, some of which include address but do not need that address to exist and be valid. Instead, they need communication—but, that is different from address. “Public” does not imagine the reciprocal relationship between a community and a text, nor does it imagine intra-group difference and how that might shape the response to an address. A member of a public does not get a say in whether they are in the public. The addresser decides that by addressing them as such. This starts to show some of the cracks between a “public” for community writing purposes, and a “community.” Communities involve shared recognition—they require membership, a belonging that others within the group recognize. Publics do not require membership, just the act of address. “A public” or “publics” as descriptions of communities then seem to do a disservice to the nature of communities many studies describe, where those being addressed have significant stake in texts within their communities. They are involved in the community writing practices more broadly, and they may choose to recognize or not recognize texts as speaking to or for them. The idea of publics seems to give less agency to community members and their reception and interpretation of texts. It puts the primary focus on the act of addressing in a way that seems counter to how the field actually thinks about community literacy practices. It does not allow for scholars to differentiate easily among different kinds of members or for them to articulate the different experiences that end up comprising the community experience. It is about membership—but not about belonging. For the field to name

belonging as important, and difference as important in community writing work, would be to open up a new way of discussing intersectionality in the field.

Who determines this membership may be a complex question; much like the membership of a public, it is a question about power. Intersectionality as a way of thinking can help the field, with time, to better unpack how community membership functions. Catherine MacKinnon (2013) notes that intersectionality was a way for legal scholars to unpack the way multiple forms of oppression came together to legally separate people from their communities. In essence, Black women were having difficulty gaining traction in court cases because the law could only recognize Black women's experiences as the experience of either racism or sexism—there was not yet a way to understand it as both. Intersectionality could be applied similarly outside of legal contexts to community writing's understanding of the mechanisms of power around community belonging.

Some scholars have also painted a more complex vision of how notions of the public and democracy play out in communities. For instance, in Ellen Cushman's *The Struggle and the Tools* (1998), she notes that there seems to be a significant disconnect between the public and the idea of democratic access. Cushman writes that “while community members understood the democratic mission of these [public] institutions, they also fundamentally mistrusted the motivations behind many gatekeepers' actions and words” (227). Cushman is recognizing that, while democracy can seem a tantalizing and noble idea, its execution can often leave marginalized groups disillusioned. Cushman observes the ways democracy currently exists in a public and how to improve on the flaws within an existing democracy. This is likely one of the other attractions of “public” work in community writing: it invests in ideals of civic goodness.

This framework of publicness and democracy is less useful when community organization is not the goal, however. This democratic notion of the public, which underlies much of what scholars imply when they utilize the term, is not negative. It is limiting, however, in that many community writing projects may not be interested in civic or service-oriented work and may not be interested in organizing

or rehabilitating the democratic public. After all, the project of democracy is not the project of every community. Take, for instance, Native American communities. What are the implications of using a “public” to describe a given tribe? And how does using “public” as a descriptor erase difference, and especially elide the most marginalized experiences? This is not to say that the notion of a public is necessarily bad, but it has limited utility when engaging with intersectionality in community writing. This is due to its heavy connections to civic and democratic notions of public writing, which decolonial frameworks, among others, may find constraining to work within. Intersectionality, which focuses on analysis of power relations and constructions of difference, allows a different way of thinking which may be more useful when the concepts of public, civic, and democratic do not align with the community’s interests.

We believe a useful intervention in the field would include disentangling community from the public as a hermeneutic for understanding. The field can then work to build new ways of understanding that embrace belonging, difference, and empowerment through intersectional frameworks. In her analysis of memes in online communities, Abbie DeCamp is exploring how queer memes function as a form of community literacy. These memes both help cohere groups to find resilience and sometimes political power together, but they can also function as mechanisms of harm or ways of marginalizing group members. Through intersectional community thinking, she moves away from a public, constituted by strangers, and toward new ways of thinking about the relationships, power dynamics, and intra-group differences in the spaces of queer community writing.

Community writing scholars are deeply invested in activist work. However, doing the best possible activist work in community writing requires engaging with the way terms may be eliding the experiences of the most marginalized members of the communities we write about, with, and for. We must grapple with the ways current ideas of community tie into ideas of publics, and how scholarship has constructed publics as a hermeneutic. Taking up intersectionality when the field articulates what community means to us can help to better express the experiences of multiply marginalized people, and to work toward empowerment through difference and collective liberation.

## NOTES

- 1 For an excellent explanation on misogynoir, see Moya Bailey and Trudy's recent work on misogynoir, "On misogynoir: citation, erasure, and plagiarism" (Bailey and Trudy 2018). This piece also explores citation and the erasure of Black women from terms they created to discuss their experiences, which is also an important consideration with intersectionality. They are among many who discuss the issues Black women face in academia around citation. The #citeablackwoman and #citeasista hashtags on Twitter also call for increased attention to how and when Black women are cited for their work, and Brittany M. Williams and Joan Collier (the founders of #citeasista) have made calls for bringing this attention to intersectionality, specifically.

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# An Interview with Paula Mathieu on the 20th Anniversary of *Reflections*

Shane A. Wood,  
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*In this interview, Paula Mathieu reflects on the twenty-year history of Reflections. She discusses how the journal has influenced her teaching and research, and she talks about being the co-editor of Reflections as Rhetoric and Composition was developing newer understandings of community-engaged relationships and practices.*

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In the 1990s, Paula Mathieu spent years working with homeless writers in grassroots street newspaper movements in Chicago. “The most important lessons about writing I have learned come from working with writers who are or have been homeless,” she writes in *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* (2005). In her book, Mathieu shares her experiences on the ground and describes what she calls the *public turn* in composition studies, a move towards uniting and establishing relationships between the writing classroom and local communities and organizations. She encourages writing teachers and researchers

to listen and learn from voices outside the classroom. At the same time, she questions teachers who send students to places where they don't go themselves, and teachers who make plans with community partners to benefit their own teaching and research agendas. She criticizes *strategic orientation* that seeks to manipulate or control street initiatives, and she offers a *tactical orientation* that recognizes spatial and temporal politics. Mathieu invites teachers to venture into "the streets," but to think about their purposes and approach for going and to establish community partnerships that are ethical and sustainable. In short, she wants teachers to see and understand street writing and initiatives as *tactics of hope*.

As we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of *Reflections* and reminisce on its history, it seems fitting to express appreciation for the pioneers who have influenced the development of community-engaged teaching and research, and show gratitude toward the teachers, scholars, and activists who have come before us: Ellen Cushman, Thomas Deans, Diana George, Anne Ruggles Gere, Eli Goldblatt, Steve Parks, Barbara Roswell, and many others. Like Mathieu, these teacher-scholar-activists have invited us to consider local communities as partners to the writing classroom (and vice versa) and as sites for social actions and initiatives. Mathieu's *Tactics of Hope* is one example of a commitment to meaningful community work. Her other writings on activism, community-engagement, empowerment, and mindfulness have influenced our considerations of community partnership pedagogies and community literacies.

When I saw the call for submissions for this special issue, Paula Mathieu was the first person to come to mind. I emailed Paula to ask if she'd be willing to talk about the importance of *Reflections* to rhetoric and composition and community-engaged teaching and research. I was interested in hearing her thoughts on the history and progress of the journal over the past twenty years, including noticeable transitions like a move away from the term "service learning." She was on her way to the 2019 Conference on Community Writing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to be a keynote speaker when she generously agreed to be interviewed for this special issue. What follows is a shortened and slightly edited version of our conversation in December 2019.

Shane Wood (SW): There's been a lot of great work in *Reflections* over the past twenty years that has made significant contributions to our theories, practices, and understandings of community-engaged teaching and writing. In the 1990s, before *Reflections*, the first journal in composition and rhetoric to provide a venue for community-based scholarship, you were writing your dissertation on community-engagement and empowerment. Do you mind sharing what that work looked like, and perhaps talking about parts of your dissertation that have never been published?

Paula Mathieu (PM): First of all, it was my second dissertation proposed because at first, I had been working at *StreetWise* newspaper for about two years, and I thought, "I don't want to do this. I don't want to write my dissertation...on the backs of homeless people." I had a completely different dissertation about economic narratives and how we talked about money. It was a rhetoric of economics dissertation completely unrelated to *StreetWise* that I proposed and had approved, and I wasn't making any progress on it. Finally, James Sosnoski, my dissertation advisor, said, "You either have to quit working at *StreetWise*, or you have to find a way to write about it, because you're not making progress."

I didn't want to quit, so I thought, "Okay, well what would be a way I could write about this experience?" I called my dissertation an "institutional narrative." *Questions of Empowerment* examined how street papers were trying to empower homeless people. Empowerment was a big word in the 1990s, and it was a big word in composition scholarship. I looked at how there were competing definitions of that term that were at work within this nonprofit. The director and the fundraising people had a very entrepreneurial idea of empowerment, where men and women would go out and sell newspapers and make money, and that was what empowerment was. The editorial office had a critique-based, structural approach to empowerment, where they were saying the paper needs to critique the policies of Chicago that were causing homelessness.



One chapter I never published looked at those competing definitions and connected it to what claims composition was making at the time and a larger pedagogical theory. There was a lot of discussion about writing as empowerment—questioning, who’s empowering whom? Then, there were critiques of empowerment and how that works. It was kind of a fascinating discussion that seems to have fallen away in our field. I feel like, in our discussions of disciplinarity, things have gotten, in some corners, away from questions of what writing does. There had been much talk and questions related to teachers empowering students.

I liked that those questions were at the heart of what was happening. So, that was the beginning of my dissertation; it was looking at, how do you teach writing when you’re not in a credential-granting place? What are you offering? What do you give? Then, I looked at the different claims of empowerment being made in entrepreneurial sectors, in kind of leftist critique sectors, and then in the field of writing studies.

SW: In 2000, *Reflections* emerges with a vision to provide a forum for public rhetoric, community writing, civic writing, and community literacy. Can you talk about the timeliness of the journal’s emergence and what it meant for community-engaged teaching and research?

PM: I think talking about the history of *Reflections*, you have to mention Barbara Roswell, who when I was a graduate student, was *Reflections*. It was a very small journal in 2000. It had a hand-drawn cover. It was really the first place where I saw people doing work like what I was doing. I thought it was amazing. It was, for me, a sign that, “Oh, people are doing this stuff,” and that was exciting. I went from my dissertation, which I finished in 1999, to *Tactics of Hope*, which I probably finished writing in 2003. I had at least fifteen references of *Reflections* articles in *Tactics of Hope*.

My first introduction to “service learning” was on the receiving end of service, because working at *StreetWise*, we would get a lot of universities wanting to work with us. But my first kind

of reading about [service learning] was *Reflections*. It was the only place to go to read about that kind of work and see all the nuances and all the range of what happens in community-based work. What I appreciated about those early years of *Reflections* is it started mapping out what scholarship could look like and how rich it could be.

SW: You mentioned you had over fifteen references of *Reflections* in *Tactics of Hope*, which seems like a lot in such a short amount of time. *Reflections Vol. 1, No. 1* was published in Spring 2000. You finished writing *Tactics of Hope* in 2003. That's a three-year window.

PM: Yeah, I'm looking at the dates. 2000-2001; this interview with Ed Slotkowski. This great article from Fall 2000, "The Best of Intentions: Service-Learning and Noblesse Oblige at a Christian College" [by B. Cole Bennett]. David A. Jolliffe, Caryn Chaden, and Peter Vandenberg and Roger Graves' article on confronting clashing discourse, "Writing the Space Between Classroom and Community and Service Learning" (2002). There's an interview with Tom Deans that was in Spring 2000 about institutionalizing service learning. Then in 2003, Bruce Herzberg revisits community service and critical teaching with an article.

So, just in that three-year time period, there's so many...there's guiding principles for redesigning composition courses.

And for me, very importantly, there's an article in 2002 by Diana George called "The Word on The Street: Public Discourse in a Culture of Dissent." I had known Diana's work, but that's where I developed my academic crush on her and thought she was amazing. I went to see her at the 2003 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). I went up to her and kind of gushed. I was a brand-new assistant professor and just said, "I think you're wonderful, and I think you do interesting work," and that's how we got to know each other.

We ended up doing a panel together the next year, and we've written between, I don't know, half a dozen things together. If it hadn't been for that *Reflections* article, I don't think I would have had the nerve to just go up to Diana George and say, "I think you're amazing." It both helped my scholarship...I mean, it shows up throughout my book. But also, it became personally super important to me.

SW: You mentioned how many articles you referenced in *Tactics of Hope*. Are there other articles that stand out to you from *Reflections* that have informed your research and teaching?

PM: Well, this is actually in that three-year window, but it's one I didn't mention. There was a great article by Teresa Redd called "In the Eye of the Beholder: Contrasting Views of Community Service Writing." I think it was one of the first that I had read that asked questions about what ways are we doing a good job, and what ways are we not doing a good job?

Additionally, Tobi Jacobi and Patricia O'Connor first edited a prison literacy issue of *Reflections*. I think seeing what a big presence that has in the field now, realizing that special issue came out in 2004, is amazing to me. They were such visionaries. Tobi and Patricia helped shape the direction of community writing in a lot of important ways.

I have enjoyed the interviews that *Reflections* does, too. Like I said, they had an interview with Tom Deans, and really, his book *Writing and Community Action* defined and framed service learning for the field. Then, Bruce Herzberg's article, "Community Service and Critical Teaching" in *College Composition and Communication* (CCC) framed important questions: What are the students getting out of this? Are they helping? Are they learning what we think we want them to be learning? He revisits that in an interview in *Reflections* that I thought was useful.

That's one thing that has affected me as a teacher. I've never forced my students to do community projects in a class. Whenever I

offer community-based projects in teaching, I always make it an option, because I don't ever want to send unwilling students out into the community and have them be forced to do work, because I feel like the potential for damage on all sides is great. I think his work helped me see that in important ways.

SW: You were the co-editor of the journal at the time composition and rhetoric was developing newer understandings of community-engaged theory and practice. In the "Editors' Introduction" in *Reflections Vol. 11, No. 2* in Spring 2012, Diana George, Cristina Kirklighter, and you write about a change in the journal's subtitle, a shift from "A Journal of Writing, Service Learning and Community Literacy" to "A Journal of Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning." There was a decentering of the term "service learning." Can you talk about that transition, and why you felt it was important for our field and the journal to detach itself from service learning?

PM: In some ways, I think the biggest problem with service learning is the word "service," and maybe all the imbalance and inequity that underlies that. I think the actual practices people were doing, and the actual pedagogy, and the actual community-based work people were doing in many cases was much more sophisticated and involved than that word allows. So, in some ways, maybe part of the de-centering was away from the word "service," which I think implies a deficit, implies sort of an imbalance of capacity, which a lot of people doing "community engaged-work" wanted to get away from. I think part of it was that.

But also, like I mention in my scholarship with Diana, to not just see the writing that happens in community spaces as just kind of, "Oh, that's good work. That's good in the moral sense, good." Like, "Oh, isn't that nice that people in prisons write?" Or, "Isn't that nice that homeless people write?" But seeing communities as sources of vital information ... stories that need to be shared. So, centering the notion of public rhetoric as part community writing, to us, seemed important.

We published an essay by Tamera Marko working with displaced people in Colombia, and how they keep their family albums, and how they keep a family history even as they're getting further and further displaced, higher and higher up into the hills, out of Medellín. Marko sends students every summer from Duke to help try to record some of these stories and maintain some of these stories. But she talks very eloquently about this double displacement; that people are displaced from their own stories and their own belongings. But then she and her students get to cross the border, and these stories get to cross the border, but those people don't. So, trying to think both about the embodied complexity of this work, and what are the challenges of doing it, but also what do we learn by listening to those stories? That's part of the difference; seeing the community-based work not just as service, but as creating important, public rhetoric, I think, to me is an important shift that has happened, and is continuing to happen.

SW: "Civic writing" was added to the subtitle in *Reflections Vol. 11, No. 2*, too. Did you feel like civic writing was spelling out those kinds of complexities more precisely as opposed to, maybe, what the original subtitle offered?

PM: Yeah, I think so. We also in our time as editors published some work on documentary film and other kinds of work where there is a public audience. The focus was trying to affect public discourse: create either a counter-public or seek to change the terms of the public debate in some kind of ways. Steve Parks, Tiffany Rousculp, and I co-edited a collection called *Circulating Communities* in 2011. The introduction was all about how groups, all the different writing groups, were trying to change the public discourse in different ways. So, the word "civic" has, I think, yeah, sharpened a focus on writing with a commitment to trying to affect the community. That doesn't mean communities always successfully make change, but that it has an eye on it.

And to think about how hard that is to do. I think it's more art than science. How do we change public opinion? How do we shape public discourse? I think those are issues on the mind of a lot of people who are involved in community writing, whether

it's trying to change the conversation about a recycling program in their community, or how to not have a toxic dump put right next to their home. Or to confront broader issues, like how people do or don't see homeless people or incarcerated people, and it's a more abstract idea.

SW: There's recently been another transition for the journal. In *Reflections Vol. 18, No. 2*, the subtitle shifts to "A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric." Laurie Grobman and Deborah Mutnick decided to shift back to the journal's original title. What advantages and opportunities for future research do you see for the journal with that in mind?

PM: Well, I think one advantage is it leaves open in what ways the community-engaged relationship can look. I'm sure there are ways of thinking about what community-engaged writing and rhetoric can be and look like that we haven't conceived of yet. So, I like that it feels aspirational as well as descriptive.

I think, at the time, when we made the change in 2012, we were trying to not throw "service learning" out because we were trying to respect the history of the journal and trying to kind of keep everything in. I mean, it was a bit of an unwieldy title. There's something nice about the elegance of "community-engaged writing and rhetoric." It's simple, and I think a lot of people doing a wide variety of work could see themselves under that umbrella in a way, where service learning is very descriptive of a specific model of community engagement. So, I think that's great. I saw that this past year at the 2019 Conference on Community Writing. Seeing such different ways of structuring community projects, different ways of people engaging, people being on the boards of Planned Parenthood to really grassroots kind of small projects. And being involved in different levels of what community means, and thinking about fundraising, both large and small, and thinking about circulating messages digitally, visually. All these different kinds of ways.

I do wish there had been something about public or civic in there, but I think that that's one of the many ways you can engage

community. And certainly not all community-engaged work is civic focused, nor should it be. Sometimes it's thinking about the kind of group, like a women's writers' group, where they're just there to support each other and do work, and that the writing in itself is the point. I think that neatly falls under that, where they're not necessarily publishing for a wider audience, but it's about, dare I say, empowerment and creating community.

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# Community Engagement for the Graduate Student Soul: Ruminations on *Reflections*

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*Reflections offers a plethora of stories, strategies, and applicable content for community-based writing projects as well as considerations for our pedagogy within institutional walls. In this piece, I, a first-time contributor, reflect on a few of my own endeavors in community-engaged work over the last decade alongside a reading of this journal and its continued impact on my pedagogy and research. Specifically, I discuss the value of community engagement efforts for graduate students developing as teachers and scholars in the discipline. Through this writing, I contribute to and build upon the ongoing knowledge-making practices at the heart of this journal.*

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*R*eflections offers a plethora of stories, strategies, and applicable content for community-based writing projects as well as considerations for our pedagogy within institutional walls. In this piece, I, a first-time contributor, reflect on a few of my own endeavors in community-engaged work over the last decade alongside a reading of this journal and its continued impact on my pedagogy and research. Specifically, I discuss

the value of community engagement efforts for graduate students developing as teachers and scholars in the discipline. Through this writing, I contribute to and build on the ongoing knowledge-making practices at the heart of this journal.

To begin, I offer a short story of my first community-engagement efforts. My first time teaching took place at a community center in the city where I lived while obtaining my master's. When my graduate program peer mentor asked me if I would be interested in joining a community literacy group a few years old led entirely by graduate students, I was excited by the prospect of getting to work with members of the community on their writing. I saw this as a moment to make connections within the graduate student community. Plus, a teaching opportunity prior to my official graduate teaching year? What a dream! This experience was also my first sustained service-learning effort. In the past, I had taken part in day or week-long community workshops or support efforts, but nothing to the caliber that I entered here in regard to my labor and leadership. I remember spending hours during the days leading up researching, remixing, and creating fourth and fifth-grade literacy materials with the aid of Pinterest and Google, looking at the practices of organizations like 826 Valencia nonprofit community writing center, which I was told our graduate effort modeled. I knew little about what I was getting into, but I knew I was excited to start.

As a first-generation student, I didn't know much about what academia entailed when I began my master's program in composition and rhetoric in the fall of 2013 beyond a desire to continue learning about writing and rhetoric. I went into this community engagement project similarly, imagining classroom spaces with boards and desks. My expectations of what teaching looked like shifted quickly when I entered a gymnasium space with a far corner marked by three large blue partitions to create the illusion of a separate room. Each class, my co-teacher-friend and I would show up early to set up our materials, taping giant Post-It note sheets to the wall with masking tape that hardly wanted to come off the roll. We graciously used the supplies we were given, many of which were donated—if not purchased—by the community center. We chipped in our own supplies when we could, making use of the dollar spot at Target

or the Dollar Store to create a pool of incentive prizes for literacy games. I looked forward to meeting with the students at the Center each week, and, as Center staff reminded us from time to time, we were among few consistent connections for these students, many of whom did not have stable home lives. When one of us was absent, students were quick to question where we were, why we might not have come, and then ask where we were when we returned. I share this story to offer a glimpse of the impact of one service-learning project early in my now career-path as a writing and rhetoric scholar. I reflect regularly on this work and recognize the invaluable way it helped me develop my own teaching persona, one who emphasizes classroom community-building in her pedagogical practice.

I worked with writers of all ages across literacy levels at different sites in the city throughout my two years as a graduate student in Lincoln. I taught fourth and fifth grade students at the Clyde Malone Community Center in an after-school writing workshop twice a week for an hour. I also worked with adult literacy learners at the Matt Talbot Kitchen and Outreach. For both sites, I helped create weekly lesson plans and worked with writers on writing, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and other literacy and communication skills to support learners on their communication endeavors beyond our spaces, such as meeting school standards or completing job applications. Community writers wrote about topics that mattered to them, from adult literacy learners hoping to learn the alphabet to build writing skills to write letters to their grandchildren, to 5th grade students practicing new vocabulary words through fanfiction, remixing familiar-to-them topics. No matter where writers were at, it was clear our workshops mattered as a regular part of our week, especially when most participants' home and work lives remained uncertain and in flux. Time and time again, I found this labor rewarding and re-energizing such that I desired continuing this work in the future. Furthermore, it helped me connect with and learn from fellow graduate students as we continued to establish additional community connections and sites, build our network of volunteers, and meet more writers where they were. Pauszek et. al (2019) describe similar impacts of their early career community engagement projects wherein co-author Charlie Lesh notes that we should continue to reflect on our community-engagement practices to consider "the diverse ways that communities use writing to shape,

resist, or reshape the politics and powers of everyday life” (139). Similar reflections on my experience in this work from a graduate student perspective contributed to my growing interest in what it means to be a present-day graduate student, the initial inquiries of which became my dissertation project focusing on first-generation-to-college doctoral students in rhetoric and composition and the ways they negotiated the expectations of graduate study with their lives and many obligations.

Needless to say, these experiences and the many community engagement experiences I’ve been privileged to take part in since have contributed to my growth as a teacher-scholar. Although I was not a regular reader of *Reflections* at the time, in preparation for writing this piece, I spent time working through the *Reflections* web archive to get a glimpse of all of the journals in its twenty-year history thus far. From this overview, I understand that the community-engaged work in which we partake impacts localized facets of our worlds. For instance, in her contribution, Gwen Robinson (2007) focuses on how student discussions and writing in her first-year writing classroom post-Hurricane Katrina made her a better teacher, but more importantly, offered students space to reflect on shared experiences surrounding tragedy. Robinson’s classroom became a space for students to process Katrina as a community. Likewise, I recently engaged such strategies following a local shooting affecting the university community where I work. I also chose to “throw out my normal procedures and establish something completely different” when turning my classroom and office hours into spaces to talk, process, and grieve (Robinson 2007, 111–112). This approach becomes more frequently utilized in our post-Trump times with seemingly faster news cycles. Following these dialogues, several students in my classes asked if they could develop projects reflecting on and/or processing the shooting. Students wrote collaborative poetry, painted artwork depicting their feelings, developed personal essays and journal entries, and covered topics including mental health, racialized tensions within the community, loss, and hope. Many students cited these projects as therapeutic and among the most important things they had written in class discussions at the end of the semester reflecting on our work. Robinson’s work affirms the value of reflective writing during moments like these when we move our existing plans

aside and re-plan our own next steps through reflection, something that we don't always get taught in our graduate programs.

The role of *Reflections* in our writing and rhetoric discipline offers space to make oft-invisible and undervalued labor visible and valued. *Reflections* can help us make a case for why the work that can get relegated to service or "other" categories in our professional portfolios, the ones that impact our future job titles and salaries, matters much more than service designations credit. *Reflections* becomes an archive for this labor and its impact. In the case of the Writing Lincoln initiative, I want to emphasize again that these community engagement efforts were led and sustained by graduate students, a population in which, due to the sheer nature of graduate education, we are on our own limited timelines when it comes to community involvement. In other words, graduate student participation in these efforts partly depends on navigating this work around our degree progress. As Hubrig et. al (2017) further detail in their article describing WLI's efforts toward theorizing strategies for graduate student community engagement, these graduate student efforts come with many challenges:

Coordinating a community partnership program often requires difficult decisions about mediating cross-institutional relationships; communicating effectively with community organizations and campus administrators; anticipating and addressing logistical, liability, space, and funding concerns; writing and managing grants, which must be housed in a particular institution or department; negotiating transitions in anticipation of graduation; and balancing one's own labor conditions, as initiating a community partnership is often unpaid and challenging to translate into work valued by institutions beyond a "service" CV line. (94)

In short, and as other community-engaged scholars have echoed, this work typically needs institutional support to thrive. Outside of the community with whom we engage, certain conditions and resources are necessary for this work to happen. In my first year with WLI, for instance, we needed money to sustain our efforts. I helped lead a successful Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign to help raise more

than \$1,000 toward purchasing supplies and developing a book of writing by students at the Malone Center; this can be considered a 21st-century literacy sponsor. Gathering resources for community engagement work often means building both institutional and community connections. These practices can help graduate students learn how to build infrastructure and gain valuable administrative experience. Graduate students can apply theoretical frameworks, rhetorical concepts, and writing skills we learn in composition classrooms in community literacy spaces to build infrastructures and gather resources. For instance, in the crowdfunding effort I describe here, much of the campaigning required employing rhetorical concepts creatively in the form of short blurbs and videos to garner support. While the conditions came to fruition in the moments of the previous project, this is not always the case. Notably, many graduate students, especially from first-generation, working-class, and/or other historically underrepresented backgrounds, must continue to find ways to survive and thrive in their programs despite diminishing institutional support. Developing and enacting community engagement projects allows us to engage our rhetoric and writing skills toward advocating for community members as well as ourselves. Part of this work happens within community literacy courses, such as the one in which the idea for the Writing Lincoln Initiative I describe here began. But, it is the practical application of these ideas that can go by the wayside because students are left to negotiate between “save-the-world” ideals and practical constraints when hit with the kind of labor and resources necessary to make community-engaged work a reality. However, many of these tactics come from business practices rather than what is traditionally taught in a writing classroom. Elenore Long’s (2008) notion of interpretative pedagogies moves us toward enacting in-class lessons in public spaces. Again, this pedagogy is grounded in having students do work outside of traditional classroom spaces.

