De-centering Dewey: A Dialogue

Ellen Cushman, Michigan State University
Juan Guerra, University of Washington at Seattle
and Steve Parks, Syracuse University

In 2009, Reflections sponsored a panel titled "De-centering Dewey,"
at the Conference on College Composition and Communication.
The following statements reflect the comments of the program
participants, Ellen Cushman, Juan Guerra, and Steve Parks. A question
and answer period followed these remarks, which is also reproduced
below. Speaker comments have been edited for clarity.

Introduction
Steve Parks, Syracuse University

The title "De-centering Dewey" raises a series of questions. ……
Why do we need to de-center Dewey? Hasn't he been very
useful to us?

As service learning made its slow turn from being an administrative
initiative linked to issues of retention into a disciplinary emphasis
within composition, and, ultimately, into a larger social and political
effort, Dewey's work was a lever that allowed us to explain to others
what we were trying to accomplish. He was a very useful guy.

As community literacy began to push the boundaries of the its work,
moving into community publishing and community partnership, Dewey
gave us a sense of pragmatism, of politics, of how to think about class.
Once again, he was a very useful guy.

Community literacy, community partnerships, service learning, like myself, are now heading slowly towards middle-age. It's seems settled. We seem to have a sense of the "important issues." We seem to have a sense of what is the important work. And, I want to argue, that's exactly the moment when you want to step back and explore what got left behind along the way. What notions of community weren't integrated into our sense of community partnership? What ideas of politics were pushed aside as we took on a pragmatism? What heritages, ideas, ethnicities, and ways of being in the world were left out as aligned ourselves with Dewey's middle class politics of social change? So although we all benefit from Dewey, although we all might have found him very useful, it's time to look back and consider what we might want to add to our emergent tradition.

Today's panel is focused on that reconsideration. It's about trying to listen to voices and ideas that perhaps haven't been heard as the "service learning/community literacy" paradigm emerged. It's about re-opening the dialogue about the goals of our work. And to my way of thinking, I cannot imagine better people to listen to than Ellen Cushman and Juan Guerra, both of whom can help us understand the limitations of the models we have developed and the possibilities which are still out there. So I am very pleased to introduce Ellen Cushman, to whom I had promised technical support that did not emerge, and Juan Guerra, who thankfully has decided to rely on the somewhat more reliable technology of paper and ink.

Gadugi: A Cherokee Perspective of Working within Communities

Ellen Cushman, Cherokee Nation Sequoyah Commissioner, Associate Professor Michigan State University

Preface

I'd like to thank Steve for organizing this panel and Juan for agreeing to be on it. When Steve invited us onto this panel, our charge was to expand the Dewey-centric, theoretical foundation of so much community literacy knowledge work. Steve invited us to complicate Dewey's ideas by explaining how cultural ethics such as *gadugi* and *resepto* might elaborate on central tenets of community literacy research.

Both Juan and Steve delivered beautiful presentations that were compelling, well detailed, and thought provoking. My original talk was delivered extemporaneously and would have had a slideshow had not a small glitch prevented my showing it. I've incorporated some of the content of the slides here. I also decided to cut some of the points I made during the presentation in order to better demonstrate others. I tend to see presentations as a place to lay open a map of ideas, showing audiences what I hope are the high spots and grand vistas in the terrain of my mind. Essays in print allow me to walk audiences down well-groomed trails that represent a fraction of the total acreage I may have mapped in my talk. Splitting the difference for this paper, I hope to approximate the content of the talk with the pace of prose.

I'd like to talk to you a little bit today about the work that I've been doing over the last five years that relates to this Cherokee ethic of *gadugi*. *Gadugi* is a Cherokee word that means roughly "working with and for." *Gadugi* is a timeless ethic for Cherokees that was first documented in the 1800s. Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick (1965 and 1966) translated a number of lovely social documents written in Sequoyan, the Cherokee writing system. The documents included one from the Echota Sunday School, part of one of the many Cherokee Baptist Churches in Oklahoma. In the meeting minutes from the Echota Sunday School, for example, they find the Cherokees who attend this church were organizing a *gadugi* for that Sunday. They described the *gadugi* as "a group of men who join together to form a company, with rules and officers, for continued economic and social reciprocity," but also noted that these can be informal groups of unpaid workers "called together for a specific task in the interests of a private charity or community welfare" (Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick 1965, 75). And so this ethic of organizing work groups to address a pressing problem is a long-standing one in my tribe (I'm a citizen of the Cherokee Nation based in Oklahoma).