Community-engaged work doesn’t happen alone, as is evident through the numerous collaborative projects and descriptions of community relationships throughout the pages of *Reflections*. Celena Todora (2019) perhaps best sums up this coming together of human-centered pedagogies, research, and, of course, community-engaged work toward performing what she terms a “radical coalitional rhetoric,” one that emphasizes “listening to the needs of the community to curb

systemic injustices rather than applying the band-aid of service work” (277). Specifically, she articulates how community-engaged work can build from social movement rhetorics toward better engaging “rhetorical and power structures within university-community relations” (259). Coalitional work, of course, necessitates developing reciprocal relationships with community members. Todora cites Karma Chávez’s (2013) definition of “coalitional possibility,” arguing that coalitions require a “shared commitment to social and political change” and not just a relationship (259). For instance, during my PhD program, I took part in a “hack-a-thon” toward developing digital resources for immigrant and refugee populations in Louisville, Kentucky. Among the thirty participants were not only humanities students and professors, but also community partners already engaged in efforts to support the local immigrant and refugee population. Together, over eight hours, we used our strengths toward building materials. For instance, modern language participants helped translate web pages from English to Spanish; English folks engaged our digital literacy and writing skills to create clear and concise copy. Todora’s piece, alongside several in *Reflections*, highlights strategies for thinking about the aspirational diversity of our discipline alluded to in the call for this special issue—much community-engaged work is inherently diverse, as are the themes of many issues in this journal.

However, we can continue to do better. Coalitions thrive through building on the strengths of their members. Likewise, community-engaged work using a “coalitional commitment to intersectionality as opposed to individuality enables an understanding and acceptance of multiple—perhaps differing or contradictory—experiences or perspectives” (Todora 265). Working alongside community partners allowed us a direct link to the needs of the community to ensure that the materials we designed would support the population by filling some of the existing communication gaps. As further evidenced by the pages of *Reflections*, community-engaged efforts are inherently collaborative, building on the strengths of all participants. At its core, *Reflections* presents numerous approaches to thinking and doing community-engaged work by and with an array of communities, as marked by the numerous special issues from the last twenty years and the many more to come.



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# Locating Our Editorial and Intellectual Selves Through and Within the Pages of *Reflections*. A Personal Reflection

**Reva E. Sias,**  
*California State  
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*This article celebrates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reflections Journal, as a premier publication in service learning, public writing, rhetoric, community literacy, and activism. The author applauds Reflections as a space that nurtures emerging voices and professional development, even prior to the printing of individual volumes and issues. In general, the author showcases four professional collaborations between doctoral students, early-career professionals, and/or more seasoned scholars that are demonstrated through and within select special issues in Reflections. More specifically, the author recalls successes and challenges of editorship when taking on the duties as a coeditor for an African American literacy special issue. The author highlights visible and mostly invisible editorial processes, reflects on the labor of editing submissions, and discusses high and low stakes editorial choices that impacted the final production of the special issue. The author makes the case that editing and editorial decisions may illuminate scholarly voices, show community engagement, and reify pre- and early-career professional development, which has been a twenty-year hallmark of Reflections.*

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The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Reflections* is a tremendous milestone. I celebrate *Reflections* as a leading professional, theoretical, and pedagogical journal for public rhetoric and writing, service-learning, civic writing, community literacies, and community engagement. As a researcher, teacher-scholar, and writing program administrator, I embrace *Reflections* as a beacon for best practices and critical thought, as it offers a lens on writing and activism that highlights and adds to intellectual conversations, scholarship, research, and professional growth. *Reflections* is a space that represents and values many voices inside and outside of the academy: stakeholders, community partners, practitioners, students, part-time and full-time teacher-scholars, non-tenured and tenured professionals, to name a few. *Reflections* reinforces public writing practices and a community activism ethos that cannot be denied.

Even prior to publication, *Reflections* is a space that nurtures emerging voices and professional collaborations in rhetoric and writing studies, which lends to our cultural, pedagogical, and global understandings and intellectual commitments. Just as *Reflections*' articles, interviews, and reviews may speak to the merits of public writing, the mostly invisible processes and labor of editing submissions may also illuminate scholarly voices, show community engagement, and reify pre- and early-career professional development. As noted in the Coda (2009) of a special issue in the field,

Journal editing brings together perfectly the big three in the academy: scholarship, service, and teaching. When it works well, it's a pedagogical act, clearly grounded in professional expertise, focused on two things: constructing the conversation in the field and nurturing the creativity and careers of our colleagues. (175)

In this article, I highlight four respective editorial teams for four Special Issues of *Reflections*. I argue that the special issues, respectively and collectively, demonstrate "the big three: scholarship, service, and teaching," as the above Coda suggests. While it is possible to read journal articles to understand the scholarly trends and discourses in the field of rhetoric and writing studies, it is also possible to read the editors' introductions as micronarratives, where an editor or editorial teams may voice the *why* and *how* of "constructing the conversation in

the field and nurturing the creativity and careers of our colleagues” (Coda 2009, 175).

I was introduced to *Reflections* in 2008, when Steve Parks took over as editor, and the journal was housed at Syracuse University, in Syracuse, New York. I am mindful of one of the first articles that I read in the journal, when I was a doctoral student in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric (CCR) Program. It was Allison Gross’s “Does the Academy Need an ‘Extreme Makeover?’” (2008). In the article, Gross argues for graduate student professional development and leadership. She laments that graduate students “were faced with the advice not to actively pursue public scholarship until tenure, and not to expect our academic commitments to be any less if we do pursue engagement with the public” (87). Gross’ attention on the balance between graduate students’ public and professional service and academic expectations rang true to me. I had similar concerns as a Ph.D. student. In contrast to Gross’ experience, the early professionalization and public activism of graduate students was encouraged in the CCR Program. The faculty in the CCR Program offered constructive feedback inside and outside of the classroom, and they mentored doctoral students to present papers at professional conferences, to submit articles for publication to journals, and to actively engage with the people and communities in Syracuse, on and off campus. For some students, active engagement was facilitated through professional collaborations, editorial production, and issues of *Reflections*.

Of the four members in my Ph.D. cohort at Syracuse, three of us participated, more or less, in the production and publication of the journal. With Steve Parks’ approval, my cohort’s contributions to the journal took two forms: (1) associate editor and/or (2) guest editor of a special issue. While Janell Haynes and I completed a guest editorship for respective special issues, Brian Bailie produced a special issue, and served as an associate editor of *Reflections*. In addition to our rigorous doctoral studies, we understood that “[e]diting special-issue essays can be more demanding than editing regular submissions, since [...] they don’t go to individual specialists for evaluation. With submitted essays the work involved in the dialogue with the authors is divided up; with special issues it falls more directly on the editor

or editors” (Brown 2009, 124). Even though editing does not qualify as an “extreme makeover” as Gross (2008) suggests, Janell, Brian and I were ready for the challenge, as we attempted to manage “the big three in the academy: scholarship, service, and teaching,” as the Coda points out (2009, 175).

For example, Janell Haynes had the opportunity to collaborate with Jonathan Alexander, from the University of California, Irvine, and Jacqueline Rhodes, from California State University, San Bernardino (now at Michigan State University). Their special issue on Public/Sex: Connecting Sexuality and Service Learning (Volume 9, Issue 2) was published in spring 2010. *Reflections* offered a platform for the editorial team to consider timely conversations, intersections, and discourses on queer theory, community engagement, service-learning expectations, pedagogical methods, identities, bodies, etc. The editors state, “Those of us who work specifically with issues of gender, sex, and sexuality are increasingly aware of what remains *unspoken* and *disarticulated* in many service-learning experiences” (2010, 2). They ask, “[W]hat gendered, sexed, sexualized, and even eroticized frameworks form the contexts in which much service-learning takes place, even as such frameworks remain often unacknowledged, perhaps even barely perceivable?” (3). The guest editors put forth eleven submissions in the special issue of *Reflections*, in response to their inquiry and call.

In Brian Bailie’s case, he was well-suited to develop a special issue with Collette Caton (Markwardt), since they both served as an associate editor of *Reflections*. Bailie and Caton’s special issue is Social Change through Digital Means (Volume 10, Issue 1), which appeared in fall 2010. The editors’ call juxtaposes Malcolm Gladwell’s claim that “the enthusiasm for social media is ‘outsized,’ and that 50 years after the Civil Rights Movement we’ve (“we” meaning Americans writ large) ‘seem to have forgotten what activism is’” (2010, 1). They state that “Gladwell fails to acknowledge” that “people are successfully using social network technologies towards achieving the traditional activist goals” (1). The coeditors present ten articles from scholars, activists, and educators that display how scholar-teachers and activists/organizers use digital technologies and literacy for social change. For the benefit of the journal’s readers, Bailie and Caton highlight

“the teaching of critical literacy practices, the utilization of digital technologies, and the importance of civic engagement” (4), as is demonstrated throughout this special issue of *Reflections*.

In October 2009, I approached the editor of *Reflections* with a request that I might produce a special issue. I met briefly with Dr. Steve Parks as he exited one of his graduate seminars. I quickly explained my idea for a special issue to draw attention to African American rhetoric, community literacy practices, and literacy partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). I emphasized the point that, while some journals in the field have published individual articles on African American rhetoric and literacy practices, and/or on HBCU partnerships, I knew of no rhetoric and composition journal to have published an entire issue in this area. Parks listened, but he suggested that a reason for little or no attention in other publications might be due to lack of readership or audience interest. He correctly stated that a journal editor must also give attention to the commercial value of each issue that is published. But he didn't say 'no' to my idea. Instead, the *Reflections* editor asked me to submit a formal proposal and rationale for a special issue on African American community literacy and HBCU literacy partnerships.

After a couple of weeks, I sent an email to the editor with a formal proposal and rationale for the *Reflections* installment. I explained the historical and cultural significance of African American rhetoric and literacy practices, and highlighted some of the literacy initiatives that were and are reflected in the Black Church, through and with HBCUs, at social clubs and Black Greek fraternities and sororities, at other formally and informally educational sites, as well as in and with community partners and stakeholders. In the rationale, I explained that early educational partnership and literacy practice methodologies did not use contemporary terms such as service-learning. But I make the case that there are many nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of African American educational, religious, and community engagements and collaborative partnerships that may speak to current pedagogy, public writing, and service-learning practices. With that written proposal and rationale, it gained me an official meeting with the *Reflections*' editor.



At the conclusion of our second meeting, Parks gave a conditional approval for the special issue. His tentative agreement was based on me finding a recognized African American scholar in the area of community literacy to agree to coedit the special issue with me. I accepted the challenge since I was scheduled to attend the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, and was planning to attend the Black Caucus meeting. My plan was to go to the Black Caucus meeting and beg Beverly J. Moss, from The Ohio State University, to be my coeditor because she was at the top of my wishlist. Although I did not find my coeditor at that meeting, I had an opportunity to speak briefly with Dr. Keith Gilyard, who offered me some encouraging feedback. That conversation gave me the courage to email Dr. Moss, when I returned to Syracuse. In my email, I introduced myself, presented my argument for the African American special issue, and attached a copy of my proposal and rationale. Dr. Moss' reply was not an immediate 'yes.' But she agreed to a phone call to discuss my idea. I am well aware that she could have said 'no' because she did not know me. But that phone call marked the beginning of our friendship, her mentorship, and collaboration as the coeditors for the special issue.

During our editorial collaboration and subsequent phone calls, Beverly's guidance was invaluable. Through her grace, patience, and example, I learned so much from her. We wrote and sent out our call for papers in February 2010, just before the next Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) convention. Once I arrived at the convention, I handed out flyers of the call for papers. I raced across the city, leaving copies in the convention's exhibit hall and in common spaces of hotels. With our call for papers and a plan of action in hand, Beverly and I had previously agreed to meet with the editor of *Reflections* to discuss the special issue. It was at that meeting that Steve Parks told us that our project had expanded, and it would be published as a double special issue on African American literacy. It was also at that meeting where we met with David Green and Ersula Ore, who were Ph.D. students from Penn State University, and who were introduced as two members of the editorial team that was assigned to manage the second part of the African American literacy series. On the one hand, I was happy that other doctoral students were able to cultivate their talents as editors, and I was extremely happy that African American rhetoric and literacy practices

had gained the editor's attention and showed commercial value as a double special issue. On the other hand, I wish that Beverly and I had been offered the opportunity to be a part of those conversations and editorial decision. After the convention, I revised the special call for papers, as "African American Contributions to Service Learning and Community Literacy," to indicate the double installment: Part I: *Historically Black Colleges and Universities and African American Literacy Practices* and Part II: *The Community Classroom: Literacy Training in the Black Public Sphere*. (See figure 1). On the revised call, I am listed as the contact person for both issues.

In hindsight, the double installment for *Reflections* presented an interesting problem in that it narrowed the proposed scope for our special issue and limited the number of submissions that we could accept. While it was always our plan to read all of the articles submitted, Beverly and I had to decide which submissions to keep and to determine which potential author's inquiry might be redirected and/or which article abstracts might be forwarded to the other editorial team, if we felt that an article did not fit neatly within our call for papers. After the selection of articles was made for our issue, Beverly and I divided the editorial labor based on our research interests. I offered support and feedback to our contributors who submitted interviews and to the authors who submitted articles from a historical perspective (i.e., nineteenth-century, early-twentieth-century, etc.), while Beverly offered feedback and support to the authors who submitted qualitative research and/or who wrote from contemporary points of view.

For me, as a doctoral student, the most significant part of the experience was how strongly Beverly J. Moss supported my intellectual and professional growth. For example, we completed regular phone calls to discuss the critical suggestions that were offered to the authors. After completing the editing process for our issue, Dr. Moss instructed and allowed me to take the lead, when communicating with the copy editor at the New City Community Press. She graciously suggested that I should write the argument, as we coauthored the introduction essay for the special issue. My rhetorical voice benefited from her critical critique of my drafts. Due to Dr. Moss' efforts and our lengthy conversations on the Black Diaspora, our time together

# Reflections

Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy

## African American Contributions to Service Learning and Community Literacy

### *Historically Black Colleges and Universities and African American Literacy Partnerships*

will focus on literacy partnerships between historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) and community organizations and institutions. From their inception to the present, HBCUs have partnered with the communities that they serve to promote literacy in African American communities. Whether it was African American churches offering their physical space to begin a college in the 1800s or an HBCU partnering with a community center to promote digital literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, these literacy partnerships are sites of rich literacy practices and activities. We invite submissions that discuss HBCU partnerships situated within a historical and/or contemporary setting and from diverse scholarly perspectives (ethnography, case study, social policy, historiography, theoretical, and so on). We welcome scholarly articles that include visual elements. With this issue, we hope to turn a scholarly gaze toward the research practices and sites situated at the intersection of HBCUs and their community constituents. More specifically, we seek to highlight the community-school literacy partnerships that expand our understanding of collaborative literacy practices, that demonstrate complex collaborative relationships built around literacy, that model school-community literacy partnerships, and, most importantly, that contribute new voices to current scholarly conversations on African American literacy practices.

**Editors:** Beverly Moss, Ohio State University; Reva Evonne Sias, Syracuse University

*The Community Classroom: Literacy Training in the Black Public Sphere* will focus on literacy practices and institutions in Black American communities. There is a long and rich tradition of community sponsored literacy training projects in Black American culture that has for years sought to complement or supplement formal academic education. We are looking for submissions that discuss from historical, ethnographic, or pedagogical perspectives different forms of literacy training in community-based projects or cultural centers. The editors also invite submissions of community-based writing itself – the pamphlets, testimonies, artwork, and memoirs that often emerge from such locations. With this issue we hope to contribute to a broader discussion of community literacy by exploring the relationship between the Black organizations and institutions

that have and continue to influence the literacy development of Black Americans and the social activism that has historically been a by-product of it. Such traditions provide invaluable models for more recent community literacy projects and broaden the intellectual discussion of community literacy in general.

**Editors:** David Frank Green, Jr., Penn State University; Ersula Ore, Penn State University; Sarah Ann Rude, Penn State University

We invite you to contribute to this special series. Manuscripts should be between 5000 and 6000 words and should be sent as electronic submissions to Reva E. Sias (resias@sy.edu). Please indicate for which issue you are submitting your piece. Submissions should conform to MLA guidelines. Please include a brief abstract (300 words) with your submissions. Attach the manuscript as a Word or Word-compatible document to an email. All manuscripts must be submitted before 12 a.m., September 17, 2010.

Research  
Community Publishing  
Academic Discourses  
Composition  
Pedagogy  
Service Learning  
Alcorn State  
Community Writing  
African American Church  
Rhodes College  
Rhetoric  
Howard University  
Link University  
Black Greek Fraternities and Societies  
Black American Culture  
Writing  
Literacy Practices  
Community Partnerships  
Higher Education  
Public and Private Schools  
Collaborative Relationships  
Social Policy  
United University  
Grand Valley State University  
Langston University  
NAACP  
Spelman College  
Morehouse College  
Fisk University  
Hampton University  
Relations Journal  
Community Literacy  
Literacy Training Projects

Figure 1

felt like home to me, even as it shaped my understanding of African American rhetoric, literacy, and historiography writing.

Our special issue on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Community Literacy Partnerships (Volume 10, Issue 2) was published in spring 2011. I offer a sincere ‘thank you’ to our contributors and to Lindsey S. Jordan, Jr., who was the graphic designer of our issue’s front and back covers. After a year of collaboration, Beverly and I looked forward to the double special issue on African American literacy. However, when our issue was printed, we learned that our HBCU issue was not presented jointly, as Part I of a double special issue. It was never communicated why the proposed double special series was not published, as discussed at the CCCCs planning meeting. Beverly and I assumed that both parts of the double special issue were forwarded to the New City Community Press at the same time, in the fall of 2010. We agreed that it would be a missed opportunity if all of the African American literacy articles were not published.

We questioned the journal’s invisible and less visible editorial processes. With the printing of the journal’s next issue, we were left to conclude that the submissions for Part II of the African American literacy installment were published consecutively, as the fall 2011 issue of *Reflections*. In fact, Volume 11, Issue 1, of *Reflections* is a special issue that was successfully edited by David Green, and that issue carries the unpublished double issue’s title, “African American Contributions to Service Learning and Community Literacy,” as it appeared in the revised call for papers. (See figure 1). I appreciate that there are many editorial decisions that are at the discretion of a journal’s editor (e.g., whether to publish or not to publish, whether to print submissions as a double issue or to print consecutive issues, etc.). Yet, these types of editorial choices may also serve as examples of the mostly invisible processes and labor of editing submissions.

Still, Beverly and I were excited to share the richness of the African American culture and traditions. In our introduction essay, entitled “Rewriting a Master Narrative: HBCUs and Community Literacy Partnerships” (2011), we draw attention to “Historically Black Colleges and Universities as overlooked sites in scholarship on

service-learning and university-community literacy partnerships in rhetoric and composition studies” (3). We acknowledge that current scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies signals a “public turn” that enables service-learning and community literacy practices. On the other hand, there is “a noticeable absence of scholarship that considers pedagogical collaborations between those schools—Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—and the African American communities to which HBCUs have long devoted themselves” (3). We agree that the “articles and interviews offer only a hint of the depth, breadth and wealth of HBCU-community literacy partnerships, [but] we see them as making a significant contribution to rewriting the master narratives that have, in the past, left HBCUs out of the story” (12). *Reflections* facilitated our efforts to rewrite a master narrative. My collaboration with Beverly J. Moss truly represents “the big three in the academy: scholarship, service, and teaching” (Coda 2009, 175). The editorship for the special issue was truly a learning experience. Our *Reflections* issue was well-received, and was presented as a “Featured Panel,” on “What HBCUs Can Teach Us About Writing Instruction,” at the 2011 CCCC Annual Convention, in Atlanta, Georgia.

As a previous guest editor, I appreciate *Reflections* as a valuable platform in rhetoric and writing studies. In hindsight, as a Ph.D. candidate, *Reflections* allowed me to locate my editorial and intellectual self. Within and through the pages of *Reflections*, Janell, Brian and I, as well as other doctoral students and early career professionals, entered editorships and discourse communities that supported us, and encouraged our growth and leadership. Together and individually, through the editing and production processes, the special issues and its editors expanded best practices, discourses, and conversations on timely and relevant topics. In turn, *Reflections* welcomed the editors’ passions and scholarly perspectives, even as it allowed a space for emerging voices, professional development, and collaborations. With this understanding, *Reflections* has evolved over twenty years, and it is ever present to speak to, from, and about cultures, identities, communities, people, languages, and generations to come.

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# **Retrospective Surveys: 20 Years of *Reflections***



# Reflective Cartography: Mapping *Reflections* First Twenty Years

**Roger Chao,**

*Oakland University*

**Deb Dimond Young,**

*University of Northern*

*Iowa*

**David Stock,**

*Brigham Young*

*University*

**Johanna Phelps,**

*Washington State*

*University Vancouver*

**& Alex Wulff,**

*Maryville University*

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*Since its inception in 2000, Reflections has functioned as a site of synthesis for community-based writing pedagogy, service-learning, public rhetoric, and community-engaged research. Such a diverse range of influences leads to the formation of a journal that is ever shifting in its identity, scope, and mission. This complexity is what ultimately defines Reflections: a publication that constantly pushes the boundaries of knowledge creation and strives to remain receptive to topics and voices that are often excluded from other academic sources. The following collaborative article offers a content analysis of all publications in Reflections' twenty-year history (2000–2020). Though not exhaustive, this analysis highlights unique aspects of the journal's history, methods, non-traditional genres, pedagogical and disciplinary impact, and evolving interactions with power and privilege that have made it the public conscience for Writing Studies.*

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This article offers a map of *Reflections*.<sup>1</sup> Yet, maps are always more complicated than they seem.<sup>2</sup> In computer graphics, reflection mapping is a means of approximating what an image

would look like on a reflective surface. When an environment is changing, or the reflective surface is moving, it is difficult to render the way that reflective surfaces would capture these changes. We have found a similar difficulty in trying to map the contents of *Reflections*. Looking back at twenty years of *Reflections*, one finds contours that are familiar from issue to issue, but the journal has moved more than it has stayed the same. Tracing this movement has not been as simple as finding the points where service-learning is replaced with community-engaged writing and research. Rather, it has meant marking patterns and shifts in perspective, the ways that later issues have complicated earlier issues. Even more fundamentally, it has meant looking at the ways that the journal has sometimes led and sometimes grappled with the wider field of Writing Studies:<sup>3</sup> calling for stronger connections between academic institutions and their communities, expressing a desire for a more public form of rhetoric, theorizing and assessing that more public form, pushing for more engagement with diverse communities, and critiquing the political limitations of simply engaging the public.

One of *Reflections*' consistent and ongoing contributions to Writing Studies is to document the full extent to which there are no hermetic educational spaces. The pedagogical implications of community-engaged writing can cut across communities and curricular boundaries. Since its inception, *Reflections* has offered readers a chance to measure the best practices of other scholars and other institutions and then to chart the possibilities for their own scholarship, their own institutions, and their surrounding communities. In Nora Bacon and Barbara Sherr Roswell's (2000) opening "Welcome to *Reflections*," they lay out a vision of writing instructors' roles in their own institutions that resembles the role of *Reflections* itself:

[W]riting teachers are among the early adopters who reach out to community members to establish service-learning partnerships and who take leadership roles on campus, explaining the why and the how of service-learning to their colleagues in other departments. And we, like our students, learn from experience. Having experimented with various models of community-based writing instruction for the past decade, we have learned enough to see that service-learning is more than good pedagogy: it's an

innovation with theoretical significance, one that challenges us to reexamine our thinking about writing, teaching, learning, community, service, poverty, privilege, responsibility, justice. Individually and collectively, we have found that our reflections on community-based writing instruction are provocative enough to warrant a new forum for sharing our insights and extending our inquiry. (1)

This is worth quoting at length because the point that this is a journal for “early adopters” making “provocative . . . insights” is perhaps the closest thing to a true north the journal has. It describes the contents of the last twenty years, a grounding for the journal’s purpose and publication history. It is perhaps fitting, then, that *Reflections* has never had the kind of institutional support that flagship journals in the field have enjoyed. “Early adopters” has also meant that the journal has been prescient regarding a number of key trends in the field (e.g., transfer, genre) and “provocative...insights” has meant that the journal can seem to be pushing in different directions from issue to issue, grappling with where the field should go. We believe this helps explain the significant number of special issues (fifteen) and themed issues (nine) that, together, account for over sixty percent of the journal’s publications.<sup>4</sup> These special issues help important themes cohere, while also allowing the journal to clearly expand and explore different community engagements. The journal has also, even early on, recognized that there are limitations to, and tensions within, the ways that writing can traverse communities.

The attempt to “map” the journal is, then, still a useful one, despite its complications. It helps us see more than the extraordinary diversity of the journal. We can better see the contradictions contained within the journal, the connections between the journal and various parts of Writing Studies, places where the journal has led, and places where the journal could go.

## APPROXIMATING AN IMAGE: HOW WE GOT HERE

This article is written in response to a very particular call from the editors of *Reflections* “seek[ing] one or more writers to review and analyze the abstracts of articles published in *Reflections* throughout its first 19 volumes for an article to be featured in the 20th anniversary

special issue of the journal.” Five authors from five institutions were selected for this project because of the project’s scope and timeline. The context surrounding the project was unique: we collaborated across four time zones while COVID-19 forced stay-at-home orders. By then, the goal of publishing this piece in time for the issue meant that we had six weeks to complete a draft for peer review.

Though a brief review of the compiled abstracts did provide some useful insight into the journal’s history (see Appendix B), we found this analysis insufficient. We determined that a more comprehensive picture of the journal required reading twenty years of articles, poems, book reviews, editors introductions, and calls for articles—a logistical challenge given the size of the archive and the project timeline. We divided the thirty-nine issues amongst ourselves and began reviewing the material in each issue, taking notes on noticeable patterns and trends. During our first meeting, we shared our initial analyses and induced a number of themes in *Reflections*’ history. These themes crystalized over the course of our conversations and serve as the basis of the sections presented in this article. This is but one illustration of many possible interpretations of the journal’s twenty-year history. We expect that another group of authors, or a single researcher, or a whole graduate course could do tremendous work with such an archive. Our through lines are centered around the concepts of diversity in knowledge construction, sharing, and consumption across genres, spaces, and methods with keen attention to issues of power and privilege as represented in *Reflections*.

In the first section, “An Emerging Journal: A Brief History of *Reflections*,” David Stock shares a brief overview of the journal’s history to provide context for subsequent sections. In “Methodology and Methods in *Reflections*” Johanna Phelps explores, via an abbreviated analysis of methods and methodologies published in the journal, the many ways *Reflections* authors, editors, and readers understand knowledge construction. In the third section, “The Significance of Non-traditionally Academic Genres in *Reflections*,” Roger Chao discusses how genres, especially those we usually associate with operating outside of academic journals, are fundamental to understanding the significance of *Reflections* itself. In “Tracing the Relationship Between *Reflections* and Its Most Common Educational

Setting: First-Year Composition” Alex Wulff finds explorations of first-year writing to be woven throughout the journal. He notes with interest the ways that *Reflections*’ engagement with the space of first-year writing so clearly predicts the places first-year writing has gone in the past twenty years. In the final section, “Mapping Power and Privilege in *Reflections*,” Deb Dimond Young examines the many ways *Reflections* has engaged with questions of power and privilege throughout its twenty-year history, which provides a concluding frame for our analysis of the journal’s archive.

## AN EMERGING JOURNAL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF *REFLECTIONS*

### *Newsletter Beginnings*

The inaugural issue of *Reflections on Community-Based Writing Instruction* introduced Nora Bacon and Barbara Roswell as founding editors, with one editorial assistant, two design consultants, and no editorial board. More newsletter than academic publication (Mason, this issue), *Reflections* aimed to provide “a forum for scholarship on community-based work in college writing courses” that also facilitated “communication among service-learning researchers” (2000, 2). The journal announced a three-times-per-year publication schedule and a \$10 annual subscription fee, payable by check. Acknowledged institutional sponsors included Goucher College (Roswell’s home institution) and the Campus Compact Fund for National Disciplinary Associations. The following year, additional sponsors included a Corporation for National Service/Learn and Serve America grant and the CCCC Service-Learning and Community Literacy Committee (2001, 2). While *Reflections* in its current form bears no material resemblance to this inaugural issue, the first editors’ introduction lays out a modest but compelling—and enduring—vision for the journal. With this vision in mind, reviewing changes to the journal’s title, descriptions, calls for submissions, and editors’ introductions, especially incoming editors, reveals a surprising degree of coherence across what may otherwise appear as divergent developments in the journal’s history.

Bacon and Roswell (2000) introduce *Reflections* by noting increased interest in service learning among US colleges and universities, especially among writing instructors. The editors see such interest as resonant with “our profession’s historical commitments” to a holistic

and social view of learning and teaching writing that has “power to effect personal, practical, and political change” (1). Referring to nearly a decade of experimenting with “various models of community-based writing instruction,” Bacon and Roswell describe service learning not only as “good pedagogy” but also as “an innovation with theoretical significance, one that challenges us to reexamine our thinking about writing, teaching, learning, community, service, poverty, privilege, responsibility, justice” (1). Speaking for a collective of scholars and practitioners, the editors conclude “that our reflections on community-based writing instruction are provocative enough to warrant a new forum for sharing our insights and extending our inquiry” (1).

Interchangeable use of community-based writing and service learning is repeated in the journal’s initial request for submissions, which casts a fairly wide net: research on teaching practices; theoretical discussions of community-based writing instruction; explorations of service-learning and composition studies scholarship; and related book reviews. The comparable length for article submissions (1,000–2,500 words) and book reviews (1,000 words) suggests a nascent academic journal focused on featuring scholarship, circulating resources, and connecting scholars, especially emerging scholars, interested in service learning as an emerging subfield in composition studies (2000, 4). A year later, the call for submissions includes a new feature: Classroom Samplers, 1000–2000-word descriptions of exemplary curricula with accompanying theoretical perspectives (2001, 2). This feature helps distinguish teacher research from more theoretically or methodologically grounded research, thus advancing the journal’s emerging scholarly profile. This issue also includes a website sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, which presumably linked to service-learning resources for writing instructors curated by Tom Deans (Mason, this issue).

The journal’s first title—*Reflections on Community-Based Writing Instruction*—indicates an effort to give equal attention to community engagement and teaching writing. However, given the journal’s novelty, purpose, and audience, it is not surprising that service learning and teacher research feature prominently in early issues. But it is incorrect to assume that *Reflections* began as a service-learning journal. As Bacon and Roswell (2000) indicated, the journal’s impetus was to



use good pedagogy to prompt a rethinking of composition studies' foundational assumptions and practices regarding writing, teaching writing, and a host of related key concepts, including community, service, and justice. The nature and explicitness of such rethinking varies throughout the journal's history, but the mandate to do so is linked to the journal's founding, which makes critical engagement with service learning a realization of, rather than departure from, the journal's initial vision. Indeed, critical perspectives on service learning and community literacy appear as early as the third issue: in her introduction, Bacon (2001) highlights the need for more rigor in service learning research, including more "theoretically grounded research questions," "careful research design" (3) and "a wider array of methodologies," particularly qualitative research (5). That issue also features an interview with Ira Shor, who describes his efforts to propose and develop "comprehensive writing program[s]" such as Critical Literacy Across the Curriculum and Critical Literacy Across the Community programs, which include service learning (Ashley 2001, 8). Further, starting in this issue, the word "instruction" was dropped from the journal's title (see Appendix A), suggesting an early effort to decenter classroom-based writing instruction in favor of extracurricular contexts and audiences as the focal point of *Reflections*.

Several early issues are missing front and back matter, and some are missing entirely<sup>5</sup>, but noteworthy changes are nonetheless evident. Aside from additional modifications to the journal's title, an early special issue on prison literacies (Winter 2004) features writing by community partners and community members (namely, incarcerated individuals). This effort marks a significant moment in the journal's emerging identity as a fully invested partner with and sponsor of community writing, rather than an aspiring academic journal about community-based writing instruction; additionally, this issue appears to be the first of fifteen special issues in *Reflections*' first twenty years.

#### *Between Community Literacy and Public Rhetoric*

In less than a decade, *Reflections* shows signs of a maturing journal with greater emphasis on community partnerships and community writing. The next available issue with front matter (2007) includes an updated journal description and call for submissions that features

two new keywords—writing and community literacy—signaling the journal’s primary areas of inquiry, and an invitation for submissions that focus on literacies of diverse communities. Additional changes include a slightly longer peer review process (six to eight weeks), a request for 100-word abstracts to accompany submissions, a notice that articles are indexed in major bibliographies (ERIC and MLA), and that the journal belongs to the Council of Editors of Learned Journals—all indicating that *Reflections* is no longer a grassroots newsletter but an established, if still emerging, academic journal. Yet, this academic profile does not come at the expense of its commitment to community work and community partners. A lengthy acknowledgements section following the journal description and written by Barbara Roswell and Adrian Wurr (2007) includes recognition of scholars, teachers, and leaders in academic settings and “in community associations,” “youth development organizations,” and other non-academic organizations who helped inspire and shape the content featured in the issue (1).

*Reflections*’ emphasis on community partnerships becomes especially evident during Steve Parks’s editorship. In his first issue, Parks (2008) demonstrates critical engagement with the term “community” and characterizes the journal as a home for those pursuing “community literacy studies,” “service-learning” and “engaged scholarship,” which reflects an effort to promote the community side of university-community partnerships and the journal’s orientation towards growing subfields in Writing Studies (1). Reminiscent of Bacon and Roswell’s (2000) introduction, Parks (2008) identifies recent US events as prompting the field to “rethink” not only our understanding of community but also “our identities scholars, teachers, community members, and citizens,” and to subsequently “revise [our] pedagogical, scholarly, and programmatic commitments” (1). Parks pledges to continue *Reflections*’ historical emphasis on supporting and representing “the full scope of intellectual work” in university-community partnerships by continuing to publish work that “demonstrate[s] the variety of voices, genres, and styles that mark community literacy” (2). This emphasis is clear in a revised journal description and call for submissions, which introduces language that signals the journal’s interest in publishing a variety of genres, including non-academic genres produced by or with community members, as well as work by emerging scholars. In line with this

impulse to increase access and diversity, Parks foregrounds the social justice aspect of the journal's founding mission.

Parks' tenure as editor marks an important shift in theorizing community for *Reflections* and for community-engaged work in the discipline of Writing Studies. Guest editors Ellen Cushman and Jeffrey T. Grabill's (2009) introduction to a special issue titled "Writing Theories/Changing Communities" extends Parks' (2008) initial critique of the term community. Cushman and Grabill's (2009) efforts to complicate undertheorized terms, such as community and service, that are central to *Reflections'* mission preface the eventual foregrounding of public rhetoric in the journal's title. Cushman and Grabill argue that cultural rhetorics, understood as a subsection of public rhetorics, offer a more rigorous theoretical framework for guiding community-based work than community or service learning. The guest editors describe their special issue as highlighting "theoretically rich, data driven, pedagogically nuanced approaches to community engagement" (17). A few years later, with the departure of Parks as editor and the incoming editorship of Diana George, Cristina Kirklighter, and Paula Mathieu, the journal undergoes substantial changes that resemble efforts to invigorate the journal's theoretical grounding by integrating current disciplinary knowledge beyond composition studies.

Under the new editorship of George, Kirklighter, and Mathieu (2012), the journal's subtitle is revised to *A Journal of Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning*, and the journal description includes public rhetoric as a new key term. Further changes indicate less emphasis on publishing the variety of community-generated genres (e.g., stories, essays, artwork) that appeared during Parks' editorship. The editors attribute this shift in part to the emergence of other journals focused specifically on community literacy and service learning, namely the *Journal of Community Literacy* and *Undergraduate Journal of Service-Learning and Community-Based Research* (2). But they also describe it as an effort "to more clearly define the journal's ambitious vision" (2). In an effort to differentiate *Reflections* from similar venues and to align it with an academic discipline (i.e., rhetoric) that would presumably increase the journal's academic legitimacy, sharpen its intellectual focus, and capitalize

on a current area of scholarship, George, Kirklighter, and Mathieu understandably saw public rhetoric as a clarifying, encompassing, and enriching conceptual framework to advance the journal's ongoing engagement in community-based work.

While some readers may interpret this turn to public rhetoric occurring at the expense of an emphasis on community, it may be more accurate to consider this shift as a culmination of prior editors' and contributors' theorizing about how to best enrich and advance community-based work. Admittedly, the abrupt and unexplained departure of editors George and Mathieu after one year may have inhibited the realization of public rhetoric to adequately reframe *Reflections'* community-engaged work. Yet, under Kirklighter's four-year editorship (2013–2017), *Reflections* continued to feature an eclectic array of academic and community-based work from a variety of participants, suggesting that an emphasis on public rhetoric did not interfere with the journal's ability to fulfill its founding mission.

#### *Foregrounding Community Engagement in Writing and Rhetoric*

In their first editors' introduction, Laurie Grobman and Deborah Mutnick (2018) look backward to advance *Reflections* in ways that echo its original mission. Citing Bacon and Roswell's (2000) introduction to the inaugural issue, Grobman and Mutnick acknowledge subsequent editors' efforts to promote the multi-faceted work of "community-engaged writing" in ways that have situated the journal "at the forefront of change in the field"—the subfield of community writing as well as the larger discipline of composition and rhetoric (2). When introducing their second issue, Grobman and Mutnick (2018–2019) identify two reasons for revising the journal's title as *A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*: first, to "reach a wider audience" (1) and emphasize "the journal's *raison d'être*," namely community-engaged writing; and second, to continue sponsoring research and scholarship in the subfield of community writing (2). The revision, which marks a return to the journal's second title (*Reflection on Community-Based Writing*) with an integration of the rhetorical turn in the journal's fourth title (*Reflections: Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning*), reflects a synthesis of the journal's initial mandate and recent history. The revised title also clarifies *Reflections'* primary and secondary disciplinary affiliations—

community writing; writing and rhetoric—and its effort to integrate both in mutual, recursive processes of knowledge-making and world-making.

Grobman and Mutnick's editorship also marks revisions to the journal's description that further refine, develop, and advance *Reflections'* founding mission. Their introduction to the second issue (2018-2019) includes a description/call for submissions that differs dramatically from previous versions. Aside from mentioning scholarly research articles, the bulk of the call describes publishing a variety of community-based work, from project and course profiles to personal essays and interviews, as well as various other genres produced by participants in community-engaged writing projects and partnerships (4). A more robust online presence has resulted in additional information about the journal's scope and vision. The journal's description online indicates a focus on "how community-based writing projects 1) contribute to our knowledge of theories, practices, and uses of writing and rhetoric; and 2) alter traditional pedagogy and research practices of composition and rhetoric and allied fields" ("About"). The journal encourages submissions from "anyone"—community members, faculty, students, activists—involved in service learning, community literacy, or community writing ("Welcome"). This emphasis evokes Bacon and Roswell's (2000) original vision for the journal, Parks' emphasis on community, and George, Kirklighter, and Mathieu's efforts to align *Reflections* with the discipline of rhetoric. The editors' vision statement, also online, reflects a renewed commitment for *Reflections* to function as "a platform . . . for a critical dialogue on social and economic justice" and to highlight the "confluence of heightened political consciousness and community writing's dynamism" in the current age ("About"). The journal's affiliation with the Coalition for Community Writing in 2017 and its shift to open-access with Volume 18.2 Fall/Winter 2018-2019 further indicate the journal's centralizing focus on community activism.

These recent revisions constitute an integration of the journal's founding impulses and its dynamic history, adapted for current exigencies. This synthesized focus rings true to *Reflections'* mission and speaks to its ongoing strength: working at the margins (or

frontiers) of discipline and community, the journal has maintained its hybrid academic/public status in ways that promote boundary crossing, coalition building, and empowerment for marginalized and emerging voices. When oriented to the journal's founding vision, this partial mapping of *Reflections'* history reveals a subtle, surprisingly consistent through line amid the journal's dynamic development.

## **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS IN *REFLECTIONS***

In *Reflections*, knowledge-making and sharing takes many forms. The journal is situated within a discipline that tends towards largely qualitative inquiry with methods that include autoethnographies, surveys and interviews, and teaching narratives. Following the trends in Writing Studies, *Reflections* extends the methodological egalitarianism identified by North in 1987 and exhibits a commitment to methodological pluralism (Kirsch 1992), wherein all methodologies and methods are not simply tolerated—they're welcome. Throughout this section, I refer to "methods" as the set of tools that allow researchers to collect and/or analyze data. Methodology is the framework that helps researchers determine what methods to use. One's methodology is informed by, among other things, world-view, perceptions of the possibilities and roles of research, and training. Many Writing Studies researchers are trained within a paradigm of knowledge construction that values qualitative inquiry; this is exhibited in *Reflections*, too. The published articles spanning the journal's history suggest that, rather than a prioritization of a particular paradigm or methodological orientation, contributors, reviewers, and readers value principled engagement with communities, in both the construction and narration of knowledge making. Authors of the more traditional articles published in *Reflections* share and contribute to knowledge via a variety of methods and methodologies, mirroring what other authors in this article note as a welcoming, non-traditional, and diverse community of inquiry and knowledge making.

In its twenty year history, *Reflections* authors who've published more traditional academic articles in the journal tend towards a few cohering strategies to share their work with the world: rhetorical analyses, hermeneutic and theory-building work, ethnography and autoethnography, institutional critique or review, and teaching

narratives and reflections. All of these are squarely situated in qualitative methodological frameworks and familiar to the broader field of Writing Studies. The articles included in the discussion below either include overt discussion of method or were reviewed by two authors and determined to fit within one of the following general categorizations. The array of methods and methodologies in *Reflections* are a testament to how the journal has acculturated its authors and readers to knowledge-making practices.

Authors such as Bellino (2008), Maltz and Manter (2010), and Cloud (2016) conducted forms of rhetorical analysis on particular artifacts and experiences. This theoretical work is common in the journal's special issues, and such articles are often balanced with other articles with research and/or narratives focused on pedagogical practice within the same issue. Dovetailing the theoretical and practical methods is a strategy that exhibits praxis as core to *Reflections'* work and concordant with what appears concurrently in community engagement scholarship (see, for instance, Iverson and James (2014)).

Importantly, too, *Reflections* is home to many hermeneutic articles that (re)theorize crucial concepts in the practice and purpose of community engagement and civic education. With foci such as the framing of the term service-learning (Marilynne Boyle-Baise 2007), such methods include critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Lewis 2019) as well as critical race frameworks (Catchings 2019). Similarly, in work like Kirklighter's (2009) largely hermeneutic inquiry, Lynch-Binie's 2010 personal narrative with labor organizing, and Thacker's 2014 narrative combined with theoretical analysis, the analytic and personal are woven together throughout the journal's history to build a series of reflection narratives imbued with theory and the practice of lived experience. These articles parallel the representation of the dialogues and interviews Roger discusses in this article and the foci of robust, democratic, and reciprocal partnerships Deb shares. Such positionality extends into the methods authors have used and reify a particular collaborative effort at knowledge construction.

Qualitative methods such as ethnography (e.g., Pimentel 2009; Gorzelsky 2008; Malin 2010; Hall 2015) and autoethnography (e.g. Wells 2016) are articulated clearly in some articles and implied in



others. Many articles contain a mix of multiple qualitative methods, such as Gorzelsky et al.'s 2009 critical theoretical work that is combined with ethnography. Similarly, several publications in the early years of the journal drew upon multiple methods associated with qualitative paradigms, such as participatory action research (Crabtree and Sapp 2004) and critical stakeholder theory (Kimme Hae 2004). The prevalence of such methods in the *Reflections* archive speaks to the power of individual experience in sharing and building knowledge. Trimble's 2009 discussion of student ethnographies suggests the multi-layered strategies for building knowledge with citizen-partners through auto/ethnographic methods, too.

Institutional/program histories and/or critiques appear, too; some are presented as ethnographic. Examples of such work can be seen in Holmes's discussion of her FYC program revision at Elon with community partners (2009) and Loudermik Garza's 2007 discussion of Texas A&M's professional and technical communication program's identification and valuation of diverse literacies. Baca's (2007) narrative discussion of her program's history falls into this loose category of institutional and programmatic discussion, as well. Similarly, Rupiper Taggart's 2005 article served as a precursor for such genres and married institutional critique with theory to negotiate the complexities of localism in community engaged initiatives. Again, this particular facet of the journal maintains a close connection between rigorous theoretical framing and qualitative methods.

Many *Reflections* articles over the past two decades are teaching narratives or classroom practice buttressed by data collected and analyzed through qualitative methods common in Writing Studies: surveys, interviews, and artifact collection with/from students. In *Reflections*, interviews with partners and/or key stakeholders are also represented. For instance, in 2009, Rogers published findings from her dissertation project interviewing teachers who worked with incarcerated individuals. And pedagogical research on the practices of community engaged teaching have always been a cornerstone of the journal. Early in the journal's history, three articles in particular employed empirical methods such as questionnaires (Redd 2003) and a Campus Compact measurement tool (Kendrick and Suarez 2003); together, the early and comprehensive use of many pedagogical



inquiries serve as a springboard for future research and inquiry. Like many *Reflections* authors before and after her, Edell (2007) relied on contributions from participants who were not “students” in the traditional sense, but rather were learners in Edell’s program. Similar styles of scholarship and methodological choices, many more closely associated with university classrooms, can be seen in articles such as those by Bingham and McNamara (2008), Nall and Trauth Taylor (2013), Wetzel (2013), and Handley (2016), and robust data collection using strategies from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is seen intermittently (e.g. Wurr’s pilot and comprehensive study featured in the Fall 2009 issue). Such data collection efforts are ethically complex and generally adhere to disciplinary guidance.<sup>6</sup> The nuance of involving students and partners in research, especially when professors or faculty often embody a default positionality that is provided deference, is mitigated to some degree by the inclusion of student authors (e.g., Grobman, Kemmerer, and Zebertavage 2017) and student writing with attribution in many publications in *Reflections*’ history. While the field of Writing Studies is saturated with such narratives, *Reflections* is an outlet for readers interested particularly in the impact of community engagement on *all* communities, not only classroom communities.

Based on what is included in the journal’s article archives, it is apparent that the past twenty years of *Reflections* has been a commitment to principles and praxis illustrated via qualitative methodologies. Inherent in any decision about knowledge construction and consumption are implied methods and methodology/ies. Overt discussion of these matters informs readers’ understanding of authors’ positionality and axiological commitments. We may take it for granted, as readers of *Reflections*, that we share similar commitments to the editors, reviewers, and authors. As we think towards bringing more readers, writers, and practitioners into our community of inquiry, transparency regarding our methods and methodology is always something we should extend to our audience.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NON-TRADITIONALLY ACADEMIC GENRES IN *REFLECTIONS*

One of the most unique features about *Reflections* is how the journal presents its focus on service-learning and community engagement to

its audience. Even a brief glimpse into the journal's history reveals a diverse range of genres published over the years; although *Reflections* primarily puts out academic articles, the journal also provides a space for creative pieces such as poetry and drawings as well as deeply personal reflections and narratives. There is even a set of instructions for a game focusing on nonprofit management that teachers can facilitate in their classrooms (see Eli Goldblatt's "Enlightened Self-Interest Game" in the Spring 2012 issue). As David's historical overview indicates, the journal has a history of diverse leadership that strive to highlight both academic and community-centered issues told from the perspective of individuals who are directly embedded within them. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the published genres reflect such a diverse range of voices and experiences. While the support for non-traditionally academic genres<sup>7</sup> certainly exemplifies *Reflections*' inclusive practices, I want to build on Heather Lang's contribution in this issue's roundtable and argue that there is a larger, rhetorical impact to the journal's decision to publish nonacademic works alongside their academic texts. More specifically, the addition of these non-traditionally academic genres influences how *Reflections* readers perceive and conceptualize not just the journal itself but service-learning and community engagement as fields of research and study.

As a field, Writing Studies has long conceptualized genres as being much more than categories or classifications. Scholars like Carolyn Miller (1974) argue that genres have a social function as well; in her seminal article "Genre as Social Action," Miller suggests that genres assist authors and audiences alike by creating recurring rhetorical situations and subsequent responses. In doing so, genres construct moments where communicants can then predict the appropriate conventions and reactions. Building off of this theory, Anis Bawarshi argues that genres are "rhetorical ecosystems," a cyclical force that mediates our social relationships and actions, which in turn reproduces certain situations and conditions: "[t]hrough genres, our typified rhetorical actions reproduce the very recurring environments that subsequently make these rhetorical actions necessary and meaningful" (2001, 73). In the context of community engagement, genres hold significant weight in that they help teachers and students understand the various discourse communities with which they engage, on not only a textual level but

an ideological one as well. Scholars like Thomas Deans would argue this affordance is extremely valuable to composition pedagogy; in his *Reflections* article “Genre Analysis and the Community Writing Course,” Deans contemplates a question he once asked his class: “[i]f, I posited to students, we understand partner nonprofit agencies as discourse communities to which we apprentice ourselves, don’t we need to understand those contexts before stepping into them as writers?” (2005, 8). The recurring situations and responses produced by a genre offer insight into the values, attitudes, and ideals of its participants—all necessary contextual knowledge for effective participation in any discourse community.

We can, therefore, gain much insight into *Reflections* and its authors and readers by examining the variety of genres the journal has put out over the years, especially the ones that are underrepresented in traditional, peer-reviewed academic publishing. Although *Reflections* publishes a variety of texts, there are three genres that stand out due to their frequency. The first is the narrative, in which authors share a personal, first-hand account of an experience or event. Published 117 times over the course of the journal’s history, these narratives are often written chronologically and contain observational details as well as lessons and experiences that the author took away from the experience. For example, in “Civic Engagement and New Media,” Michelle Albert (2010) shares her story of leading a multimodal civic engagement course, beginning with the exigency for creating the course, student reactions, and her assessment of how the course was received. In addition, narratives often provide a glimpse into composition pedagogy in non-traditional learning environments or during unique circumstances. In “A Narrative on Teaching, Community, and Activism,” youth minister Tim Lee (2011) reflects on his experiences in establishing One Black Man, a community organization dedicated to improving the literacy of young African-American males in Chicago, while “Writing the Blues: Teaching in a Post-Katrina Environment” tells Gwen Robinson’s (2008) experience of teaching a first-year writing course at Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina.

Another commonly published genre in *Reflections* is poetry, which has appeared twenty times over the course of twenty years.

These poems, some following a rhyme scheme and some not, add an emotional element to the social issues covered by the journal. Since its inception, *Reflections* has published two special issues focused on prison education, and while the academic articles in each issue highlight the systemic issues plaguing U.S. prisons, it is the combined eleven poems from both issues that allow readers to *feel* the repercussions of those issues and the toll they take on prisoners. The inclusion of poetry offers a unique perspective for readers, especially when academic discourse often over relies on appeals to ethos and logos and undervalues appeals to pathos. However, as Laura Micciche argues, “emotion is crucial to how people form judgments about what constitutes appropriate action or inaction in a given situation” (2005, 169), thereby making these poems invaluable in terms of helping readers understand the stakes involved in certain social and community-based issues.

Finally, the journal has a long history of publishing dialogues between two or more authors, appearing forty-six times since *Reflections*’ inception. These dialogues are depicted in a variety of formats: interviews (“‘Where is the Finish Line in the Race Race?’ An Interview with Dr. Edward Peeples” in volume 18, issue 2), email exchanges (“A Conversation About Literacy Narratives and Social Power” in volume 9, issue 3) or a transcription of a conference panel (“De-centering Dewey: A Dialogue” in volume 9, issue 3). More importantly, these dialogues also involve a multitude of voices, including those that are often left out of many traditional academic journals. For example, “‘At-Risk’ of What? Rewriting a Prescribed Relationship in a Community Literacy Nonprofit Organization: A Dialogue” captures conversations between Cherish Smith and Vani Kannan (2015), two college students who worked at the same NYC-based community literacy nonprofit. Other dialogues involve activists conducting “on-the-ground” research, such as Kathleen Kerr’s (2012) “*Dreams Deferred*: An Alternative Narrative of Nonviolence Activism and Advocacy,” an interview with documentary filmmaker Jennifer Hitchcock, who traveled to Israel and the West Bank to learn more about the complexities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These conversation-oriented genres, though not as formal as traditional academic essays, represent what Steve Parks calls “a sense of mutual listening and response,” (2010, 1), an interaction he argues is the exception rather than the norm. Aaron Zimmerman (2018/2019)

reiterates this position in his interview “‘Everyone Is a Writer’: The Story of the New York Writers Coalition,” arguing that listening helps to humanize the speaker, something especially important for the voices that are often limited, silenced, or on the margins of our society.

The inclusion of non-traditionally academic genres like narratives, poems, and dialogues not only affects the perception of *Reflections* as an academic source but also influences our conceptualization of service-learning, public rhetoric, and community engagement on a macro level. That is, when these genres are read alongside the journals’ academic pieces, audiences gain a comprehensive look into the values, ideals, and attitudes that govern these discourse communities. For one, their inclusion demonstrates an appreciation and recognition of the various processes involved in service-learning and community work. Often, the public only sees the final product, whether that be student-created resources or a collaborative project. Yet, much of the labor required to facilitate an effective service-learning course or public-facing project is often invisible or behind the scenes. By publishing genres like narratives and dialogues in which authors have an opportunity to reflect and unpack their experiences on a certain topic or event, readers of the journal get a much more holistic view of community engagement. In fact, these genres help to construct a more authentic picture of community engagement in that authors are often transparent about not just the successes of a project but its failures as well. For example, in her narrative “Courage, Commitment and a Little Humility: The Path to Civic Engagement,” Jennifer Kidd (2008) focuses specifically on the shortcomings of an experimental course she taught at Old Dominion University. In publishing genres that allow authors to showcase all the various stages and dimensions of their community-based work, *Reflections* upholds the idea that we can learn just as much from our pedagogical failures as our pedagogical achievements.

The presence of these non-traditionally academic genres also humanizes the content that is discussed in each issue. While the syntax and structure of academic articles offers scholars the ability to meticulously break down a research topic, there is the possibility that such a formal discourse can fail to capture the emotions involved

in the social issues that *Reflections* addresses. Often, these genres document an experience that would simply not resonate the same had it been composed in standard English; in the poem “Fieldnote,” Steven Alvarez (2013) depicts a brief conversation between two fourth-grade girls, Lili and Maria. As they talk about their home and school lives, their fluid synthesis of English and Spanish phrases also simultaneously reveals the social and cultural implications of codemeshing. In doing so, the audience comes to understand the importance of codemeshing not through analysis but through personal, lived experiences.

Finally, I want to echo Lang’s argument in the roundtable when she states that the journal’s decision to publish a wide variety of genres “expands our notions of what might count as evidence, knowledge, or data.” Similar to Johanna’s analysis of critical methodological approaches in the previous section, the presence of conversations and creative writing in a recognized peer-reviewed journal like *Reflections* demonstrates past and present editors’ awareness that meaning making and knowledge building often occurs in informal ways, from undervalued sources. Academic discourse often acts as a barrier of entry for many writers, despite their wealth of knowledge and expertise. Thus, by providing a space for non-traditionally academic genres, *Reflections* makes the argument that authors ranging from incarcerated prisoners to undergraduate students all have some experience that contribute to our field.

In addition, dialogues and interviews exhibit the organic, collaborative method of meaning making, a process that all scholars go through yet is often excluded from the final drafts of academic articles. However, there is rhetorical value in showing the audience the entire process; in the aforementioned dialogue between Smith and Kannan, they initially discuss their thoughts and concerns about the community literacy organization at which they both worked, before coming together and agreeing on a call to community organizations to consider alternate methods for teaching literacies and composing mission statements. The format and structure of the conversation allow readers to trace the exigency of their call for action, as Smith and Kannan work together to reflect on their experiences. In doing

so, the audience has a much clearer understanding of their concerns and the rationale behind them.

Anne Ruggles Gere's (1994) well-recognized essay, "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition," champions the notion that learning often occurs in non-traditional settings where the participants' passion makes up for the lack of institutional support or recognition. I would argue that *Reflections* and its blend of traditionally and non-traditionally academic genres continues to carry that torch. While genres like narratives, poems, and dialogues are still underrepresented overall in academic publishing, *Reflections* proves they capture a side of our field – all the emotions and imperfections – that just cannot be represented accurately through academic jargon.

## **TRACING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *REFLECTIONS* AND ITS MOST COMMON EDUCATIONAL SETTING: FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION**

While non-traditional genres are central to *Reflections*, most of the journal has directly engaged educational spaces. If one were to attempt to create a curriculum map of the classes, courses, and learning opportunities explored in *Reflections* for the past twenty years, the map would be incredibly eclectic and diverse. I can think of no other journal that has published such curricular diversity in the same span of time. There are articles that directly discuss curriculum and pedagogy in easily identifiable places (first-year writing courses, advanced writing and rhetorical courses, literature courses, high school language arts classrooms, elementary school classrooms, writing across the disciplines courses), but there are also higher education capstone courses that are incredibly unique, prisons, writing groups, reading circles, literacy support programs, and an incredible number of community partnerships and partners who would push the orientation or scale of our map well past the point of usefulness. There is such extraordinary diversity that many of the articles are unique, almost to themselves. This is, it seems to me, as it should be. *Reflections* is the kind of journal where pushing boundaries and looking for new directions is an ongoing editorial commitment.



For all the diversity in *Reflections*, perhaps the educational space explored most often in the journal is first-year composition in higher education. A majority of the issues have at least one piece on community engagement in a first-year writing classroom or program. I want to focus on the first issue of the journal, which is largely about first-year composition courses, as a lens through which we can view what was to come. This has some limitations, as I am privileging the first issue, but only to suggest that first-year writing is one of the sites where it is possible to trace some patterns and threads running through the journal's history.

It is true that first-year writing has been privileged throughout the pages of *Reflections*, but it is also interesting to note the ways that *Reflections* has put pressure on the term “first-year” in composition studies. Is it really a “first-year” composition course for an incarcerated writer taking her “first” composition course inside a prison, but after testing out of what would have been her first two composition courses outside the prison? This is the case for Alissa Knight's article “(Re) Defining Literacy” (2019) and other pressures on the term “first” and “first-year” exist in other issues.

Even still, *Reflections* has, from its beginnings, been interested in the place of community engagement in first-year composition classrooms—and the limitations found therein. In fact, the first issue almost reads like an unnamed special issue on first-year composition and what the journal at the time called service learning. The first three articles in the first issue, and four out of the five in that issue, cover first-year composition courses in some way. The broader issues raised seem prescient in many respects today. Published before the “public turn” in Writing Studies, the entire first issue marks out ways that the public can be engaged by Writing Studies courses. The issue as a whole seems to suggest that community engaged writing might be a way to link high school and first-year writing curriculum, though it does so obliquely.<sup>8</sup>

The first issue of *Reflections* asks questions about community engaged writing that have stayed with the journal: Does community engagement foster student success? Are first-year writing classrooms the right place for community engaged curriculum? What can first-



year students offer to communities? What do communities offer first-year writers? How do we measure or assess the benefit to students and community partners? What kind of institutional support is necessary to make community engagement curriculum work?

The first article in *Reflections*, after the introduction and an interview with Tom Deans marking the CCCC's commitment to service-learning, is Mary Vermillion's (2000) "Community-Based Writing Instruction and the First-Year Experience." Vermillion looks closely at the need to balance student success and engagement in a first-year composition course focused on community engagement. She is, essentially, making an argument that community engagement in first-year composition is a 'high-impact practice' a full six years before the term would be coined by George Kuh and go on to become a dominant focus of higher education administrators. In this way, she focuses on the first-year composition course as a site concerned with retention, the first-year experience, and student success in the overt ways that have increasingly become central to scholarship on the composition side of rhetoric and composition. The citations in Vermillion's piece are divided between primary sources from her institution, student success and first-year experience sources, and broader engagements with service.

The piece also established *Reflections* interest in publishing writing assignments and course documents as they relate to narratives about service learning. While there has been less of this in more recent issues, it is a thread running through the journal and was a regular feature of early issues. Assignments are more likely to be narrativized in more recent issues. The kind of full-length inclusion that one might find in *Prompt* (which began in 2016), is now largely absent from *Reflections*. Most recently, one is more likely to see the graphic representation of assessment data than the graphic representation of assignments and course documents. I believe there are several trends that explain this shift:

1. Conferences and other journals offer the field opportunities to share assignments and curriculum in ways that were not as robust when *Reflections* began twenty years ago;

2. The field has, more broadly, become increasingly concerned with assessment and so *Reflections* has increasingly featured articles assessing the impact of community engaged writing and;
3. The “Public turn” in composition and rhetoric has meant that scholars are increasingly interested in documenting community engagement beyond the classroom.

Even still, the classroom remains a central site in *Reflections*. In the most recent issue, Chris Iverson’s (2020) “The Long-Term Effects of Service-Learning on Composition Students” begins to assess community engaged curriculum’s impact on students as life-long learners with students’ own accounts of their classroom experience, Christine Martorana’s (2020) “The Muted Group Video Project: Amplifying the Voices of Latinx Immigrant Students” focuses on a particular assignment, with suggestions for further wider applications, and Jeffrey Gross and Alison A. Lukowski’s (2020) “Writing for Advocacy: DREAMers, Agency, and Meaningful Community Engaged Writing” is the type of course profile that dominated the first issues of *Reflections*. So, even as the journal has increasingly sought to engage public rhetorics, it has continued to engage the classroom experience of community engagement.

Another course profile in the first issue, Hannah M. Ashley’s (2000) “True Stories from Philadelphia” discusses assignments and classroom interactions meant to mark successful engagement with students in a first-year composition classroom, but with more focus on the needs of community partners than on first-year student success. In Ashley’s words, the senior citizens literacy program she writes about was “designed to meet a real community need. Philadelphia offers no other literacy program geared specifically toward older adults” (2000, 10). She overtly emphasizes the impact of the program on the community, though she relies less on direct assessment of this impact than will be found in later work in the journal. It is interesting to chart the increasing need to document or assess directly. For instance, Lisa Mastrangelo is deeply self-conscious about the limitations of indirectly measuring impact and achieving some kind of reciprocity in her 2004 article “First

Year Composition and Women in Prison: Writing and Community Action.” More current issues make much more stringent demands on this sense of reciprocity. While there are several articles that make the case that having the community measure the impact of community engagement needs to be a central component of this kind of scholarship, perhaps Jessica Shumake and Rachael Wendler Shah make this case most starkly in their 2017 article, “Reciprocity and Power Dynamic: Community Members Grading Students.” Shumake and Shah make the case that community members should score and grade students on their contributions. While Ashley is not pushing for this kind of assessment in the first issue, she does tell what would become a familiar story in the pages of *Reflection*: the community engaged program that did not succeed in adequately supporting the community, at least without revisions. Using her reflection on the program to reveal assumptions and biases that had to be corrected, she addresses the difficulties she had implementing a curriculum that looks like something we would now call Writing About Writing.

The importance of addressing “a real community need” is equally present in the next article in the first issue, Michael John Martin’s (2000) “Merging Voices: University Students Writing with Children in a Public Housing Project.” Martin’s piece is about students working with a population not found in most traditional higher education spaces, but it is also about the genres utilized to work with these children. While genre is highlighted frequently, Martin and other authors in *Reflections*’ first four volumes do not draw explicit links between genre as a social function and genre analysis to community engagement, but by 2005 Tom Deans was publishing “Genre Analysis and the Community Writing Course” in volume 5, issue 1. As Roger points out in the previous section, Deans’ article—an examination of which genres to use in first-year composition courses versus upper-level courses—marks a clear point where the “genre turn” in rhetoric and composition became an important consideration in community engagement.

The extensive use of special issues has allowed the journal to widen, and sometimes accelerate, its exploration of genres and how those genres fit into first year composition. In the Fall 2009 issue, the journal published Karyn Hollis guide to “Desktop Publishing for Community

and Social Justice Organizations,” but Fall 2010 sees the journal fully embrace multimodal forms of social engagement—including social media. In their introduction to the issue, editors Brian Bailie and Collette Caton do an outstanding job of marking the importance of social media to future community engagements and Laurie A. Britt-Smith’s “Txt Msgs 4 Afrca: Social Justice Communities in a Digital World” looks at ways to bring social media into the first-year composition classroom. Digital forms of writing have remained a thread through the journal with Stacy Nall and Kathryn Trauth Taylor’s Spring 2013 “Composing With Communities: Digital Collaboration in Community Engagements,” Jen England’s Fall 2016 “Sustainable Worlds, Sustainable Words: Using Digital Games to Develop Environmental Awareness in Writing Classrooms,” and Kristi Girdhar’s Spring 2020 “#BostonStrong/BostonStrong?: A Personal Essay on Digital Community Engagement.” The journal has also, at times, used book reviews to mark connections to composition’s broader investment in bringing multimodal forms of composition into the classroom. While social media in particular has only been a thread running through the journal since 2010, it seems increasingly likely that social media will play an even larger role in *Reflections* as it moves forward.

Returning to the first issue, it is interesting that both Hannah M. Ashley and Michael John Martin are writing about community engagement programs that have lost funding, and the only institutional home that could be found for the programs was in first-year composition. First-year composition is a second choice for both authors who were involved in previous iterations where upper-level students received more extensive training to work with their community partners. So, does community engagement belong in first-year writing, or is it only a match based on institutional requirements and limitations? Both authors eloquently defend their programs against this criticism. Yet, they both use the specifics of their programs and institutional context to craft their defenses.

Pushing beyond institutional limitations and the contexts of particular programs is sometimes the work of those in different institutions running different programs. Over the course of *Reflections* history, the journal has sought to balance the need to report on “early

adopters,” or even early developers, pushing up against institutional limitations, and the need to assess the impact of community engaged pedagogy more broadly. Cathy Sayer’s (2000) “Juggling Teacher Responsibilities in Service-Learning Courses,” which follows Martin’s article in the issue, is all about the difficulties of securing institutional support. While Sayer has an interesting critique of team teaching, she is most forcefully arguing that institutions must support service-learning. Practitioners cannot create meaningful programs without that support.

The first issue ends with a unique section called “Research Spotlight” that was meant to highlight forthcoming dissertations in the field. In that section, Adrian Wurr (2000) reports on “The Impact and Effects of Service-Learning on Native and Non-native English Speaking College Composition Students,” which is the first of his many contributions to *Reflections*. It is also a direct attempt to quantify and assess the impact of community engaged curriculum in first-year composition classrooms. While the other articles have longer time horizons to the programs they discuss, Wurr’s measurement and data collection is far more robust. Here, it is clear that the initial editors of *Reflections* understood that assessment would increasingly need to be part of the journal’s output. The variety of assessment instruments that have been featured in *Reflections* in the past five years has been especially interesting, and especially focused on ways to map how privilege can be monitored or revealed in community engaged settings. In the Fall/Winter 2018 issue, Georgina Guzmán, in her article “Learning to Value Cultural Wealth Through Service Learning: Farmworker Families’ and Latina/o University Students’ Mutual Empowerment via Freirean and Feminist Chicana/o-Latina/o Literature Reading Circles,” used reflective writing and assessment meetings with community partners to chart ways that “cultural deficit logic” (18) operated within the reading circles she facilitated. Of course, *Reflections*’ commitment to examining power and privilege runs deeper than assessment.

## MAPPING POWER AND PRIVILEGE IN *REFLECTIONS*

In their edited collection, *Culturally Engaging Service-Learning with Diverse Communities*, Delano-Oriaran, Penick-Parks, and Fondrie (2018) argue, “[e]xperiences of historically and presently racially

marginalized and underrepresented groups should provoke a critical awakening to scholars and practitioners in Institutions of Higher Education to adopt high-impact pedagogical practices that attempt to eradicate or dismantle institutional injustice” (xix). This consciousness of power and the desire to dismantle unjust systems is deeply woven throughout other foundational works on critical service-learning and community-engaged writing by scholars like Bacon, Eyler and Giles, Haussamen, Hertzberg, Jacoby, Roswell, and Wurr. The examination of power and privilege is so deeply rooted in community-engaged writing pedagogy that the first editors of *Reflections* chose to address it in the inaugural issue, noting a commitment in community-engaged instruction, “to a vision of teaching and learning which addresses cognitive, affective, and social development, to a vision of writing which recognizes its power to effect personal, practical, and political change” (Bacon and Roswell 2000, 1).

A vital step in understanding systems of power is the recognition of privilege, or the often unacknowledged and unrecognized social hierarchies that provide some groups with greater access to unearned power and resources (McIntosh 2007). There are two significant ways *Reflections* has contributed to our ever-changing understanding of power and privilege in community-engaged writing. First, contributors have examined the pedagogical implications of community-engaged writing as a tool for empowering students and helping them to recognize systemic power structures and their impact within the community. Second, editors actively resisted systems of institutional power by welcoming and amplifying voices not often heard in academic journals and by expanding the methods used to create and communicate knowledge.

*Reflections* articles discussing privilege in community-engaged pedagogy focus on a wide range of issues such as the need to recognize the way White European American cultural practices impact the teaching of writing and reinforce marginalized status for students of color (Pimentel 2013); the need to examine service-learning partnerships from the perspective of the student, the instructor, and the partner to ensure reciprocity (Redd 2003); and the need for culturally relevant public writing assignments (Medina 2013). Notably, the Spring 2007 featured a special issue guest edited

by Adrian Wurr (2007) focusing solely on the “rhetorical, ethical and practical issues inherent in negotiating difference when interacting with the ‘Other,’” (3) allowing the journal to dive even deeper into questions of power and opportunity in community literacy programs.

Other *Reflections* authors have pushed back on the idea that all service-learning students come from a place of privilege in the first place. For example, in her article, “Keep it Real: A Maxim for Service-Learning in Community Colleges,” Michelle Navarre Cleary (2003) discusses designing service-learning courses for students who reflect the characteristics of the people being served more than the people doing the serving. Terese Guinsatao Monberg (2009) continues this discussion a few years later with her article, “Writing Home or Writing *As* the Community,” where she examines the unique and challenging experiences of service-learning students volunteering within their own communities. Both authors call on readers to recognize the privilege often assumed in service-learning pedagogy, but not always present. They challenge readers to recognize that not all students need to be introduced to the concept of systemic power and discrimination through service-learning and community-engaged courses. Many students already have an intimate, experiential knowledge of such structures and have much to add to the conversation, if their perspectives are welcomed and honored.

Moreover, the journal has also acted to dismantle privilege in academic journals by using its pages to amplify marginalized voices. This critical consciousness was built into the journal’s structure in part through an openness to nonacademic genres and a commitment to seeking work from partners and community members. As Roger discusses earlier in this article, *Reflections* created space for diverse voices and genres not always heard in academia, continually calling attention to privilege in knowledge creation and the question of who is allowed space to speak in academia, all while actively dismantling exclusionary structures.

In their article “Are We Still an Academic Journal?” included in this issue, Steve Parks and Brian Bailie (2020) reflect on their efforts as editor and associate editor, respectively, to ensure all those involved with community-engaged writing—instructors, students, community

partners, and participants—had an equal opportunity to discuss their experiences. For Parks, the journal needed “[d]ifferent voices, different languages, different designs” (76).

The expanding definition of who can create knowledge and how that knowledge can be communicated is seen most frequently in the many special and theme issues produced throughout the journal’s history. For example, the first special issue was published by guest editors Tobi Jacobi and Patricia O’Connor in Winter 2004 and focused on prison literacies. In the foreword, Jacobi (2004) points out that writing instructors have long valued the individual voices of their students, encouraging them to tell their own stories. She argues it is vital to extend that opportunity to incarcerated students, holding space for inmates to speak for themselves (2). That single issue features twenty-eight pieces of prison writing examining a wide variety of topics and providing myriad perspectives on the prison experience. “Democracia, pero ¿para quién?” or “Democracy, but for whom?” was published in Spring 2019 and brought much-needed attention to community-engaged projects that address immigration and migration. It was also the first to publish bilingual work, again, creating and holding space for community-engaged writing participants to share their experiences in the language(s) that best express that experience.

Inviting community-engaged writing participants to speak for themselves also expands the boundaries of knowledge created in the journal, providing instructors and practitioners vital information to improve their practice. For example, the most recent prison issue published in Fall 2019 featured an article by Christopher Malec, a participant in the Exchange for Change program at the Dade Correctional Institution in Florida. Malec (2019) describes the program from his perspective, including a discussion of issues with recruiting participants and the challenges volunteers face working in the prison system. Sharing his perspective provides valuable insight for an instructor or practitioner looking to work within the US prison system.

While I found extensive engagement with questions of power and privilege in *Reflection’s* twenty-year history, I entered this project



expecting to find a clear connection between the language used and the discussions of privilege within the journal. A journal that has used five subtitles in twenty years is clearly concerned with specificity of language. I was surprised not to find clear connections, as the terms “service-learning,” “community-engaged,” and “community-based” were used interchangeably throughout the journal’s history. Shifts in terminology appear to be linked more to the changing focus of the journal and discussions in the larger field than to a statement of critical consciousness.

Looking at article titles provides one way to understand changes in the terminology used in *Reflections*. I wanted to map terms used in article titles with various points in the journal’s history. The journal’s subtitle changes provided a logical examination point since the subtitles were chosen by editors shaping the vision of the journal. As David already established, the editors discussed the importance of language in introductions and calls for proposals, so it was interesting to see how that translated to article submissions. In the first three iterations of the journal (see Appendix A for subtitles and dates), article titles use the term “service-learning” forty-two times and “community-engaged” or “community-based” only eight.<sup>9</sup> There was a major change of focus in the journal with the change in subtitle to *Journal of Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning*, and with it, a change in terminology. Only six articles published in all fourteen issues used the term “service-learning” and four used “community-engaged” or “community-based.” We see a balancing between service and community-based descriptors, but the change in direction for the journal toward a more rhetorical foundation means these words almost disappear entirely. What is not clear, however, is a link between terminology and the journal’s work addressing power and privilege.

Drilling down to article content rather than the titles shows authors wrestling with questions of institutional power in many ways, but without consistently connecting the semantics of service- or community-engaged learning with that power. For example, Crabtree and Sapp (2005) discuss their decision to dismiss “charity-type” project models in favor of reciprocity (10). In that same issue, Kimme Hae (2005) invokes Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Waters’

(1997) call to reject assumptions of “do-goodism” in service-learning (55). Bateman (2010) also rejects the assumption that service-learning must be charity and promotes a model where universities and community partners enter into, “a more mutually enriching interaction among civic agents” (92). All of these authors engage with a greater conversation about the unequal power dynamics between institutions and community partners, but they don’t critically examine the role language might play in those relationships. There are, however, occasional attempts to engage with the language of power and its impact on the terminology used to describe the field. For example, Phelps-Hillen (2017) explains why she explicitly rejects “charity models of service-learning” in support of a “justice-oriented approach to community engagement” (114), but that sort of linguistic examination of power is not seen consistently across the journal’s history.

However, connections between terminology, power, and privilege in the journal may be becoming more explicit, reflecting a shift in the larger discipline. The four most recent issues, headed by editors Laurie Grobman and Deborah Mutnick, see a clear shift in article titles, with three using “service-learning” and three using either “community-engaged” or “community-based.” One of those articles, “The Long-Term Effects of Service-Learning on Composition Students,” uses the term “service-learning,” but begins with a detailed review of the evolving thoughts on power and terminology in the field and in the journal (Iverson, 2020). This change in terminology reflects Grobman and Mutnick’s own work, as they used the phrases “community-engaged” or “community-based” writing twelve times in their first introduction to describe both the field and the issue. “Service-learning” was used only once, and that was in a quotation taken from the inaugural issue of *Reflections*. The discussion introduced in their first issue continues into their second, reinforced by the most recent name change: *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*. In a recent interview, Grobman explained the changes in terminology were intended to align the journal with shifting discussions in the field, including changes in CCCC’s “Statement in Community-Engaged Projects,” and to narrow the scope of the journal.<sup>10</sup> In their writing, Grobman and Mutnick do not connect the name change and the shifting terminology explicitly to questions of power and privilege, but they do call for the journal to continue

the “reflective, critical community-based” work that they believe is necessary in our chaotic world (3). The shift from service-based terminology to community-based terminology seems to indicate a desire to return to the journal’s roots, while also calling for more critical analysis of the ways community-engaged work is itself entwined in community power systems.

Grobman and Mutnick have also maintained the journal’s long commitment to dismantle academic power structures. Along with the name change came a move to online open-access, expanding the potential audience for *Reflections* and removing barriers to access. The movement of the journal to an open-access, online format actively dismantles power structures and reduces privilege by making the knowledge created and distributed through the journal accessible to anyone with a computer and internet, anywhere, at any time.

Questions of power and privilege are forever shifting, but they are always present. Since we began writing this article, our country has exploded with massive, wide-spread protests against police brutality and murder of Black Americans like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade. These acts of violence and resulting protests remind us once again that systems of power run deep and are extraordinarily difficult to dismantle. As Grobman and Mutnick (2020) state, “[t]he work of community-engaged writing and rhetoric both exposes paths to justice in ways that distinguish it from many other disciplines and reproduces the same inequities that pervade life in and out of the academy. In other words, our small but growing field is rife with both possibilities and limitations...We must recognize the limits of what we’ve accomplished and the urgent need to do more and to do better” (6). Mapping the first twenty years of *Reflections* has demonstrated questioning and dismantling power and privilege is at the heart of the journal’s mission; that history must now provide a foundation for future community-engaged scholars and partners to continue the fight.

## CONCLUSION

*Reflections* has a twenty-year history of pushing the boundaries of knowledge creation in the field of service learning or community-engaged writing, making it extremely difficult to create even a partial

mapping of the journal's history, let alone its future. Further, the journal's financial support has varied widely and has been largely determined by editors' institutional affiliations and community partnerships. This fluctuating structure greatly increases the number of people who shape the field of community-engaged writing. Allowing the journal to engage with a diverse array of editors and editorial styles also leads to a more dynamic view of who is a knowledge-creator and what styles of writing can be used to communicate that knowledge. This can be seen in the wide variety of methods, genres, and authors published in the twenty-year history of the journal. As Alex points out, this expanding definition of knowledge-creator also leads *Reflections* to live out a core tenet of critical service-learning: reciprocity. Inviting community partners to collaborate in knowledge creation democratizes writing pedagogy in a manner not often explored in more composition-focused journals.

In all these ways, *Reflections* has shown a deep and abiding commitment to wrestling with issues of power and privilege in community-engaged writing and rhetoric. This twenty-year history should serve as a call for all readers to continue that work. We are called to look for ways that community-engaged pedagogy can help students better understand systemic power structures that privilege some and marginalize others. We are called to follow in the work of Cleary (2003) and Monberg (2009) and recognize that students often have much to teach us about systemic power and privilege, and their insight and life experiences should be recognized and valued. We are called to critically reflect on the ways community-engaged work is enmeshed in community power systems, sometimes empowering and sometimes marginalizing. We are called to question academic power structures that narrowly define who can create knowledge, what knowledge is valued, and how knowledge can be shared. In the words of bell hooks (1994), "[t]he classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (12). For twenty years, *Reflections* has taken that idea and expanded it beyond the classroom, helping scholars and community partners ensure it remains so.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 We refer to the journal using the abbreviated term *Reflections*, mindful that the journal's title or subtitle has changed five times in twenty years (see Appendix A).
- 2 The indexical nature of maps means that history and politics can be obscured by things as simple as scale and relief. Additionally, there are different traditions for mapping and map making. For an interesting critique of traditional, two-dimensional western map making, see Kelli Lyon Johnson's 2019 article in *Studies in American Indian Literature*, "Writing Deeper Maps: Mapmaking, Local Indigenous Knowledges, and Literary Nationalism in Native Women's Writing."
- 3 Throughout this piece we refer outward from the journal towards scholarship in broader and adjacent disciplines. The most common reference point is the field of Writing Studies. When we refer to these fields, we are referring to what's articulated in the U.S. Department of Education's Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code designation for 23.13 "Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies." Like Elliot et al. (2015), we refer to "Writing Studies," we are referring to all the fields subsumed within 23.13: 23.1301: Writing, general, 23.1302: creative writing, 23.1303: professional, technical, business, and scientific writing; 23.1304: rhetoric and composition; 23.1399: rhetoric and composition/writing studies, other. We hope this designation does a reasonable job of acknowledging a good bit of the vast network of scholars impacted by scholarship published in *Reflections*.
- 4 Special issues are designated as such in editors' or guest editors' introductions, whereas themed issues are not.
- 5 While all issues of *Reflections* are now available on the website, several issues were unavailable to the authors at the time of writing.

- 6 Such as the CCCC Statement on the Ethical Guidelines for Conduct of Research in Composition Studies
- 7 In the context of this project, I utilized two criteria to determine whether or not a source was non-traditionally academic: (1) the appearance of sections typically found in an academic genre, such as a literature review, an appendix, or a Works Cited section; and (2) the intended audience(s) as induced from the discourse and language used by the author in composing the text. I recognize that the process for evaluating academic genres is far more nuanced than what is represented in the above criteria; however, given the time constraints of this project, I ultimately felt it was sufficient to provide an initial level of analysis.
- 8 The only article that does not deal with first-year writing in the issue is Kathy A. Megyeri's "Infusing Service-Learning into the Language Arts Curriculum" (2000).
- 9 I did not include book reviews for this study, since the authors could not control the titles used.
- 10 Laurie Grobman, in discussion with the author, May 31, 2020.

## APPENDIX A: CHANGES IN *REFLECTIONS* JOURNAL TITLE, 2000-2020

*Reflections on Community-Based Writing Instruction* (Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2000)

*Reflections on Community-Based Writing* (Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall 2001)

*Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy* (Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 2002)

*Reflections: Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy* (Vol. 4, No. 2, Spring 2005)

*Reflections: A Journal of Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning* (Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring 2012)

*Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric* (Fall/Winter 2018-2019)

## APPENDIX B:

### FINDINGS FROM PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF ABSTRACTS

Aside from simply reading the abstracts for the traditional academic articles in the preliminary analysis, we compiled them to conduct some quick analyses. At the time of data collection, fourteen articles did not have abstracts but did have an introductory paragraph which served this genre purpose. These were included for the analysis so as not to lose swaths of data from specific years. These are some insights we gleaned from this preliminary review. For the analysis, we removed common stop words: a, about, an, and, are, as, at, by, can, for, from, how, I, in, is, it, of, on, our, that, the, their, these, they, this, through, to, with. The AntConc “Word List” tool is a simple analysis that ranks the occurrences of words. The ranking and frequency of words can be seen in the figure below. The rank and frequency (number of occurrences) for words with fifty or more occurrences can be seen below, next to a word cloud generated only by the text of the abstracts, which exhibits how commonly terms are used in relation to others. Together, this basic analysis exhibits how the many goals of the journal manifested in its published abstracts:

Rank	Freq	Word
1	287	community
2	242	students
3	231	writing
4	179	learning
5	169	service
6	132	article
7	124	literacy
8	114	we
9	97	work
10	86	university
11	74	rhetorical
12	71	project
13	69	based
14	68	course
15	67	student
16	66	new
17	66	social
18	64	essay
19	64	public
20	63	research
21	62	education
22	61	which
23	60	between
24	59	compositi
25	57	engageme
26	57	have
27	56	who





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# Twenty Years of Community Building: *Reflections on/and* Rhetorical Ecologies

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*This article is an experimental collaboration that blends qualitative data, archival research, and rhetorical theory with autoethnographic writing. Utilizing Jenny Edbauer's (2005) conceptualization of rhetorical ecologies, we engage strategic contemplation and critical imagination (Royster and Kirsch 2012) to explore Reflections' past, present, and future rhetorical landscapes. We designed, distributed, coded, and analyzed a fifteen-item questionnaire to discover the journal's readership demographics, its archival contents, and its reverberating effects/affects on issues of public rhetoric, civic writing, service learning, and community literacy. We identified four themes—inclusivity, advocacy, pedagogy, and discovery—as the most salient features of Reflections' twenty-year legacy. Amplifying our participants' voices, we discuss the ways in which these four themes work to cultivate an affirming space of theoretical inquiry and ethical intervention—a networked community of mutual reciprocity that continues to transform the field of rhetorical studies today. Altogether, this article offers unique insight into Reflections' rhetorical ecology, including its professional legacy and the ways in which the journal has innovated the genre of writing scholarship.*

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In “Unframing Models of Public Distribution,” Jenny Edbauer (2005) brilliantly proposes an analytic shift from rhetorical situations toward “*affective ecologies* that recontextualize rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes” (9). Unlike Bitzer’s original conception of the rhetorical situation, a rhetorical ecology is not bound by the “terministic lens of conglomerated elements” (9) but instead navigates the in-between en/action of events and encounters. Since Edbauer’s article appeared on the pages of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* in 2005, our personal and professional lives have borne witness to tremendous political turbulence and collective social uprising, forever affecting the ways we locate and navigate our rhetorical environments. We no longer reduce rhetoric to its textual fragments; rather, we *encounter* rhetoric as a generative continuity, “distributed, embodied, emergent” (Syverson 1999, 23)—a transformative network of processes and products that ebb and flow as they are engaged.

Embracing Edbauer’s (2005) ecological frameworks and vocabularies is central to our article here. As *Reflections* commemorates its twentieth anniversary with this special issue, we embark on an experimental collaboration that blends qualitative survey data, archival research, and auto-ethnographic writing to explore the rhetorical ecology in which *Reflections* finds itself: the journal’s past and present contents, its sustained commitments to resisting and resolving planetary inequities, and its reverberating effects on today’s writing community. The amalgamation of these rhetorical methods represents our deliberate attempt to (more) fluidly navigate *Reflections*’ material and symbolic landscape and its interconnected community members.

We do so in the spirit of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s (2012) articulation of *strategic contemplation*—a meditative approach to rhetorical research that builds upon introspective reflection and critical imagination in a recursive practice of thinking and writing. Strategic contemplation, as Royster and Kirsch explain, involves both an outward and inward research journey that provides multidirectional texture to a rhetorical moment—in this instance, the journal’s commemorative special issue. Our outward journey invited *Reflections* readers to partake in an open-ended, fifteen-question survey on memorable theories, methodologies, and perspectives

and their impact on readers' institutional and community roles (n=63). Collecting these responses helped us to, first, contextualize *Reflections* as its own rhetorical figure and, second, map the movement of the journal's effects through its community's voices. Our inward journey—one that creatively “process[es], imagine[s], and work[s] with materials” (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 85)—is represented by this theoretically reflexive article. We use this space as an introspective blackboard to narrate the survey's responses beyond their textual codes; as equal parts analytical and visceral; as embodied perspectives that animate not just the pages of the journal but the fabric of our collective rhetorical lives.

This commitment extends beyond mere data synthesis, however. In line with Royster and Kirsch's (2012) emphasis on collaborative dialogue, this article features auto-ethnographic narratives (marked in italics) which call forth our “dialogical viewpoints and dialectical thinking as active rhetorical practices” (86). Our hope is that these moments of contemplative pause will add an additional layer of intellectual discovery and continue to legitimize the many ways in which knowledge creation is communally constructed as its own ecological mechanism. As a whole, our mixed-method approach becomes a compass not simply to locate but rather to thoughtfully navigate the *Reflections*' archives and its readers' voices. Through this process, we uncovered the critical function that rhetorical ecologies play in *Reflections*' production, circulation, and sustained value.

Thus, this essay takes a somewhat nontraditional form. In the section that follows, we outline our approach to questionnaire design and survey analysis. We then unpack the immediate question of readership—who exactly comprises the journal's audience and how long they have been part of the community. Next, we zoom into the *Reflections* archive, thematizing the content that readers found to be most memorable or meaningful throughout its twenty-year history. We discuss our participants' visions for *Reflections*' next twenty years, including editorial strategies for increased impact and recommendations for future special issues that continue to promote marginalized and minoritized topics and voices. We conclude by positioning this data (our participants' voices) in a critical dialogue with Edbauer's (2005) rhetorical ecologies. As we

discovered throughout this research journey, *Reflections* readers are multidimensional, multidirectional community members whose past and present roles as graduate students, teachers, and researchers fold organically into each other. Discovering and narrating this rhetorical network provides nuanced (and oft-overlooked) insight into our disciplinary conventions, tensions, and commitments, as well as *Reflections*' revolutionary approach to centering public rhetoric and civic writing as a deeply ethical endeavor.

## DISCOVERING THE *REFLECTIONS* COMMUNITY

The unconventional origins of this project began in April when we individually responded to *Reflections*' "Anniversary Issue" call for proposals. Deborah Mutnick and Laurie Grobman, the current co-editors, replied with an idea to generate a questionnaire gauging how *Reflections*' readers engage the journal in their personal and professional lives. When we both enthusiastically voiced our interest in the project, we digitally connected, and a new research partnership was formed. Throughout each stage of the research journey, our conversations have centered wholly on the concept of community—discovering the voices of the journal's readers and integrating their perspectives in a reflexive, data-informed narrative. Thus, this project's approach to community as both *product* and *process* takes an intrinsically meta form: we designed a fifteen-item open-ended Qualtrics questionnaire to identify *Reflections*' immediate community (demographic base) in order to explore how the journal serves the secondary communities in which its readers are located (applied reach).

We recruited participants using network and snowball sampling procedures (Lindlof and Taylor 2019) and distributed our questionnaire on professional listservs and social media platforms, collecting responses from April 27 to May 11. During this time, sixty-three participants responded; however, only thirty of those completed the entire questionnaire. As such, we incorporated all sixty-three responses to analyze questions pertaining to demographics and relied upon the thirty completed responses to locate and analyze emergent themes. Our data indicates that *Reflections*' readers are centered primarily within academia, with forty-one participants (65%) on a tenured or tenure-track line (see Figure 1). Perhaps

more interestingly, the journal's readership patterns demonstrate increasing rates of traction (see Figure 2). While an impressive twelve participants have followed *Reflections* for fifteen or more years, readers who joined the journal's community in 2015 and beyond represent more than 45% of surveyed participants, signaling the vitality of the journal's contemporary *ethos* in the field.

Figure 1. Professional Demographics

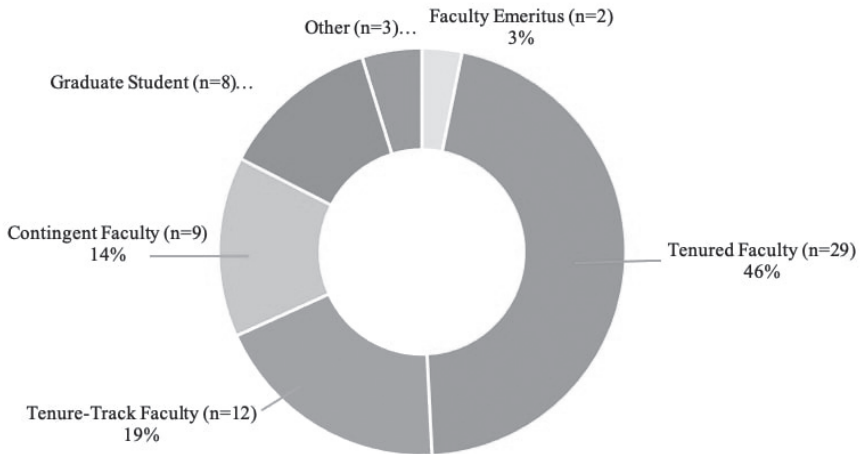
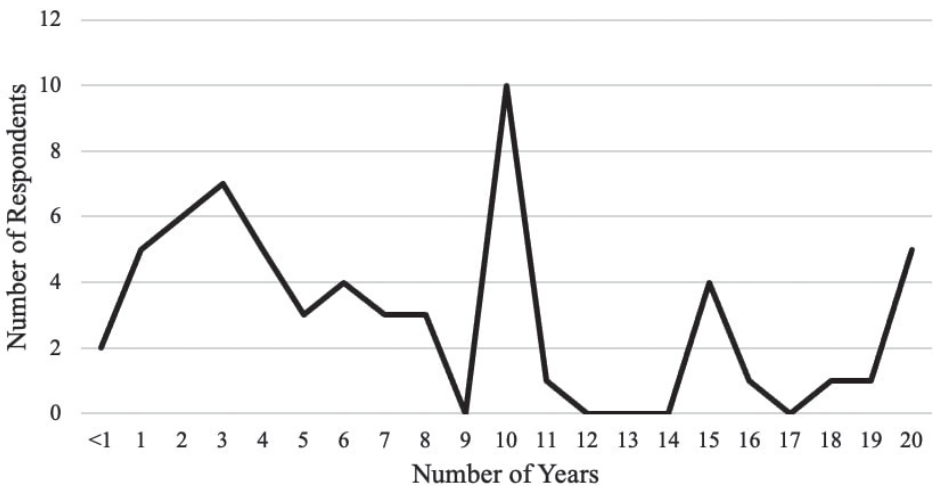


Figure 2. Years of Readership



As part of the *Reflections* community, we thought it only natural to situate ourselves amongst these datapoints by contemplating our own rhetorical positionalities and the ways in which our unique vantage points may coalesce or converge with other readers’.

*Noah: When Reflections debuted in 2000, I was only a toddler, so my perspective on this journal (and the field of rhetoric and writing it calls home) is a fresh and admittedly inexperienced one. One of the graduate seminars I took this spring was about community literacy, and our final project asked us to analyze a journal in the field. I picked Reflections and began my way down the archival rabbit hole. What I learned during my deep dive was that Reflections answered a lot of the questions I had about academia—about listening to traditionally silenced people; about improving as a researcher, teacher and citizen without burning out; about writing things that matter but still have merit in a publish-or-perish world. Serendipitously, during this seminar project, I made contact with Deborah and Laurie about the anniversary edition and started working with Rachel on this article. Turns out, a lot of you had the same questions I did, and in our own time, each of us has found Reflections to be a source of answers about what it means to do community-engaged writing.*

*Rachel: I am an Assistant Professor of Rhetorical Theory at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, which is located on the unceded, ancestral homelands of the Wahpekute and Anishinaabe peoples. I hold a joint appointment in the Department of Writing Studies and the Department of Communication Studies, so much of my research and pedagogy is concerned with the formation and circulation of Indigenous resistance rhetorics. I am deeply committed to an intersectional ethos and the tenets of anti-racist and decolonial praxis, and many of my projects are situated at the intersection of indigeneity, space/place, and social justice, with a secondary interest in sound studies. As someone who straddles the rhetorical worlds between communication and composition, Reflections has provided me with a richly theoretical vocabulary and activist sensibilities that translate seamlessly across disciplinary enclaves—a journalistic “home” of sorts that I have enjoyed for about five years.*

## LOCATING *REFLECTIONS* MEANINGFUL AND MEMORABLE MOMENTS

We both found inspiration in Michele Eodice, Anne Geller, and Neal Lerner's (2016) *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*, which asks students to share, in their own words, encounters with meaningful writing and learning experiences. As Eodice, Geller, and Lerner explain, meaningfulness invites "an opportunity to reflect on its significance to us or to make meaning through reflection" (5). As a project of historiographic enquiry, we modeled our questionnaire in a similar vein, asking participants to recount archival content that stands out as meaningful and with memorable affective impact. In line with Royster and Kirsch's (2012) advancement of strategic contemplation-and/as-critical imagination, our process of coding and thematizing utilizes a con/textually grounded rhetorical analysis; or, one that functions "dialectically (referring to the gathering of multiple viewpoints); dialogically (referring to the commitment to balance multiple interpretations); reflectively (considering the intersections of internal and external effects); and reflexively (deliberately unsettling observations and conclusions in order to resist coming to conclusions too quickly)" (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 134).

In the thirty completed questionnaires, participants offered thoughtful input regarding which issues, articles, topics, theories, methodologies, and/or types of writings characterize *Reflections*' rhetorical persona and represent its collective commitments to public rhetoric, civic writing, service learning, and community literacy. We do not claim that thirty people—nor even sixty-three people—fully represent the kaleidoscope of views within the *Reflections* community. We do, however, strategically contemplate our participants' narratives and our own experiences to critically imagine *Reflections*' impact across circulating ecologies of rhetoric and composition. Thus, the themes narrated below holistically represent our participants' perceptions of *Reflections* as a space of theoretical and pedagogical inquiry as well as an ethical and political intervention. For additional personal and professional exploration, we also include tables that feature our participants' most-cited meaningful and memorable issues (n=5), as well as representative articles. Our hope is that these readings will continue to inspire diversified course syllabi, expansive research questions, and engaged community projects. We conclude this section

with a look toward *Reflections'* future and amplify our participants' suggestions to further advance *Reflections'* principles of inclusivity, advocacy, pedagogy, and discovery.

## **“UNFLINCHING, UNCONDITIONAL INCLUSIVITY”**

Perhaps the most salient feature of *Reflections* is its resolute recognition of marginalized and minoritized groups; or, as one respondent noted, “inclusivity in the broadest possible sense, unflinching and unconditional.” When asked to locate specific topics, theories, and methods from the journal's archives, participants commended the range of diverse voices that were “invited” and “centered” in *Reflections'* pages. Most notably, readers recalled intersectional subjects like prison writings, Indigenous narratives, queer theories, dis/ability platforms, and raced and gendered literacies and languages (particularly from Latinx communities). Table 1 provides a robust list of our participants' recommended journal issues and articles that prioritize “a diversity of viewpoints and positions.”

*Noah: The first thing I noticed about the Reflections archive was how many editions and articles centered marginalized communities as writers—not subjects to observe and essentialize, but fellow writers. My passion project is to work with American Indian first-year writing students, and when I imagine how that project will develop, I see it modeled after many of the articles I've read in the archive. It's exciting to know that when I have questions about respectful, ethical research involving marginalized writers, I can turn to Reflections for twenty years' worth of models and theoretical support. In particular, the Fall 2013 edition is one I will read over and over again.*



Table 1. “Unflinching, Unconditional Inclusivity” Readings
<i>Meaningful or Memorable Issues</i>
Latin@s in Public Rhetoric: Vol. 13, No. 1 (2013)
Engaging the Possibilities of Disability Studies: Vol. 14, No. 1 (2014)
Veterans’ Writing: Vol. 16, No. 2 (2016)
Prison Writing: Vol. 19, No. 1 (2019)
<i>Meaningful or Memorable Articles</i>
Tom Deans, “Review of Who Says? Working-Class Rhetoric. Class Consciousness. and Community edited by William DeGenaro,” Vol. 7, Nos. 1&2 (2008)
Terese Guinsatao Monberg, “Writing Home or Writing as the Community: Toward a Theory of Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service-Learning Courses,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009)
Ronisha Browdy, “Strong, Black, and Woman: Black Women’s Perspectives on Naming and Claiming Their Strength as Everyday Rhetorical Practices,” Special Winter Issue (2018)

## “CHALLENGING HEGEMONY AND POWER DIFFERENTIALS”

Theoretical commitments to inclusive writing naturally beckon towards actionable commitments to advocacy and activism. One participant shared that *Reflections* “provides a professionalization of advocacy and activism that I have found empowering,” while another applauded the journal’s myriad “approaches to challenging hegemony and power differentials in their design.” A number of intersecting topics, theories, and methods emerged within this theme, with respondents commenting on general areas of civic discourse, social change, and racial justice, as well as specific areas of interest, such as environmental action, digital activism, and non-violent protests. Table 2 provides generative suggestions for journal issues and articles that center this “commitment to dissent.”

*Rachel: I think many rhetoricians (myself included) face an existential crisis in trying to extend our work beyond the pages of disciplinary journals and into the lives of our students and fellow community members. As I type this reflection, my city of Minneapolis is grieving the murder of George Floyd and courageously protesting for a world free from police brutality. For the past few weeks, I have joined in this resistance, returning home at night to reflect upon the (in)visible politics*

*of coalitional movements and the ways in which I may harness my privilege as a White accomplice to protect and support my BIPOC neighbors. I am not alone in these moments, however. I am in dialogue with other Reflections' readers who share in these intellectual and ethical commitments to liberation politics.*

<b>Table 2. "Challenging Hegemony and Power Differentials"</b>
<b>Readings</b>
<i>Meaningful or Memorable Issues</i>
Public Rhetoric & Activist Documentary: Vol. 12, No. 1 (2012)
Sustainable Communities and Environmental Communication: Vol. 16, No. 1 (2016)
Community Resistance, Justice, and Sustainability in the Face of Political Adversity: Special Winter Issue (2018)
<i>Meaningful or Memorable Articles</i>
Lehua Ledbetter, "Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework," Special Winter Issue (2018)
Octavio Pimental, "An Invitation to a Too-Long Postponed Conversation: Race and Composition," Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013)

## **"RADICALLY TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING"**

As Rachel's reflection suggests, rhetorical studies often occupy a blended state of research-and/as-pedagogy in order to breathe theory into our material and embodied lives. Many of our participants commented as such. In fact, one reader praised *Reflections'* meaningful role in the classroom as having "radical transformative potential for students, instructors, and community members," while another added that the journal "has helped me rethink teaching as service and my students and community partners as co-learners." Service learning, in particular, was a common topic that participants readily identified with many celebrating the movement toward co-constructed meaning-making: being "in partnership with the community instead of doing it 'to' the community" and "exploring democratic principles together." While none of *Reflections'* past issues are designated as wholly or solely pedagogical, rhetoric is, by nature, always attuned to the argumentative capacities of our surroundings which inevitably include our classroom spaces. Table 3 thus identifies a number of

important articles that creatively tie rhetorical theories and writing strategies to a range of pedagogical sensibilities.

*Rachel: Johanna Phelps-Hillen’s 2017 article, “Inception to Implementation: Feminist Community Engagement via Service-Learning” is a standout piece for me. At the time, I was a graduate student at Ohio University teaching a Group Communication course and had designed a multi-tiered final project that depended upon successfully forging a campus or community partnership. I spent three class sessions with my students working through Phelps-Hillen’s article as a prerequisite to completing their first project milestone. Instead of privileging a traditional, top-down approach to service learning that “bridges” the divide between campus and community, we interrogated what it means to speak with, not for, a group whose differences sustain its very existence. It was a particularly productive conversation that reiterated the ethical commitments of collaborative decision-making and community engagement work. Johanna—if you’re reading this—thank you.*

Table 3. “Radically Transformative Teaching” Readings
Meaningful or Memorable Articles
Thomas Deans, “Genre Analysis and the Community Writing Course,” Vol. 5, No. 1 (2005)
Guiseppe Getto, Kendall Leon, and Jessica Getto-Rivait, “Helping to Build Better Networks: Service-Learning Partnerships as Distributed Knowledge Work,” Vol. 13, No. 2 (2014)
Lehua Ledbetter, “Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework,” Special Winter Issue (2018)
Terese Guinsatao Monberg, “Writing Home or Writing as the Community: Toward a Theory of Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service-Learning Courses,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009)
Laurie A. Pinkert & Kendall Leon, “Heuristic Tracing and Habits for Learning: Developing Generative Strategies for Understanding Service Learning,” Vol. 19, No. 2 (2020)

## “NEW AND UNKNOWN TERRITORY”

The final pattern that emerged from our survey data was a distinct appreciation for *Reflections’* boundary-pushing approach to writing

and rhetoric. One participant hinted at this theme, noting that “[t]he prison literacy issue (v4) was interesting to me because it was new and unknown territory.” Multiple other participants mentioned that the journal’s inclusion of author and community-driven narratives and voices were especially meaningful and a unique deviation from other publishing outlets. Additional responses noted a conscientious attunement to societal exigencies, non-traditional methodologies, and radical possibilities for “dialogues across difference.” Table 4 provides suggested readings for those interested in rhetorical innovations and “expanding notions of legitimate knowledge outside of the university.”

*Noah: As a young scholar, I am constantly navigating the elusive status of “good writing.” My methodological interests lean more toward the social science genre (I did talk Rachel into adding charts to this article, after all), so concepts like auto-ethnographic research and critical imagination were “new and unknown territory” for me. Now that I have finished my Master’s degree, I feel like I have a better understanding of the conventions and expectations of writing in composition and rhetoric, but it’s exciting that Reflections has spent twenty years pushing back on those very conventions and expectations. I hope that the journal continues to be a publication platform for writers who choose to write without boundaries.*

Table 4. “New and Unknown Territory” Readings
<i>Meaningful or Memorable Issues</i>
Writing Theories: Changing Communities: Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009)
Public/Sex: Connecting Sexuality and Service Learning: Vol. 9, No. 2 (2010)
<i>Meaningful or Memorable Articles</i>
Ellen Cushman and Jeffrey T. Grabill, “Writing Theories/Changing Communities: Introduction,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009)
Maria Novotny and John T. Gagnon, “Research as Care: A Shared Ownership Approach to Rhetorical Research in Trauma Communities,” by Vol. 18, No. 1 (2018)

## A LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS

Here, we harness a critical imagination to move beyond *Reflections*' past and present impact toward its future interventions within and beyond the discipline. Imagination in this sense represents a commitment to "making connections and seeing possibilities" (Royster 2000, 83), or a tool of inquiry to envision and support radical change in our research agendas, classroom pedagogies, and community organizations. In our questionnaire, we asked participants to contemplate future meaningful and memorable moments—political, ethical, and cultural values that deserve amplified attention. Many echoed the call for sustained social justice efforts, especially in the wake of an increasingly turbulent global climate and exclusionary politics across the academy. For example, readers proposed the journal continue to educate those with privilege about confronting (White) fragility and to step ever more fully into emancipating and empowering language diversity. Further, in recognizing the *kairotic* exigencies of 2020 politics, one participant astutely noted a special interest in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, writing, "[c]learly there's a need to address the way that COVID-19 has exposed health, economic, and political inequity in the U.S." Other readers identified religious community writing to trouble our understandings of secularity; grassroots activist campaigns and the recognition of third party or alternative forms of governance; and environmental rhetorics that center the devastating impact of climate change on public policy.

*Rachel and Noah: At this point, we believe it is critical to highlight the urgent call for radical anti-racist action that unapologetically confronts and dismantles the Whiteness of rhetorical studies. One participant's note to engage the work of Robin DiAngelo and to cultivate "dialogues across differences" serves as a haunting reminder that this work is quite literally a matter of life or death. When Rachel penned her response to "Challenging Hegemony and Power Differentials," George Floyd had been ruthlessly murdered just a few days prior. Now, as we type this reflection, we grieve the additional deaths of Rayshard Brooks, Dominique Fells, James Floyd, Riah Milton, Chantel Moore, Sean Monterrosa, Elijah McClain, Carlos Ingram Lopez, and countless more Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies whose names and lives are buried underneath the crippling weight of racist hatred. A look ahead to the next twenty years is one in which anti-racism is not a fleeting*

*lens of inquiry—a mere keyword in a special topics issue—but rather a defining ethos of the discipline. #SayTheirNames should not be an endless rollcall of state-sponsored murder. It is a deafening demand to do better.*

Finally, we asked *Reflections* readers to consider the ways in which the journal, and its editorial team in particular, may carve out additional space for disciplinary growth and mentorship. Readers appreciated the sustained commitment to community-building, such as “the small events at conferences, the conversations. The new CCW is a wonderful home for scholars in our field to make connections.” Yet, a few folks also noted an opportunity for increased visibility and circulation, questioning whether the journal’s lack of indexing in common databases like JSTOR or Project Muse results in decreased readership and circulation. This latter point is particularly noteworthy, especially with regard to ongoing issues of citational politics across academia, many of which disproportionately affect scholars of color. The journal’s origins as the first publishing outlet to center community-based writing and rhetoric clearly indicates its disciplinary *ethos*, and thus raises an important conversation regarding publishing metrics, journal paywalls, and digital access.

## COMPOSING *REFLECTIONS*’ RHETORICAL ECOLOGY

Thus far we have prioritized a thematic approach to *Reflections*’ historical contents and present effects, but as Edbauer (2005) notes, rhetorical ecologies encompass active and lived fluxes, or a “view towards the processes and events that extend beyond the limited boundaries of elements” (20). Rather than confining our analysis to the archive, we sought to discover how readers encountered and interpreted *Reflections* as a mutually-constituted site of flux and transformation. Our questionnaire asked participants to consider how the journal informs or influences different aspects of their lives—as students, as educators, as researchers, and as community citizens. An overwhelming number of responses beckoned toward readers’ sincere commitment to critical reflexivity and continued growth in each of these domains. Participants cited the journal as a “motivation to continue work in the discipline post-dissertation;” “a resource to inspire lessons for students;” and a venue “to keep me grounded/not be such a tight ass.” (*We couldn’t have said this better*

ourselves). Many readers found that *Reflections* offered them a safe place to critically reflect on their positionality in order to better support the communities and organizations they serve. For example, one participant admitted the journal “[h]elped me to become more conscious of my privileges and such,” while another stated that it “developed a better sense of ethics for engagement.” A third noted that the journal’s inspiring of “new and alternative perspectives . . . challenge[d] my habits of mind.”

This articulation of continued transformation across participants’ personal and professional lives beckons toward a second interrelated data discovery—that many readers do not neatly differentiate their responsibilities, but instead embrace an ecological fluidity where titles and boundaries collapse and organically fold into one another: the “blend[ing] of the personal with the academic” in a “community I could learn from and with.” In other words, research becomes inseparable from teaching, and both are consistently informed by a reader’s civic commitments. One participant explained, “*Reflections* encouraged and reinforced my desire to have my research contribute to social justice change on my campus and in the broader community. Specifically, we worked on changing attitudes about the importance of interracial dialogue, as well as building a beginning infrastructure of action against dating and partner violence.” Another echoed, “[m]ost of my research is classroom- and community-based, so I naturally applied what I learned in the journal to my own praxis.” The coherence of these roles symbolizes an intricately connected and circulating ecology—a rhetorical landscape in constant motion, informed by its members’ actions, effects, and affects.

In fact, it is this very environment—one that encourages and supports research-as-teaching-as-activism—that underscores *Reflections*’ most vital contribution to the discipline: cultivating a space of inquiry that legitimizes and validates community-based writing in a multiplicity of forms. Of the thirty open-ended responses we coded, twenty-six participants shared stories of affirmation by the journal: graduate students who felt *Reflections* “invited legitimacy into the kinds of work I want to pursue” and the “legitimacy of service learning and community-engaged scholarship;” teachers who found pedagogical validation and feelings of “legitimization in doing community

research and engaging my students in service to the community that was integrated with their learning;" and scholars who discovered new ranges of "acceptable research" that "demonstrate variety in scholarship and approaches." We found one reader's narrative to be especially powerful in this regard. They shared:

As an untenured faculty member, *Reflections* invited legitimacy into the kinds of work I wanted to pursue and provided a needed community of scholars to engage with. It provided ways to advance the argument to my chair, a very traditional literature professor. As a now full professor, it creates a place where I can send emerging scholars to find the same kinds of support.

This is a defining feature of *Reflections* and perhaps the most tremendous aspect of its twenty-year legacy. Community engagement is not merely a subject of theory and praxis confined to the pages of the archive; rather, community building is woven into the very fabric of the journal's readership.

*Noah and Rachel: While writing this article, we struggled to articulate the relationships we identified in our survey data: among readers, community partners, authors, and Reflections staff; between each of these peoples' different roles and interests; and between these individuals and the archive. Using one-dimensional terms like "reader" and "participant" felt lacking. Inadequate. It simply did not/ does not do justice to the complex, multidirectional relationships woven into Reflections' rhetorical ecology—one built upon mutual validation and accountability. In the end, we settled on "rhetorical symbiosis" and "rhetorical symbionts" as terms for future theoretical exploration. Scientifically, symbiosis is a state of mutual benefit between different organisms; while not all organisms appear, function, or contribute in the same way, each one is vital to the collective ecology's wellbeing. We could not think of a better way to describe the community that Reflections has cultivated over the past two decades.*

## JOURNEYING THROUGH OUR RHETORICAL ECOLOGIES

In this article, we sought to navigate *Reflections*' rhetorical ecology by blurring methodological boundaries and incorporating archival,



participatory, and theoretical lenses of inquiry. We spanned these rhetorical domains in a deliberate attempt to immerse ourselves in the two-part journey of strategic contemplation: interacting dynamically with the journal and its readers and harnessing a critical imagination to expand our understanding of ecological networks. In a sense, we ventured on a nature walk to discover the landscape of the *Reflections* community—the archive’s textual remnants that circulate within and beyond disciplinary (b)orders and its effects on the personal and professional lives of the journal’s dedicated readers. Our journey throughout this project—much like the journey many of you all narrated—excited our rhetorical sensibilities. It brought to life new theoretical and pedagogical capabilities; new possibilities for community engagements committed to unwavering activism. Yet, rhetorical ecologies are not entirely mappable. While we may be able to locate points of its composition, we must also engage with its unknowable circulations. Just as *Reflections* has legitimized community-engaged writing, we hope that this article legitimizes your own rhetorical journeys into unexplored ecologies; to think multi-directionally, “from the outside in and inside out” (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 86), about networks, publics, and their unexpected pathways.

*Rachel and Noah: Under the guidance of Deborah and Laurie, we found ourselves partaking in the very type of community building we attempted to narrate: two young scholars with no prior introduction who discovered a mutual interest in Indigenous politics and decolonial theory and who are already working on our next collaborative piece. Locating and partaking in this vibrant ecology—both separately and communally—we also found ways to support one another as co-authors, as teachers, as protestors, as friends. May we all continue to push forward into “new and unknown territory” together for the next twenty years.*

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# **The Ongoing Work of *Reflections***



# A Curriculum of the Self: Students' Experiences with Prescriptive Writing in Low and No-Cost Adult Education Programs

**Alison Turner,**  
*University of Denver*

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*The unique perspective that adult learners have on writing and its instruction in low or no-cost education programs offers valuable information to both instructors of written components in these courses and to scholars exploring how writing in adult education functions as community literacy. After conducting interviews with instructors and students at six adult education programs, I identify significant tensions between the ways that instructors perceive their students to experience writing and the ways students describe their own writing experiences, particularly in the areas of process, enjoyment, and feedback. After situating low and no-cost adult education programs as sites of community literacy, I explore these tensions and propose that they contribute to and arise from instructors' understanding that personal development through writing occurs with free-forms such as journaling, whereas students experience these benefits through prescriptive modes such as note-taking, rote copying, and dictation. I introduce a concept called the "curriculum of the self" to identify students' use of prescriptive modes to enjoy and engage with writing, and I end by situating this concept in other tensions inherent to and ongoing in community literacy, including "turbulent flow" and sustainable practices of reciprocity.*

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Myriam<sup>1</sup> likes to date her recipes, save them, and look at them years later to remind herself of when she baked a particular cake and for whom. I met her after her Adult Basic Education class near the end of 2017, when I interviewed her and five other students from various adult education programs in the Denver area, asking questions about how they experience writing. I also interviewed one instructor from each program, asking how they perceive their students to experience writing. One of Myriam's statements helps to locate this essay in community literacy discourse. She says,

I've been trying to make a project to have a notebook next to my bed because I always forget my dreams. I'm trying to see if it works to have something and write it down as soon as I wake up, but as soon as I wake up...the first thing that I think is am I going to work? Do I go to school? What time is it? Yeah, you start thinking about your responsibilities right away.<sup>2</sup>

A dream journal is an enticing project for inquiries into how non-academic writing might help a writer reflect in ways that develop understandings of the self; community literacy programs may wish to support such a project, in hopes that Myriam does start writing down her dreams one day, both for the personal benefits this kind of reflection makes possible and for the impact her voice could have on whatever communities she touches.

However, in this essay I explore the multiple ways that Myriam and other students in adult education programs enact this same kind of reflection not through dream journals, but through prescriptive writing such as rote copying, note taking, and dictation.<sup>3</sup> I identify

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1 All names are changed per IRB agreement.

2 The responses cited throughout this essay may be abridged with ellipses but are otherwise unchanged. I choose not to use "[sic]" when participants' oral responses do not conform to Standard Academic English.

3 I consider "prescriptive" in the OED sense of "giving definite, precise directions or instructions" ("prescriptive"). While this may sometimes overlap with Deborah Brandt's attention to "workaday writing," in this research "prescriptive" writing is specifically enacted in class through note taking, rote copying, dictation, and other forms of writing that are commonly positioned as antithetical to creative and expressive modes.



adult students' personal development through prescriptive writing as a concept called the "curriculum of the self." I borrow this phrase from Walker, a native speaker of American English pursuing his GED, who suggests the term as he describes the notes he takes in class as writing that "[pieces] what you're trying to learn together" and for when "you need to understand other things to understand that thing"; this, he says, is "like building a curriculum for yourself." Walker discusses note-taking the way many writers might discuss a draft of a short story or a journal entry.

I use the concept of the curriculum of the self to evoke the inevitable tensions that occur when adults in non-traditional<sup>4</sup> education programs pursue dominant discourses. Walker's phrase connects a practice that is typically located in traditional academia, "curriculum," defined as "the subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college" (Lexico 2019), with the infinite, unknown multitude of "the self"; this pairing generates new understandings of the ways that adult students learn, use, and, most importantly, enjoy and experience writing in low or no-cost education programs. I explore three particular tensions between the ways that instructors perceive their students to experience writing and students' own writing experiences in terms of process, enjoyment, and feedback. This inquiry shares the desire that Heather Lindenman and Justin Lohr (2018) express to "prompt" consideration for the ways that "educators and institutions gauge writing knowledge and how that influences what students at all levels think writing is" (29). I will end by proposing that the tensions I find in this research enact Lauren Rosenberg's (2015) notion of "turbulent flow," the inevitable "collisions of discourses" that occur in sites of adult education (6), and that acknowledging the notion of the curriculum of the self is a new way of enacting reciprocity, the now-expected culture in community literacy programs that values the skills and experiences of students as much as those of instructors (Miller, Wheeler, and White 2011). I suggest that the concept of

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<sup>4</sup> Sharing other scholars' use of the term, I use "traditional" academia to describe a college or university in which the majority of beginning students enroll within a few years of leaving high school. I resist the term "nontraditional students," which historically refers to students fitting non-dominant identities in regards to race, gender, or socioeconomic status (Compton, Cox, and Laanan 2006, 73); while this definition fits many of the students I interviewed, the assumption of a "traditional" student belies the work of community literacy and research.

the curriculum of the self offers new considerations for sustainable reciprocity in adult education courses, contributing to scholars' many explorations of the multiple methods of and benefits from enacting reciprocity (Gindlesparger 2010; Stone 2018; Holmes 2015; Shumake and Shah 2017).

## **METHODS: WRITING AS COMPONENT, NOT PRIORITY**

I initially identified thirteen potential programs for this study using prior knowledge and the internet. I sought programs that were publicly advertised as adult-serving, low-cost (\$60 per semester or less)<sup>5</sup>, and whose curriculum included "writing" or "literacy" as part of a more general goal. This last criteria importantly excluded low-cost community college writing courses and writing-focused programs such as poetry workshops; I specifically sought programs in which writing was a component of the greater goal—not the stated goal—in order to better understand how writing is perceived by both instructors and students whose current priority is not writing. Several of these programs were one of many operations within a greater organization, which in some cases required drilling through the website. After reaching what felt to be a saturation point, I called and emailed program coordinators as listed on the website, explaining that my research was IRB-approved, that results might one day be publicly available but anonymous, and that my intentions with this research were to nuance understanding of how writing is and might be used in adult learning communities.

Four programs were eliminated upon further research because of high cost, a focus on youth without also serving adults, or because they did not consider writing an official component of the curriculum; three others were ultimately unreachable after courageous bouts of phone tag. My administrative contacts with the remaining six programs, two programs of Family Literacy and four of Adult Basic

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5 This number was determined by the figures listed on websites, which suggested a divide between adult literacy programs, most of which charged sixty dollars or less per semester, and unaccredited college programs, which charged at least twice as much. Further, administrators from all programs in the former category did not perceive cost as a barrier to student entry, as their programs offer adequate financial aid.

Education (ABE),<sup>6</sup> agreed to the terms of participation and answered preliminary questions over the phone or email to confirm that the program met criteria. Administrative contacts then connected me with an instructor in their program who agreed to participate, after which I had no further contact with administrators. This instructor in turn selected a student for voluntary participation.<sup>7</sup> I conducted each semi-structured, hour-long interview onsite at the six different programs, separately and privately with one student and one instructor, and directly before or after a class to best accommodate participants' schedules. The separate, semi-structured interview protocols for the students and instructors included questions about the ways students use writing in and out of class, the feedback given and received, and the ways that writers return to writing. The development of my questions and the ensuing coding process followed the spirit of Stephanie Vie's exploration of qualitative research and community literacy as a "celebration of the individual voice" (2010, 177). Each participant consented to recording and received a \$25 gift certificate in thanks for their time. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using open coding.<sup>8</sup>

Future research might explore nuances between the experiences of writing in a non-native language and writing in a native language in community literacy programs. This research would benefit from translators during interviews in order to include students learning English as they pursue Family Literacy and ABE programs. While I do not think that students' perceptions of writing in English versus in other languages are necessarily discrete, further exploring how these experiences might differ in adult education programs would benefit instructors, students, and programs. One student's observation that "I am not a good writer in my own language, but I think I can write

6 At one site, an instructor taught both English Language Acquisition (ELA) and ABE classes and selected a student from each track. While I interviewed both selected students, I have omitted the ELA student from my results because transcripts suggest that language barriers prevented her from fully comprehending the interview questions. See the end of "Methods" for thoughts about how this writer's perspective might be included in future research.

7 I did not request any characteristics (i.e. age, ethnicity, experience, primary language, etc.) of the instructors or the students beyond that they were currently teaching or enrolled in an adult education program that used writing among other components.

8 I thank the University of Denver Writing Center for supporting this research with resources and mentorship.

better in English than in my own language” opens many avenues for additional research. Similarly, there might be compelling differences in how writing is perceived in ABE, Family Literacy, and ELA programs.

## **PRESCRIPTIVE WRITING IN LOW OR NO-COST EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS COMMUNITY WRITING**

The six students and six instructors that I interviewed participate in programs that I call low or no-cost adult education programs, a category that includes Adult Basic Education (ABE), during which students prepare for the General Education Development (GED) and Family Literacy programs, which might collaborate with an elementary school to help parents communicate with their children’s teachers, read to their children, and assist with their homework. The students that I interviewed and their classmates are, on average, older than those in traditional undergraduate settings, which may inspire different methods of instruction; centuries-old theories suggest that adults learn differently than children, so that the term andragogy, teaching adult learners, is distinct from pedagogy (Knowles 2005, 58). Participating students are also more likely to come from backgrounds that do not offer access to traditional academic settings, to pursue their learning while committed to other responsibilities such as child or elder care and full-time employment (Petty and Thomas 2014; Tighe 2013; Wells 2014), and to have “frequently experienced previous struggles and failures” (Nielsen 2015, 144). I consider these programs sites of community literacy, spaces that are defined by others as those that “engage” writers outside of traditional academia (House, Myers, and Carter 2016), value the “knowledges” of these writers (Licona and Russell 2013), and welcome the “conflicting realities” (Flower 2008, 40) these knowledges inevitably generate.

Partially because of the additional responsibilities adult students share with their coursework, many instructors of these programs consider students’ non-academic lives as an important component to their learning. For example, these programs are likely to consider “health-related topics” in curricula (Mackert and Poag 2011), and many furnish the classroom with anti-drug posters and information about financial assistance and family programs (Wells 2014). Low and

no-cost adult education programs are also more likely to make space for the emotional contexts of students, a philosophy that for decades scholars show has been detrimentally antithetical to traditional academia (Jaggar 1989; hooks 1994; Stenberg 2011). However, René Antrop-González and Anthony De Jesús (2006) caution that care for students' emotions can extend into the "Ay Bendito syndrome," a form of "soft care" manifested by a "teacher's feeling sorry for a student's circumstances and lowering his/her academic expectations of the student out of pity" (412). Below, I show how this "syndrome" participates in the tensions explored in this essay.

Despite the attention to students' experiences in classrooms, there is what one scholar calls a "dearth of adult literacy writing research" (Nielsen 2015, 144). Previous work exploring students' experiential relationships with writing focus on undergraduate students at an elite university (Sommers and Saltz 2004) and high school students embarking on a writing mentorship program (Shah 2018; Lindenman and Lohr 2018). Alongside the "dearth" of information about the ways that adult students experience writing runs a corpus that suggests best practices for instructing writing to adult learners. In a literary synthesis on research on writing as a component of adult literacy, Kirsten Nielsen (2015) finds that relevant studies suggest that adult students benefit when writing exercises incorporate a variety of factors (143), with emphasis on "explicit strategy instruction" (146). "Explicit strategy instruction" proves particularly effective for students working to improve their scores on the written component of the GED exam (Berry and Mason 2012), perhaps the most dominating of discourses; the GED website encourages students to register in order to "learn how to write a perfect extended response" (GED 2019).<sup>9</sup> Instructors, then, face pressure to teach curriculums so rigid that "perfect" is advertised as a possibility.

However, as instructors are expected to teach strategies for attaining a "perfect" score, adult writing instruction best practices also task instructors with fostering students' "motivation, persistence, and self-efficacy" (Nielsen 2015, 143). Scholars emphasize journaling,

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9 See Elizabeth Parfitt and Stephen Shane's essay "Working within the System: The Effects of Standardized Testing on Education Outreach and Community Writing" (2016) proposing methods to teach for the GED while engaging writers' agencies and strengths.

a strategy seen often in responses from instructors I interviewed, as a “means to engage and motivate writers” (Nielsen 2015, 145), and a growing corpus of research exploring the personal and social benefits of “[engaging] and [motivating]” writers, as an inclusive part of any community includes projects valuing non-academic modes of writing (Gere 2001; Brandt 2015), the ways that writing can function as a tool of personal identity and health (Burgess and Ivancic 2010; Kells 2012; Turner and Hicks 2012), and the impact of writing on community health (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 1995; Carlo 2016). My research suggests that the societal and personal benefits that scholarship more commonly pairs with journaling, free writing, and other non-academic modes can also occur in adult students’ engagement with prescriptive writing.

The explicit focus that some adult education programs have on the GED exam and Standard Academic English makes low and no-cost education programs vulnerable to labels of “practical” as opposed to “intellectual” education (Bradbury 2012); prescriptive writing, as opposed to creative and critical writing, garners a similar stigma. Research suggests that, to the contrary, adult students in non-traditional programs value intellectual processes of inquiry over skills acquisition (Knowles 2005; Bradbury 2012). The concept of the curriculum of the self suggests that, just as students of the GED exam engage in intellectual inquiries as they follow rigid essay structures, students in ABE courses and others may use prescriptive writing as intellectual, inquiring, and ongoing personal development practices.

Below, I highlight aggregate patterns between the interviews with students and instructors that suggest three tensions between students’ experiences with writing and how instructors perceive their students to experience writing in the areas of process, enjoyment, and feedback. I have considered that the interview environment contributes to the differences I explore below: questions about students’ experiences put instructors in a strange position, as perhaps they would never choose to speak for the experiences of their students, well aware of the multiple and varied ways that emotions and experiences manifest; or perhaps students felt like I wanted a particular answer from my body language; or perhaps, because students were selected

as interview participants by instructors, instructors identified their most enthusiastic writing students for a study on “perceptions of writing.” However, the tensions between the ways that instructors perceive their students to experience writing and students’ own writing experiences dominated comparisons between interview responses, suggesting that these tensions are significant.

Below, I offer close readings of responses from instructors Coral, Reggie, and Ajay, and students Myriam, Walker, Lana, and Victor, several of whom expressed never having considered the questions I asked about writing; I hope that this makes their responses all the more interesting to community literacy scholarship.

## **I) PERCEIVING AND EXPERIENCING THE WRITING PROCESS:**

*“Words Are Gone Because They Are Deleting Them” // “It Will Be Saved in Your Brain”*

One of the most fundamental differences between instructors’ perceptions of their students’ writing experiences and students’ described experiences was the question of what writing *is*. This appears in the data through differences in how writing is perceived to happen.

### *Results:*

Table 1 presents instructors’ and students’ estimated responses to the question “How often do your students/you use writing in this program?” as matched as an instructor/student pair. Table 2 orders responses from lowest to highest percentage estimates. These numbers do not measure how much time in class is technically spent on writing, but how much of class time instructors and students *perceive* writing to happen.

Table 1. Perceived Estimated Percentage of Class Time that Students Spend Writing.		Table 2. Perceived Estimated Percentages Ordered from Low to High.	
Instructors	Students	Instructors	Students
15-20%	50%	10-15%	10%
depends on level	100%	15-20%	25%
10-15%	40%	25-35%	40%
25-35%	10%	50%	50%
50%	80%	50%	80%
50%	40%	depends on level	100%

### *Discussion:*

Tables 1 and 2 show that overall, students estimate that they write in class more than their instructors perceive them to be writing.<sup>10</sup> Analysis of responses show that this dissonance occurs in two general areas: first, instructors consider the act of writing as work that produces (i.e. text), a perception that may dismiss students' thinking, planning, and self-editing/deleting as writing; and second, students' attention to prescriptive writing such as note-taking, rote copying, and dictation may be less acknowledged by instructors.

#### a) The Seven-Minute Pause

Several instructors described difficulty in getting their students to "write." Ajay, a Family Literacy instructor who carefully composes text messages to friends in "long, explanatory, full sentences" and spent much of the summer before he and I met "designing that project-based style" of instruction, describes what he calls a "reluctance" in students to begin writing. I provide a generous portion of my conversation with Ajay to offer a taste of the style of the interviews and to demonstrate in context the connection Ajay makes between reluctance and writing:

*Alison:* And do you think that the participants enjoy the actual writing part of the program?

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10 The anomalous "10%" was cited by a student who, later in the interview, said: "I take notes the majority of the times I'm in class just because I don't want to forget anything."



*Ajay:* On a whole?

*Alison:* Yeah.

*Ajay:* On a whole, no. I would say no.

*Alison:* Can you explain that a bit?

*Ajay:* There is a lot of reluctance to start. So, a lot of my writing activities there is a—I learned last year to do like a big waiting period and just kind of sit and allow the reluctance to start writing to kind of pass. Before I would jump in and try to get into teacher mode. And, well, how about this, how about that? And let's try this together. I notice that if I just sat in wait and let it stew for a little bit, that uncomfortableness would turn into all right, I'll give it a shot.

*Alison:* So literally it's like, okay, start writing now more or less and nothing happens.

*Ajay:* For like seven minutes. [Laughter] Yeah.

*Alison:* That's a long seven minutes.

*Ajay:* Oh yeah. I'll have people like looking at their paper and just like, waiting and thinking. And it feels super-painful. But I notice that if I just kind of wait, it actually does happen.

Ajay describes the pause as students “[look] at their paper” as “super-painful,” but he also describes students as “waiting and thinking” during this time; is this pause “super-painful” for Ajay alone, while his students enact the first stage of their writing process?

Other instructors note a similar “reluctance” in different forms. When describing a writing exercise using a computer, Reggie, an ABE instructor who regularly jots down “lists upon lists,” journals,

and frames his work as a programmer as writing, also sees evidence that his students do not “write.” Reggie notes that his students

want to be precise. They want to get down exactly what they want to say and so I see that they type out words. And then I look back over and those words are gone because they are deleting them more so than they’re creating them. And so maybe they were trying to be exact and getting everything perfect the first time through.

Ajay’s comment about “reluctance to start” and Reggie’s about “deleting...more so than...creating” emphasize an assumption that many of us have about writing: writing requires production. While Reggie goes on to suggest that “the drafting of ideas is something that needs to be developed,” (that is, perhaps instructors could better emphasize the purpose of drafts), Reggie and Ajay assume that if there is not a draft to be *seen* then there is no draft.<sup>11</sup>

The tension between process versus product of writing is particularly relevant to low and no-cost adult education programs. Instructors might love to embrace the greater process of brainstorming and “waiting and thinking,” but the GED exam doesn’t care about brainstorms, thought processes, and the back and forth generative process of beginning to write. To pass the written portion of the GED exam, as the official website says, a student needs to “write clearly” (“Reasoning” 2019), an achievement that contributes to the aforementioned “perfect” score—but first, a student needs to put words on a page. Demands of the GED test aside, the assumption that without text, there is no act of writing overlooks the labor that students undergo. The process of writing then deleting, writing then deleting, is, after all, writing.

#### b) Save It to the Brain

- 11 It is possible that this tension exposes interpretations of the word “writing” more so than differences in observation of the act. Throughout the interviews, I told instructors and students that I was interested in hearing answers responding to their own understandings of writing—transcripts show that I often add the phrase “any time pen is on paper, for example” and other versions of the same idea, showing my own bias for what writing is. However, I showed this same bias to both instructors and students, and the discrepancy remains.

Responses suggest that, in addition to instructors privileging product over process, instructors and students categorize “writing” differently. When asked to expand on the ways that they use writing in class, several students discussed prescriptive forms, such as Walker’s rigorous practice of note-taking referenced earlier. Lana, a Family Literacy student who is a native Farsi speaker and began learning English in Tajikistan, considers copying stories word-for-word as writing: one of her favorite assignments is to copy a “long story,” which she does “three or five times,” because it is “helpful...like when you save in a computer, it’s the same as writing it five times, it will be saved in your brain.” The kinesthetic act of rote-copying, a mode unlikely to be considered as intellectual or creative by instructors or scholars, is not mindless for Lana: physically copying a text into her own writing is her way of moving the material into her mind.

The dissonance between Lana’s and Walker’s enthusiasm for copying and note-taking and the “reluctance” that instructors perceive in their students to write seems to come from instructors’ own resistance to prescriptive writing. Coral, an ABE instructor, points directly at this dissonance when she explains a dictation exercise she does with her students: “They write the sentence up on the board, and the rest of the class says whether it’s perfect or not, and if it’s not perfect, what is it that needs to be fixed. They love that, which I have yet to exactly understand why.” Coral’s students are focused on making a sentence “perfect,” an exercise that she cannot “understand” as something students might “love.” The notion of “perfect,” a word Reggie also uses to explain why his students delete more than they type (above), evokes the practical forms of writing that claim to be right or wrong, such as GED exams.

“Perfect” writing typically has no home in community literacy programs: how can a student’s “lived, relational, and situated knowledges” (Licona and Russell 2013, 1) be determined “perfect” or not? How could a learning space welcome the convergence of “difference, rival hypotheses, and conflicting realities” (Flower 2008, 40) with a single notion of “perfect”? While “perfect” may go against instructors’ belief in and practice of community literacy and all that it stands for, “perfect” is what many students might be pursuing. The notion of the curriculum of the self raises possibilities that

students' pursuit of "right" and "perfect" may not necessarily oppose self-expression and means of "[engaging]" and "[motivating]" their continued writing practice (Nielsen 2015 145). As I show in the next section, students might prioritize prescriptive forms of writing in the deliberate pursuit of mastering dominant discourses because they are motivated by—and also enjoy—the challenge.

## II) PERCEIVED AND EXPERIENCED ENJOYMENT OF WRITING:

*"Students Struggle to Enjoy [Writing]" // "Personally...I Love Writing"*

A second tension that emerged between instructors' and students' responses was the way that each group perceived students to enjoy writing. I expected the question about enjoyment to be an ice-breaker that would push the conversation into other topics; the answers to this question, however, show one of the most important findings in this research.

### *Results:*

Figure 1.<sup>12</sup> Instructors' and Students' Responses to Whether Students Enjoy Writing.

Instructors	Students
"On a whole, no. I would say no."	"Yes, it's practice for me ...Yes, I enjoy it."
"I think the...students struggle to enjoy it."	"Yeah."
"It depends on the person.."	"Sure, yeah, ...I enjoy a lot [to] write... it's really fun."
"Some of them yes... there are more [students] who complain about having to write."	"Yes."
"No."	"Yes, I do."
"No, I don't."	"Personally, ...I love writing."

12 Responses in Figures that are not in quotations are paraphrased for concision.

Figure 2. nstructors and students describing students' lack of/ enjoyment with writing.

Instructors' speculations for why their students (seemingly) do not enjoy writing	Student's explanations for why they do enjoy writing
<p>"<b>Lack</b> of experience being a student"; "<b>lack</b> of practice"</p> <p>"they've <b>never been taught</b> to dream. And writing can give you wings, but only if you know that you have wings...I also think these are not students that typically journal or have learned that writing can be pleasurable. Poetry <b>scares</b> them."</p> <p>"I think a lot of them are pretty <b>intimidated</b> to write"</p> <p>"They <b>don't know</b> how to get started, they are <b>not sure</b> what's good. And they have more of a tendency to just copy from text than to create their own sentences."</p> <p>"to get them to expand on responses is generally <b>painful</b>. ... Probably stems from somewhere in the past where it's <b>not an enjoyable pastime</b>...Maybe they don't like their handwriting; ... it is a <b>struggle</b> to have writing occur in the academic environment ...maybe it's <b>overwhelming</b>...There's a lot of <b>bad habits</b> to be broken and a lot of maybe really <b>painful memories</b> associated with writing to be aware of."</p> <p>"I think it's really <b>hard</b> for them to write ...I think by the time they get here, they just might be <b>tired</b>. The other thing is that I think that it just <b>doesn't come easy</b> to them."</p>	<p>Repetitive writing exercises "<b>wake up</b> my brain"; copying "a long story" is "<b>helpful</b>"; she writes to "<b>find something new</b>. I think my brain is empty, like a flower needs water, our brains are the same."</p> <p>"Because I <b>learn more</b> with writing."</p> <p>"I <b>love</b> write because when I can't remember something, I can read my notes...so for me it's <b>good</b>. I use in home. I use my notebook in home when I need to so, yeah, it's <b>good</b> for me."</p> <p>"I <b>enjoy</b> thinking of words, like strings of words....Kind of like pushing my vocabulary or using words in a context that's... <b>dynamic</b> subjectively I guess....It's aesthetically <b>pleasing</b>, plus it's <b>practical</b> for, like, revision."</p> <p>"Because first of all, I'm – my goal is to have <b>more knowledge</b> how to read, how to write in English. That is something that it <b>helps</b> me a lot to learn how to spell words. That sometimes is <b>hard</b> for me."</p> <p>"Personally, I <b>like</b> writing. I <b>love</b> writing, so I <b>like</b> it. That's why I come here, to <b>improve</b> my writing."</p>

Figure 3. Excised words and phrases from responses about students' enjoyment of writing

Instructors	Students
Lack; lack Never been taught; scares Intimidated Don't know; are not sure Painful; not an enjoyable pastime; struggle; overwhelming; bad habits; painful memories Hard; tired; doesn't come easy	Wake up; helpful; find something new Learn more Love; good; good Enjoy; dynamic; pleasing; practical More knowledge; helps; hard Like; love; like; improve

Figure 4. Responses to "How do you use writing outside of class?"

Instructors	Students
Research paper on a Spanish novel (in Spanish); letter writing; texts with "long, explanatory, full sentences"	To "talk and write correctly" or else her kids "will not learn right"; to help her be a nurse
Daily <b>journaling</b> (gratitude and "regular <b>journal</b> "); poetry challenge of writing a poem every day; has published a book and scripts for two shows	Texting; recipes; emails; "when I go to the doctor, to the dentist, and stuff like that."
Emails, Facebook, texting, <b>journaling</b> writing thank you cards, to-do lists	"I help my husband to write.... I text message with the boss"; writes letters with her daughter
Assignment sheets; emails; <b>book projects</b> , "One nonfiction and one fiction"; social media	Note-taking; texting; "I write code"
"I have <b>books and books of journals</b> and notes... and prefer sending letters...I take notes all the time. I jot down list upon list ...I keep <b>journals</b> . I write both digitally and with pen and paper, professionally and <b>just for personal</b> . I write.... I program, too, so I suppose that's writing."	texting; "I've been trying to...have a notebook next to my bed because I always forget my dreams. I'm trying to see if it works to have something and write it down as soon as I wake up, but as soon as I wake up, I forgot"; recipes; birthday cards; notes at work
"I write all the time"; emails; texts; grant writing; letters; meeting minutes; "I do <b>journaling</b> every single night before I go to bed."	"Sometimes my... brothers in law, they ask me to write a letter they need"; texts; emails

*Discussion:*

Figure 1 shows that most instructors believe their students do not enjoy writing, and those that hesitate lean towards “no”; every student, however, answers unequivocally that they *do* enjoy writing. Figures 2 and 3 show that nearly all of the six instructors offer negative emotional possibilities for what they perceive as students’ lack of enjoyment with writing, whereas students use positive phrases and words. Instructors’ acknowledgment of students’ emotions both confirms the contrast between these programs and traditional academia’s distrust for emotions in learning (Jaggar 1989; hooks 1994; Stenberg 2011); instructors’ concern for their students’ seeming lack of enjoyment with writing informs their lesson plans. Most instructors discussed projects that engage writing in personal and reflective ways, such as “group writing” to make the work less “scary,” “human paragraphs” to increase participation, free-writing, and journaling, including creative forms such as photojournalism projects and “dialogue journals,” an epistolary conversation between instructor and student. Nielsen’s literature synthesis shows that overall, studies on adult writing instruction value journaling as a practice that “offers frequent opportunities for practice and reinforces habits of writing regularly that are essential to improvement,” can be “a substantial comfort and stress relief for students,” and “[creates] a sense of ownership over the writing experience” (2015, 147). Nielson’s research, and the instructors in this study, connect positive experiences with writing to creative and expressive modes.

Instructors’ own experienced pleasure with non-academic writing seems to inform how they perceive their students might enjoy writing: emboldened words in Figure 4 show that a majority of instructors journal and write creatively, some of them enthusiastically, whereas the majority of students use practical writing at home (see the right-hand column of Figure 4 for examples). The ABE instructor, Coral, makes most explicit that she connects enjoyment of writing to journaling and creative modes, a link that is not surprising given that she self-identifies as “a poet, a playwright, and an author” who, at the time that we spoke, was on day thirty-nine of a year-long challenge to write a poem a day that she shares publicly. She does not see similar passions for writing in her students:

I'm not sure I would say in my current group that any one of them enjoys writing. I also think these are not students that typically journal or have learned that writing can be pleasurable. Poetry scares them like math scares them. They did not typically grow up in a household where books were seen as a go-to thing.

Coral conflates the practice of journaling with the knowledge that "writing can be pleasurable"; she also suggests that "pleasurable" writing is connected to upbringing, i.e. in homes "where books were seen as a go-to thing." Perhaps the thinking goes, if people who enjoy writing keep a journal the way that I do, my peers do, and most published authors do, then keeping a journal will help students enjoy writing.

The right columns of Figures 2, 3, and 4, however, suggest that students' enjoyment of writing has little to do with journaling and free expression. Instead of connecting enjoyment of writing with the freedom to express themselves, grammatical rebellion, and a way of working through emotional hardships, students enjoy writing because it is hard and it helps them improve, perhaps manifesting characteristics of the recently-popularized notion of "grit," the "tendency to prefer labor over leisure" (Duckworth 2015). More specifically, students enjoy *prescriptive* writing, such as Coral's students' enjoyable pursuit of a "perfect" dictation, because it is hard. Students' positive experiences with prescriptive writing challenge the ways that instructors perceive students' relationship with writing in general; this tension extends to the feedback that instructors provide and the kinds of feedback students appreciate.

### **III) PERCEIVING AND EXPERIENCING FEEDBACK ON WRITING:**

*Refusing The "Crushing" Potential of "Red Marking" // "I Like to Know When I've Made A Mistake"*

Perceptions of feedback that instructors provide on students' writing offers the third site of tension that I explore.



Results:

Figure 5. Participants’ reflections on the feedback they give (instructors) and receive (students) on writing in this program.

Instructors	Students
“I don’t know if they’ll read it.”	“I always bring this in to the teacher to see if there are mistakes... <b>I never write something without showing.</b> ”
“I don’t want to <b>crush</b> the spirit and the intention behind, so particularly if there are a lot of errors, I’ll focus on one thing.”	“if somebody explain it to me and stuff like that, or read it to me, <b>then I can understand it.</b> ”
“They rarely do” [ask questions about feedback when she invites them to]	“I think that <b>it’s a good way</b> [of providing feedback]... because she is listen what we are saying and she’s like, ‘No, you need to say that because this is incorrect’.”
“I always tell them good job or good start. Because most of them are <b>very anxious</b> about doing well and so they need some kind of encouragement.”	“If I’m wrong, <b>I would like to be corrected</b> or if I made a mistake I would like to know I made a mistake. Or just any kind of error I guess or something open for improvement.”
“I don’t wanna <b>overwhelm</b> them with feedback. .... We gotta be <b>cautious</b> with feedback.”	“he check my work and <b>it always helps</b> when I do something wrong. <b>I like to know when I’m doing something wrong</b> so I can go and do it right. That makes – <b>it helps me to learn more.</b> ”
“I’ll say to them, when I’m handing back their paper, this is a great job. You knocked it out of the park or why don’t we try and work on this a little bit more, but <b>I always try and say something very positive about it.</b> ”	“The feedback <b>always helps me</b> ...that helps me to write better, <b>to be a better writer.</b> Because the next time I see that error, I would not make it again and <b>I love to have feedbacks</b> from the teacher.”

Discussion:

As noted above, most of the instructors expressed awareness of the non-academic and emotional lives of their students: these factors perhaps inspire the cautious and deliberate feedback on students’ writing shown in Figure 5. Instructors’ skills of providing intentional, positive, and encouraging feedback have likely developed over years of experience; however, the emboldened phrases from students in

Figure 5 suggest that “cautious” feedback is precisely what students *don’t* want.

Students’ responses about feedback give no indication of feeling “crushed” or “overwhelmed.” This must partially be the achievement of instructors’ deliberate care and attention *not* to create negative feelings, yet their responses also suggest they could handle more. Victor, a native Spanish speaker who grew up in Mexico, explains that his desire for writing is not hindered by rules and boundaries that might be marked during feedback, but rather boosted by them. He takes an upper-level ABE course on scholarship from an organization that supported him during his early years in the United States, and he likes writing in English more than in Spanish because when he learned Spanish as a child,

maybe I didn’t put too much attention in what I was doing at school. And right now, I pay attention to the teacher and where to put a comma or semicolon or anything like that, and before, I just write. I didn’t put any semicolons or commas or anything, just writing.

Concern for punctuation rules feeds, rather than depresses, Victor’s energy for writing: indeed, he does not intend to stop classes after passing the GED because he wants to “learn to learn.” Though instructors worry that Victor and other students will turn away from writing if given too much feedback, students like Victor write particularly *for* that feedback.

The dissonance between instructors’ caution and students’ appetite for more feedback evokes Antrop-González and Jesús’s (2006) *Ay Bendito* syndrome, the “soft care” that causes instructors to lower their standards for some students out of “pity” for their emotional and non-academic situations (412). It is easy to see how this “syndrome” could negatively impact ambitious students like Victor, but it is also easy to empathize with instructors demonstrating these symptoms in low or no-cost adult education programs. One instructor speculates that writing can be “very frustrating for students; their life has been about surviving, and when you’re in survival mode, you think about, ‘How am I gonna feed my kids?’”; another proposes that students

don't do journaling exercises at home because "they just might be tired." Perhaps because instructors understand the urgency for many students to pass the GED or communicate with their child's teachers, they understand the importance of not pushing a student too hard in the short term for the sake of the long term.

Instructors' consideration of students' emotional and non-academic lives is one of the strengths of low or no-cost adult education programs; but if instructors provide "soft care" when students want tough love, the power dynamics that community literacy programs aim to deconstruct are maintained. Perhaps feedback that doesn't "overwhelm" results less in students' sense of freedom to express themselves and more in students feeling stuck where they started. Increased awareness of these tensions could help to acknowledge space for students' extracurricular challenges without *displacing* students' goals.

## **"BUILDING A CURRICULUM FOR YOURSELF": PRESCRIPTIVE WRITING AS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The concept of the curriculum of the self highlights the possibility that adult students can experience prescriptive writing, such as rote copying, note-taking, and dictation, as a process that is "intellectual" as well as "practical" (Bradbury 2012), which might inform the ways that instructors use writing in adult education classrooms. I do not suggest that instructors eradicate journaling and reflective writing; rather, I propose that considering the possibility that students can use prescriptive writing creatively, pleasurably, and actively, may relieve some of the pressure imposed on instructors to teach a "perfect" GED essay on the one hand and a love of writing on the other: sometimes, these goals are one and the same.

For example, instructors like Reggie, the ABE instructor-slash-programmer, are aware that note-taking is an important skill; however, he seems to perceive it as a task of the present confined to a particular course. Reggie explains,

We do note taking. We do very **formalized** notes. I teach Cornell note style<sup>13</sup> in the class as the approach that I would encourage them to use, but by no means force them to use. It is more about trying to **instill an organization** of notes and even more than that is that we need to also **refer to back to** our notes. And so I try to build that reflective piece back into the instruction model. So at some point, I stop teaching and be like, you already have notes, very detailed notes. We did them yesterday. So **use those to move forward**, to try to get them to see **the usefulness of** writing all this stuff down.

Reggie, and the Cornell method, acknowledge that note-taking can be a “reflective piece” of students’ learning; however, his phrases that I embolden suggest that he connects note-taking with short-term academic progress. The words and phrases “formalized,” “instill an organization,” “refer back to,” “move forward,” and “usefulness” focus on a systematic learning path organized along the curriculum of one particular class: taking notes helps students understand what they are learning in this class, and it will help them to “move forward” with specific material.

Comparing Reggie’s description of note-taking with Walker’s, the ABE student quoted near the top of this essay, suggests a significant difference in the way that instructor and student conceive of note-taking. (Despite their similar interests in note-taking, Walker is not Reggie’s student.) Walker says,

[note-taking is] just helpful to **continue learning** because you can get lost. And depending on what you’re learning if you need to understand multiple aspects of something to understand that, that’s where taking notes helps because you know where you’re leaving off and you know kind of **how to piece what you’re trying to learn together**. ... Like I guess if you’re trying to learn something that – it’s **like building a curriculum for yourself**. Because you can’t just go off learning about some things that you need to understand other things to understand that thing.

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13 The Cornell note-taking system is a rigorously detailed method including five steps: record, question, recite, reflect, review (Cornell University 2019).

With the emboldened words and phrases “continue learning,” “how to piece what you’re trying to learn together,” and the eponymous to this essay “curriculum for yourself,” Walker suggests that his notes serve him the way that journaling may serve other writers, including most of the instructors I spoke with: Walker’s notes help him to understand a class, yes, but they also help him to understand himself.

## **CONCLUSIONS: PRESCRIPTIVE WRITING, RECIPROCITY IN TURBULENCE**

The other students quoted in this essay, like Walker, engage prescriptive writing such as rote copying, note-taking, and dictation as ongoing personal development. For Lana, the student who copies out a “long story...three or five times” in order for it to “be saved in [her] brain,” rote-copying shapes the way she understands a subject: she says that when she is not writing, “I think my brain is empty, like a flower needs water, our brains are the same.” And Victor, the student inspired by semicolons and commas, extends his enthusiasm for punctuation into writing about himself: one of his favorite assignments is to “write stories,” but only when the assignment will be handed in. He says, “I always write about my own experiences, my own life, and I think that’s a way to tell a little bit more about myself. And so, the teacher or the students can know me a little better.” Victor suggests that personal stories can still be personal even if he writes them for the instructor rather than for himself; more, because learning to write is intimately tied to his personal goals, writing stories for the instructor *is* writing for himself.

These tensions between the ways that instructors perceive their students to experience writing and how students describe their own writing experiences identify new and specific components to what Lauren Rosenberg (2015) calls the “turbulent flow” of learning sites. Turbulent flow describes the inevitable “collisions of discourses” that occur “as people navigate their everyday experiences” and is “[a] persistent mixing rather than linear or predictable patterns” (6); I suggest that the differences between instructors’ perception of their students’ experience with writing and students’ own writing experiences are in this “persistent mixing.” As instructors offer free journaling as a way for students to write more and express themselves

while doing so, students focus on shaping prescriptive writing tasks into their own ways of learning.

Within these turbulent flows, acknowledging the unexpected, nuanced, and individualized ways that students use prescriptive writing, particularly as intellectual and personal processes, offers new ways to enact reciprocity. Rather than imposing particular methods on students of developing positive relationships with writing that invite personal expression, instructors, administrators, and scholars might value and learn from the ways that students cultivate their own ways of written enjoyment and engagement. Spaces that value students' perspectives and skills might also consider what valuing students' experiences with writing looks like, especially if they differ from (*because* they differ from) what research predicts.

After working closely with the students' and instructors' responses and considering the assumptions we all make about how others experience writing (which impacts how we teach writing, and to what extent we are open to learning and practicing writing), I caught myself in the act of assuming. Re-reading the transcript of my conversation with Myriam, I see that she, like Walker, also brings up taking notes—but, unlike Walker, she does not return to it when I pass it by:

*Myriam:* The bullet points or when I'm—when I want to have something noticeable that can go back and easier for me to find it if I don't remember. That will be a good way to make it in bigger letters or different color.

*Alison:* So those are all for when you're taking notes?

*Myriam:* Yes, when I'm taking notes or even when it's something about math, for example, that it's important to remember.

*Alison:* It's a good idea. In addition to writing when you take notes for school, are there other ways you use writing?

I wonder what Myriam might have shared had I pursued *her* ways of using writing, rather than the ways of using writing that I expected to discuss. While we learn that Victor's knowledge of commas and semicolons allows him to tell stories about himself, Walker uses notes to build his own curriculum, and Lana copies a story word for word three times over because it "wakes up [her] brain," we know that Myriam has *thought about* keeping a dream journal, but we do not know what she *does* do to write for herself, because I changed the subject.

In addition to preparing their students for a particular written exam, work, or daily communication, the instructors in this study all hope to foster students' self-expression and enjoyment of writing in ways that exceed the ABE or Family Literacy course. While scholarship on adult writing instruction cautions that, "too often, the aspect of creativity and personal expression are hidden from students, who are only driven toward academic or professional tasks in writing" (Nielsen 2015, 148), the concept of the curriculum of the self reverses the warning: creativity and personal expression might also be "hidden" from instructors and scholars when they drive students *away from* academic or professional writing tasks. Perhaps students' pursuit of a "perfect" sentence or GED score does not confine their writing to dominant modes but serves as a source of energy and inspiration; perhaps in sites of community literacy, "perfect" does not need to be a dirty word.

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# More than a Sandwich:

## Developing an Inclusive Summer Lunch Literacy Program in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania

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*This article describes a case study of an inclusive Summer Lunch Program, focused on nutrition, community engagement, and literacy programming. The Summer Food Service Program is a federally-funded, state-administered program designed to meet the needs of children from low-income families who qualify for free and reduced lunches during the school year. The most tangible outcome of the program is the food and the literacy programming provided to students during the summer months. Secondary outcomes include the development of new social skills, preparation for new educational experiences, less “screen time” for children, and learning about the community and the people in it.*

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The end of the school year means two things for at-risk school children—no more lunches, and no more school librarians to encourage reading. Statistics show that children who qualify for free and reduced lunches suffer from a “summer gap” in nutrition. Similarly, educators have long been concerned with “summer slide,” or the loss of literacy skills that occurs over the summer months (Kim & Quinn, 2013; Quinn,

Lynch, & Kim, 2014). Federally funded Summer Lunch Programs are intended to be a natural summer extension of the better-known free and reduced meals provided by the National School Lunch Program during the academic year. Unfortunately, only 10% (3.8 million) of children who enjoy free and reduced lunches during the school year participate in Summer Food programming; this “summer gap” is troubling because food insecurity rates among children rise during the summer months (Bruce, De La Cruz, Moreno, and Chamberlain 2017; Gunderson 2015). One of the reasons that the “summer gap” persists is that families and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch during the school year may avoid similar summer programs because of the stigma that they perceive both when registering for such programs and when actually participating in the program (Freeman, Macias, Narayan, Ng, and Yang 2012, 7).

Summer Lunch Programs are designed to meet the nutritional needs of at-risk students; however, best practices in developing these programs now suggest that creating engaging activities will ensure greater participation in the program. For example, a recent evaluation of a library-based summer lunch program also noted that the addition of educational enrichment enhanced participation and prevented summer learning loss among children (Bruce, et al., 2017).

Stigma is a major barrier to participation in food service programs such as SNAP (food stamps) and the traditional free and reduced lunches provided during the academic year. School officials and researchers consistently find that as children age and become more aware of the stigma associated with poverty, they self-select out of free or reduced school lunch participation (Bhatia, Jones, and Reicker 2011; Lopez-Neyman, and Warren 2016). The adult parents of the children who participate in summer lunch programs appreciate the more open and welcoming environment they experience when registering for and participating in such programs. In fact, many summer lunch programs (including the one described in this article) are open to all children, thus reducing any need to prove eligibility or go through an arduous enrollment process. This stands in stark contrast to the stigma, prejudice, confusion, and general lack of kindness and respect that these same participants experience when

applying for and receiving other food services (e.g. SNAP, WIC, TANF, etc.) (Bruce et al. 2017).

The program described here builds on the gains described in these articles and provides further evidence that creating engaging activities will increase participation in the program, all within an inclusive context that minimizes stigma. The purpose of this profile is to showcase a university/community collaboration that created an inclusive, literacy based Summer Lunch Program to feed, educate, and entertain local elementary school children. Our educational focus provides a useful strategy for engaging large numbers of children, and it is our hope that it serves as a useful model to practitioners who are interested in replicating our work in other communities. These camp-like activities work to erase the stigma associated with a free Summer Lunch program with an emphasis on community rather than need.

The authors helped to develop and then participate in a Summer Lunch Program, sponsored by the Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC), a collaboration between Shippensburg University and local community social service organizations, including the local library. The Shippensburg Summer Lunch Program (SLP) not only provides food for hungry children; this program is unique in that it also provides dynamic literacy programming organized in an inviting camp-like atmosphere for its participants. Moreover, the Shippensburg Summer Lunch Program is an open site, which means any child can participate, whether or not he/she qualifies for free or reduced lunch at their local public school. The Shippensburg SLP embodies the best practices for social development that James Midgley describes. According to Midgley, communities are best served by addressing the needs of all, not just of those in need. He writes, “Unlike social philanthropy and social work, social development does not cater only to needy individuals but seeks to advance the well-being of the entire population” (Midgley 1995, 29). The goal of the Shippensburg Summer Lunch Program is that all children in the community—no matter their socioeconomic status—will attend the program and experience the fun that should be a part of every child’s summer.

The Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition (SCRC) began in 2012 as a community-university partnership designed to meet social service and youth programming needs in a rural community where Shippensburg University is located. Shippensburg is in the unusual position of being split between two Pennsylvania counties, which can pose challenges for accessing social services in particular. While there are many services available in neighboring towns, it can be difficult for residents to access them due to lack of awareness, transportation, and/or their perceptions of these services. The SCRC is designed to help address these challenges in a variety of ways. One approach is for the SCRC to partner with neighboring organizations to expand and strengthen their services to the Shippensburg community in order to avoid duplication of services. However, some services have been developed directly by the SCRC. The Summer Lunch Program is one such example. The idea for the SLP was initiated when a board member, who is also a guidance counselor at the middle school, attended a workshop related to the USDA Summer Food Service program and gathered information about how these programs are operated. Masters of Social Work (MSW) students at the university then researched how to implement the program and developed a proposal as part of their course related to organizational development. The proposal was implemented the following summer of 2013 with four churches and SCRC; each church hosting one day of programming for the SLP. Thirty-nine students attended at least one day of the program, with closer to 5-10 attending each day during that first summer. The program has grown each year, adding participants, staff, and programming, with the most recent summer including ninety-nine children total with an average of sixty children each day.

When the SCRC Summer Lunch program began, its purpose was simply to feed hungry children, and in its first year, several local churches donated space so that the program rotated every day. In 2014, Summer Lunch began to grow in ways that brought literacy into focus. First, we were offered a stable full time location at the Shippensburg Public Library, and we were guaranteed library programming once a week. One of the first goals was to get every child a library card and encourage them to take out books. Second, our very first paid Summer Lunch Director, Martina Bartova, believed firmly that the programming should have an overall theme,



as it was in her childhood in Europe, and an adventure book seemed like the perfect way to coordinate all the program's activities. That first year, she chose *Treasure Island* as the theme and divided the Summer Lunch participants into teams. Right from the beginning of her tenure, Martina knew that making a camp atmosphere would encourage children to attend, and it would erase the stigma of coming to receive a free lunch. She explains that, "my goal was to make them WANT to come every day. Missing a day meant missing an activity or competition, i. e., missing precious points in the all-summer game. Since we were at the library, I got the idea that our theme could come from a book, ideally a classic adventurous piece, which we would read together throughout the summer."

By creating a summer camp environment and emphasizing the importance of community and team building exercises, Martina created a cadre of regulars who rarely missed a day, and effectively erased the stigma of receiving a free lunch. Martina ran the Summer Lunch Program for the next two years. In 2015, she picked *Around the World in 80 Days*, and in 2016, she chose *The Treasure of the Silver Lake*. Every year featured programming that highlighted the chosen book, and the program gained a reputation in the community for providing a camp environment. Many children attended who were not in need, and this mix of financial status further decreased the stigma of attending the Summer Lunch program. From Martina's perspective, the lessons became as important, or more important, than the food provided: "apart from feeding the children, a very, very important side of the program, I hope that I showed them how to spend summer time outdoors, what to play, how an old book can still have a lot to say, how there is adventure in every trip outside." Martina's vision—one that emphasizes community building activities that linked to a common book—became the foundation for the SCRC Summer Lunch program. The program continues to grow every year, and as the program grows, the Directors modify the community building activities to include more children.

Caitlin Clarke took over the position of Director in 2017, and she brought her own vision of literacy to the Summer Lunch program. As a school counselor, she was interested in the social lessons that the theme might offer the participants, and rather than adventure, she

wanted to emphasize recent texts that played with form and genre. For example, in 2017, the programming focused on “El Deafo,” an autobiographical graphic novel by Cece Bell that describes her experiences growing up deaf. According to Clarke, “kids of all ages could really resonate with this book in identifying what makes them different and celebrating it. Activities that tied to the novel included learning sign language, listening to an adult with an intellectual disability discuss his childhood, and taking turns writing affirmation notes for kids and staff.”

The focus for 2019’s Summer Lunch Program shifted to building social literacy through group interactions, projects, field trips and performances. When Sysha Irot became the Director in 2019, she chose Katherine Applegate’s *The One and Only Ivan*, a high-interest story based on true events about a captive gorilla to provide an inspiration for Summer Lunch activities that focused on understanding and building identity, expressing thoughts and emotions, and friendship. Participating in the activities within mixed-age and mixed-ability groups allowed the children to practice and develop social skills for successfully and respectfully interacting with each other, and to even form friendships with children they might not have otherwise met or socialized with before. The children and teens of Summer Lunch build a variety of social skills as they navigate different settings and groups, developing a sense of responsibility for their Summer Lunch community. For instance, Summer Lunch teens took the initiative to design and create rule posters for each area of the shared space to encourage all members of the Summer Lunch community to do their part in keeping the space clean and to take care of the shared materials. Summer Lunch children planned and created special thank you notes, paintings, and chalk art for guest presenters, and they expressed their gratitude to Summer Lunch staff members by actively participating in the preparation for and clean-up of projects and positively influencing their peers to do the same.

Sysha focused on creative self-expression as a form of empowerment, as it is in the book, through writing, the visual arts, and the performing arts. Summer Lunch participants explored identity and creative self-expression together with their peers through written introductions inspired by Ivan the gorilla’s introduction of himself in the story,

painting and drawing with different materials, building clay sculptures, exploring marbled shaving cream art, making rainbow zig-zag books, and constructing hats, as well as through trying out different forms of dance and playing theatre games. Summer Lunch children and teens also created a massive “The One and Only Summer Lunch” banner to display in the school and worked collaboratively to write positive messages for each other and express themselves on it. A Summer Lunch teen helper created the lettering for the banner and inspired many of the younger children to try their hand at lettering too!



Summer Lunch participants flourish in an environment that celebrates the unique and varied contributions of each person and promotes a shared vision of uplifting and encouraging others in a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere. This spirit of support is evidenced by the enthusiastic cheering and clapping that can be heard during each Behavior Awards ceremony, where children and teens are called out for specific, positive actions or contributions from that day and everyone shares in their accomplishments. The Behavior Awards are so popular that Summer Lunch participants are often on the lookout for good behavior and positive actions demonstrated by their peers so that they can nominate them for a Behavior Award. This encourages the intrinsic reward of publicly recognizing and celebrating the contributions of others. Focusing on the good builds morale as we try new things and learn, and it improves our outlook for ourselves and others. As Ivan remarks in the book: “Growing up gorilla is just like any other kind of growing up. You make mistakes. You play. You learn. You do it all over again” (Applegate 127).

## **BENEFITS TO STAKEHOLDERS: “WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY”**

The Shippensburg Community Resource Coalition played a vital part in the creation and continued support of the program. However, there are a number of other local community organizations—both private and governmental—that provided ongoing support of the Summer Lunch Program. These organizations can be loosely grouped into the following categories: community churches, community charitable organizations, parent/teacher organizations, local businesses, the local public school board of directors, and the local university. During one of our interviews, one of the parent participants said, “we all have something to contribute to the community, and we can all learn from each other, and summer lunch definitely emphasizes that.” This quote encapsulates the sense of community that is a key part of organizing stakeholders around feeding children during the summer.

In the case of the Shippensburg Summer Lunch program, local churches provide support in the form of cash donations and additional food for snacks. Many of the volunteers at the Summer Lunch Program are also members of local churches. Parents who

attend these local churches are often the driving force behind the donations that come to the Summer Lunch Program.

Community organizations such as social and civic clubs make various types of donations and give support to the Summer Lunch Program. These organizations are generally most comfortable providing a cash donation to support the efforts of the staff and volunteers serving in the program. However, the Kiwanis organization bought the books that were the focus of the programming, local members of The Grange annually donate space on their property for three or four of the daily activities, and local Rotary International members provide snacks for the summer lunch students. Shippensburg Produce and Outreach, a local fresh produce food bank, also donated snacks in the form of apples or other produce to the Summer Lunch Program.

One of the Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) at a local elementary school has a large number of students who participate in the Summer Lunch Program, and they provided a monetary donation to support the Summer Lunch activities. A number of non-profit and for profit businesses in the local community also provided funding and in-kind donations to the Summer Lunch program. In the past, the local library provided space for the Summer Lunch students and their activities. For some time now, a local orchard provides fresh fruit (peaches, apples, plums, cherries, apricots, etc.) and a local bottling factory provides enough bottled water for the entire Summer Lunch Program. More recently, the Shippensburg Area School District became the most prominent local partner to the Summer Lunch Program. The school board and administrators permit the students in the program to meet in their elementary or intermediate schools. The general consensus is that locating the program at a local public school building increases attendance and decreases any stigma that children may face who attend the program. For each of these organizations described here, their contributions to the Summer Lunch Program were vital to creating the sense that this program was definitely a community program. Their support helped the program to survive and, very importantly, grow the sense that this was a program for all children rather than just for “those kids,” which would have added to stigma.

## **RECIPROCITY AND PRIDE**

The time and dedication to developing this network of supporters is key to long-term sustainability and success of the Summer Lunch Program. We have worked to develop trust with these partners so that they know that we use resources wisely, provide a safe program, and meet community needs. Evaluating the program's outcomes through research is an important piece of being able to tell the story of Summer Lunch and have evidence to support the effectiveness of the program. The research that was conducted also relied on the strong relationships and trust that we have worked to build with our community partners and participants.

In their article, "Accepting Roles Created for Us: The Ethics of Reciprocity," Katrina Powell and Pamela Takayoshi (2003) emphasize the importance of human relationships in research. They write, "at the heart of calls for reciprocity in research is a recognition/assertion/insistence that research involves building relationships among humans. At a basic level, research is about understanding other people, their lives, and their experiences" (Powell and Takayoshi 2003, 399). We believe that strong relationships within the SCRC Summer Lunch program is what made our program, and our research, so meaningful to us.

One of the unique aspects of this experience is the fact that the project involved both service and research in one combined effort. In order to make sure that we continued to value these relationships, we developed a research methodology that would incorporate participant voices loudly and clearly. This approach gave both the participants and the authors the opportunity to learn and grow as people. It opened up doors for some and gave others a wide view of their community. One of the authors, Gabrielle Binando, was awarded an undergraduate research grant that gave her the opportunity to sit down and talk with some of the parents who participated in the program. In order to ensure that relevant ethical guidelines were followed during the project, prior to completing interviews or filling out surveys, all participants provided written consent to be involved in the research, and all research endeavors were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Shippensburg University.

The parents learned a lot about the community, and they noticed changes within their own children from their participation in summer lunch. One parent in particular expressed to us that they “have learned all about the great opportunities, and that there is a lot of things that the community offers compared to other communities.” For parents that have never participated in SLP before, it was a great way for them to get involved and see what can be done for the community. During the interviews, some of the parents expressed how surprised they were when they found out about all the different pieces of the community puzzle: “and the basketball coach at Shippensburg University to come and participate. I was just blown away, and I think that by living here and getting into this type of thing I’m learning how, not close knit, but how behind each other this community seems to get. It is more of a ‘oneness’ and less of a clique feeling here.” The parents seemed to be thrilled to find out how other aspects of the community are involved in SLP. For us, this was not just a way to feed children; it was a way to form an unbreakable bond. “I was really surprised at how much, not necessarily the community, but the community people involved in other aspects of the community have come and participated here.” One parent in particular did her part to give back to the community in an immense way; she first participated in SLP as a mother who brought her kids so that they would learn, have fun, and have lunch. She was so moved by the program that she wanted to be more involved. This mother joined the SLP team as the Assistant Director after only participating for one year.

In a recent article articulating the importance of reciprocity, Sarah Stanlick and Marla Sell (2017) argue that community activists can fall under the spell of the “superhero mentality,” and then start believing that only they hold the power to make positive changes in their community. Stanlick and Sell contend that this belief is a dangerous one, and one that we can avoid if we develop a strong sense of collaboration as we build projects and programs together. They write,

“The role of follower or nurturer is implicitly or explicitly discouraged, and a power dynamic is thus created that elevates single individuals into the role of hero. The value placed on that role is wrapped up in the ideal image of ourselves as helpers. This



superhero mentality can lead to bold action, but it can also relegate others—often, community partners—to the role of sidekick, or worse, recipient. The Service Learning Community Engagement movement aims to identify this problem and to avoid the superhero mentality. Instead, programs can focus on connecting and sustaining relationships, with the goal of collective empowerment at the forefront” (Stanlick and Sell 2017, 82).

We believe that the SCRC Summer Lunch program has developed a strong ethos of collective empowerment, so that all participants believe that they have something to offer that will strengthen and sustain the Summer Lunch program. We learned, through observation and interviews, that parents felt an increasing sense of ownership in the program. Many volunteered to help when we were short-staffed, and two parents applied for Assistant Director positions, and in effect, transformed their ownership into leadership positions within the program.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

If someone were to put fun on the typical pyramid depicting Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs, it would likely go somewhere above Physiological Needs and Safety Needs. The Summer Lunch program provides students with some of those lower level needs so that they possess the psychological wherewithal to engage in meaningful, literacy-based activities during the summer months. The program provides educational and other programming to help children with other, higher level items on Maslow’s Hierarchy, such as Belongingness and Esteem. Moreover, the program creates an inclusive environment that minimizes stigma. It also encourages reciprocity between the local community and university. The program provides a sense of oneness that helps to support all the people within it, filling the hungry mouths, minds and hearts of our participants.



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# Book Reviews



## Review:

### *Writing Suburban Citizenship: Place Conscious Education and the Conundrum of Suburbia*

Edited by Robert E. Brooke

**Charlotte Kupsh,**  
*University of Nebraska-  
Lincoln.*

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Americans are becoming increasingly mobile. As it becomes common to frequently relocate for work, suburbs have sprung up to accommodate transient families (Brooke 2015, 11). More students grow up in communities created for temporary, mobile populations, which as a result are often disconnected from their cultural and physical regions. This emerging population of students poses a challenge to place-conscious educators, who strive to foster students' participatory citizenship by connecting them to their localities. By grounding the curriculum in local environments and cultures, place-conscious educators believe students' knowledge will "spiral outward," connecting them to the larger world (Brooke 2003, 13). But how can educators engage suburban students to become effective citizens when their students often feel only a tenuous connection to their communities? *Writing Suburban Citizenship: Place-Conscious Education and the Conundrum of Suburbia*, edited by Robert E. Brooke,

takes on this question. At a time when America's political attention is increasingly concerned with suburban voters, this book explores the problem of fostering rhetorically aware, civically engaged citizens.

The nine contributors, all Teacher Consultants for the Nebraska Writing Project, offer pedagogical strategies for engaging suburban students in place-conscious literacy while also providing a rhetorical framework to understand suburban places as meaningful sites of community engagement. A central premise of the collection is that students and teachers must learn to envision the world around them, and they must become aware of their locales as they currently exist while also developing "a critical, informed idea of what [their] place can become" (31). Brooke applies this concept of *vision* to Wendell Berry's notion of places as both ecological and cultural; envisioning a suburban place requires attention to ecological watersheds and cultural commonwealths. Drawing from the concepts of rhetorical agency and engagement that Linda Flower describes in her 2008 *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, the contributors provide strategies for developing this vision and learning to "speak up," "speak against," "speak with," and "speak for" suburban communities (qtd. in Brooke, 40). Each contributor highlights methods for creating engaged citizens, whether in traditional suburbs, edge cities, exurban areas, or "the new urban penurbia" of college campuses (32).

A key issue in suburban place-conscious education, Brooke argues, is that suburbs are "constructed environment[s]" whose artificial nature can make it difficult for students to envision the material realities of their regions (37). The first section of the book, "Writing from the Watershed: Claiming Local Place as Natural and Geographic Space," focuses on projects that develop students' awareness of their natural environment as a first step toward rhetorical engagement. For example, Susan Martens adapts the National Writing Project's idea of a writing marathon to develop place consciousness among suburban students. In a writing marathon, small groups of writers freewrite in a place for a set amount of time, share their work aloud, and walk to a new place to repeat the process. Martens argues the physical and sensory processes of "walking, sensing, noticing, writing, and telling" in writing marathons combine with the intellectual



processes of “mapping and connecting” to ultimately “immerse writers in their physical surroundings in a way that helps them see landscapes and relationships that might otherwise remain invisible” (44). Aubrey Streit Krug’s chapter builds on fostering this vision of the material world. She describes a “perennial pedagogy” in which first-year college students learn how local problems in their material watersheds are part of larger ecological patterns (111). Rather than engaging in temporary and transactional ways, students learn to pay attention to local issues, connect them to global patterns, and take steps toward solving “perennial patterns” through public writing (125). Martens and Krug highlight the interconnectedness among vision, ecology, and action. By making suburban students aware of their ecological watersheds, teachers can encourage students to develop place-conscious orientations toward their communities and model habits of engaged citizenship.

The isolated nature of suburbs that distances students from the natural environment often also separates them from their cultural locales. The pervasive individualism inherent in suburban communities can leave little room for civic and social responsibilities. Section two, “Writing from the Commonwealth: Claiming Local Place as a Cultural and Economic System,” highlights projects that bring suburban students into conversation with community histories, cultures, traditions, and civic practices. Contributors engage Flower’s concepts of rhetorical agency alongside the notion of rhetorical space that Nancy Welch describes in her 2008 *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*. According to Welch, “ordinary people *make* rhetorical space through concerted, often protracted struggle for visibility, voice, and impact” (qtd. in Brooke 137). For example, college instructor Bernice Olivas points out suburban spaces are at risk of “creating an oasis of sameness within fenced borders” and obscuring contact zones where students can engage meaningfully with difference (211). Echoing Brooke’s call for vision, Olivas argues for a “pedagogy of seeing” in which students contextualize larger issues, such as the marginalization and oppression of Native Americans, by engaging with them in local spaces (210). In doing so, students address what Flower calls their “contested agency,” or their positions as privileged citizens learning to stand in solidarity with marginalized populations in their communities (qtd. in Brooke 219). The contributors in the remainder of this section take up the call

to teach students to build rhetorical space, from developing critical awareness of civic issues in AP high school literature classrooms (Mary Birky Collier's chapter) to recording oral histories from the local workforce (Cathie English's chapter). "By becoming aware of the long-existing histories and cultures of our local spaces," Olivas writes, "place-conscious education acts to create exigency, a desire and need, to speak to the concerns and issues that were once hidden" (233).

"This book presents a challenge to American education," Brooke writes in the introduction to *Writing Suburban Citizenship* (1). The challenge, readers of this collection will find, is twofold. First, this book calls on educators to help suburban students develop a place-conscious vision of their community and its future potential. The contributors to this volume provide a wealth of strategies to help students become apt rhetorical agents and engaged citizens. The second challenge underlying this collection is for scholars and educators to learn to see suburban America in a new way: despite the fact that they are often perceived as empty, placeless, and disconnected, suburbs are worthy, rich sites of study. The contributors create a seamless argument for the ways that suburban students can contribute to their communities and develop deep, authentic senses of belonging. Their work makes this book a must-read for all educators and scholars concerned with the task of helping America's growing suburban communities become places of participatory citizenship.

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# Review:

## *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era*

**Brian McShane**

*Texas A&M University –  
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This isn't a book about Donald Trump. In *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era*, out from Routledge in 2020, editors Shannon Carter, Deborah Mutnick, Stephen Parks, and Jessica Pauszek set their sights on pushing against neoliberalism, a nebulous term that has gained favor in the past few years in articles and classrooms. Neoliberalism “stands for laissez-faire economic measures, including austerity, deregulation, financialization, and privatization, linked to a conception of society as consisting of individuals, whose interests eclipse those of collective identities” (4). To combat the expansion of neoliberalism, the contributors and editors call for “a political turn (a left turn) informed by Marx’s theory of historical materialism” (2).

The “book’s overarching aim is to contribute to efforts to reclaim (or redefine) democracy as an egalitarian, inclusive political economic system that supports human and all planetary life and well-being” (3). The

book is presented in three sections—"Mapping the Political Turn," "Variations on the Political Turn," and "Taking the Political Turn"—and issues a clarion call to teachers, students, scholars, and activists to take a political turn in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, to embrace the field's capacity to engage politically both within the walls of the classroom as well as on the streets outside them.

Scholars and students new to Rhetoric and Composition will find the book's first section, "Mapping the Political Turn," to be more than just a history lesson. John Trimbur's contribution, "Composition's Left and the Struggle for Revolutionary Consciousness," notes a "vague yet unmistakable feeling in radical sectors of composition that something was going wrong, that composition no longer was the 'beacon of democracy' that once inspired its ranks" (27). This is not a swan song for a declining field, but a jarring reminder of its capacity for the type of turn being advocated for in this volume. Trimbur concludes with hope by mentioning recent political wins on the American Left, and he sets the stage for an interview with Angela Davis, which motivates those considering this turn to stand up and get involved by eloquently discussing the human role in activism. Davis warns us, as scholars interested in social justice, "not to assume that these new social media can actually to do the work" of organizers, putting the impetus solely on the humans who must do the heavy lifting (53). When readers encounter Nancy Welch's "Marxist Ethics for Uncertain Times," she skillfully frames the fast-moving nature of today's political moment, connecting neoliberal encroachment in politics through the recent Supreme Court hearing for Brett Kavanaugh. Welch notes the sexual harassment controversies surrounding Kavanaugh's nomination, arguing it "exposes that while sexist ideas circulate at all levels of society, institutionalized misogyny and sexual predation serve specifically to groom white male elites for power, including over women's bodies and lives" (64). By the end of the section, readers know the discipline can and should get more politically involved, and Deborah Mutnick calls on instructors directly, noting "education has a decisive role to play in informing and mobilizing a multi-issue mass movement" (84).

As the embers of a budding movement are fanned into flames, the book's second section, "Variations on the Political Turn," makes

explicit the need to include the entire Rhetoric and Composition discipline in this political turn instead of speaking only to the segment of teachers and scholars more interested in activism. Paul Feigenbaum's "Nudging Ourselves Towards a Political Turn" provides a new line in activist thinking through what he calls "severing the concept of nudging from libertarian paternalism and reorienting it toward progressive ends" (141). Feigenbaum offers a lesson in adapting tactics made use of extensively by Conservatives, and it is well worth the price of admission. Vani Kannan's "Taking a Lead from Student Movements in a 'Political Turn'" encourages teachers to view students as those who can be stood with in solidarity, while Darin L. Jensen's call to include two-year college instructors, those he calls "invisible" to others in the field, solidifies the section's call for inclusion of students, scholars, activists, and instructors of all levels (163).

The book's third section, "Taking the Political Turn," manages to contextualize and historicize the problems we are seeing in starker terms in this political moment, but the authors are clear to note this administration is a symptom of larger structural problems, not the single issue the discipline must confront. Tamara Issak's "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem at the 9/11 Museum?" is an absolute showstopper, as it frames Islamophobia as an American problem that spiked right after 9/11, one that persists reinvigorated by the Right's racist tendencies, amplified by Trump's rhetoric and policies. Issak does this while commenting on the structural racism that the 9/11 museum is perpetuating by stereotyping Muslims. Issak deals with the body as rhetoric—and how a person can be read through wearing religious garb such as a hijab or presenting in a way that Americans have been prejudiced against—through the lens of a museum that "oversimplifies history, conflates Muslim identity with terrorism, and presents an 'us' versus 'them' narrative" (179). This trend in today's political rhetoric of Othering based on ethnic makeup that Issak talks about is furthered by Stephen Alvarez in "Dismantling the Wall: Analyzing the Rhetorics of Shock and Writing Political Transformation." In this article, he minces no words: "the wall became a way to disparage the perceptions of Latinx and Latin American immigrant communities and question citizenship status, while using racism as a tactic for pushing through privatizing austerity measures" (192).

The trends this section follows are given historical perspective through Shannon Carter's "Pass the Baton: Lessons from Historic Examples of the Political Turn, 1967-1968." Tracing the racism that John Carlos experienced before, during, and after the Mexico City Olympics (1968), Carter lauds Carlos as someone who "sought to expose the inexcusable, mutable contradictions between the promises and realities of America in 1968 and my [rural Texas] community in 1967" (207). This article continues the trend started by Trimbur, opening the volume, of providing a historical precedent both for the persistence of the struggles the book argues Rhetoric and Composition should be fighting against, and also by bringing that previous experience into the new political moment. The metaphor of passing the baton is both apt for the subject as well as useful for what the discipline should be doing now, according to the volume, to address the racism, climate crisis, and neoliberal destruction in which we find ourselves mired. Tamera Marko's "The Visa Border Labyrinths: 310 Colombian and U.S. Artists and Scholars Write Their Way Through" closes this section with a personal account of brokering a collaboration between students and artists across national lines. Fostering a literacy through education and integrating into pedagogy the act of navigating the visa process, Marko teaches us "to see what those who do not have to experience the visa process had been trained to not see" (255). Chronicling more than the bureaucratic nightmares that this process prompts, Marko explains some of the unique cultural difficulties that the process can bring out, like writing about yourself being considered a boast and a cultural taboo, which renders something readers won't have considered a difficulty in terms they can understand as almost aggressively American.

As tempers, temperatures, and sea levels rise, the sheer volume of work to do can be paralyzing. *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era* gives students, instructors, and activists a life preserver of practical thought, sage advice, and instantly-usable pedagogical tools to push back against the tide of neoliberalism and all that it has broken. Far from just a critique of the moment, this book is a field manual in the battle against political ideologies and economic movements that still haven't destroyed us, at a time when (hopefully) the field of Rhetoric and Composition is ready for it.



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**Brian McShane** graduated from Heritage University with a master's degree in Multicultural English Literature and Language where he continues to teach undergraduate literature courses online. He is currently a PhD. student at Texas A&M University – Commerce where he also works as a graduate teaching assistant. There he teaches composition with a focus on individual as well as group literacy. His focus of study is Rhetoric and Composition and he is primarily interested in the connections between protest music and political activism, with the early 2000s serving as a model that could apply today. Further research interests include Science Fiction – particularly the rhetorical construction of gender from an alien's perspective and the continued importance of clothing in human society. Originally from New Jersey he currently resides in Texas.