As a long-standing principle, *gadugi* was incorporated into the central mission of our Nation. In 2003, Principal Chad Smith gave his inaugural speech in which he talks about this ethic of *gadugi*. He had been speaking and working with Benny Smith, who is a former dean of Haskell Indian Nations University, a descendent of one of the most traditional stomp ground leaders, and brother of one of the most important medicine people in the tribe. Taking Benny's advice, Chief Smith made *gadugi* a central mission of the Nation.

> Four years ago, Benny Smith, at this very courthouse, admonished me to be a student of the Cherokee people… He also instructed us to build one fire. To build one fire is the image of *gadugi*, to come together and work for the benefit of our families, communities and nation. That one fire came across the Trail of Tears and in many

ways it still burns today…Our legacy is that we are a people who **face adversity, survive, adapt, prosper and excel** (emphasis his, Smith 2003).

So this private tribal ethic was written into the public mission statement for the political arm of the tribe. And what's so interesting about this ethic is that it seems to overlap in some ways with many of composition and rhetoric's key terms related to public engagement.

As I understand *gadugi*, it has at least three central themes to it, and these facets of *gadugi* correspond to central ideas in public engagement:

1. Kinship: civic duty and reciprocity;
2. Teaching and learning: capacity building;
3. Cyclic time: sustainability and accountability.

First is kinship—kinship has everything to do with blood, lineage, family, and the ways in which we identify ourselves as sister, brother, mother, father, and child. All of these roles have attached to them ethical responsibilities to account to our families and our peoples. Now I see that as being roughly equal to our understandings of civic duty and reciprocity. As scholars and teachers, we have responsibilities to our students and the community members we work with and from these responsibilities we receive benefits. So we might see the Cherokee idea of kinship as related to reciprocity, a foundational principle in many community literacy initiatives.

The second facet of *gadugi* is teaching and learning, and this is the process by which we work across generations to ensure that capacities are built. You see where I'm beginning to bleed it into public engagement terms, where capacities and knowledge are built for our communities and students. And Cherokees do this through a process of ongoing teaching and learning that is cross-generational. Everybody teaches and learns together at once.

When we do this, over time, our everyday practices build into traditions and institutions that support future generations: and we have a cyclic notion of time, so that knowledge from our elders is always present as we work toward preparing a future for the children who grow to be the adults passing on knowledge to their generations, and so on. The strengthening of our community's capacities comes back to our individual and family roots, back into how we organize our everyday lives. And this allows us to talk about sustainable efforts. This is how we, as a tribe, have been able to craft our identity and sustain this over incredible hardships and adversities. Because we act in the everyday in ways that are aligned and precise and careful, we're able to develop a sense of a whole, a sense of generations, working from this sense of cyclic time. And we might see these as akin to the terms sustainability and accountability, right? Because when one piece of this falls apart, we are held accountable to those who we did not serve.

To recap, we have those three parts again of the Cherokee ethic of *gadugi*: kinship, teaching and learning, and cyclic time. And all of these parts map on to ideas such as civic duty, capacity building, and sustainability and accountability. So let me tell you a little bit about how these corresponding notions have played into my work over the last few years. I've been trying to wed my research, teaching, and service, because I always ask myself, "How is this work helping somebody other than myself? For whom am I doing this work? Why is this important?" And then, ultimately, "How do I know that it's made any kind of difference?" And, this question is something that people interested in public engagement and community literacies, and sometimes in other areas of our field as well, ask themselves to make sure that they are holding themselves accountable, right? It's not just knowledge-making for knowledge-making efforts, at least where I'm concerned.

For the last five years I've been working with and in my tribe and with and in Michigan State University to make knowledge, and teach,

and write in ways that may benefit Cherokees and students both. Beginning in 2004, I worked with a professional writing class to develop some educational materials for the Cherokee Nation, and those are now available online through the Cherokee Nation website (http://www.cherokee.org/allotment). They asked us to write a history of Oklahoma that countered the history of the state's centennial that was being told by the state. And so we developed this online educational piece where we allowed other people's stories, especially from the Cherokee Nations, to help write the understanding of Oklahoma as the Red Person state, not necessarily the Sooner and Boomer state. The Cherokee Nation had asked us to do this, and they looked through everything that we did.

We worked with Richard Allen, the policy analyst and Tonya Williams, the webmaster there, and we got final blessing from the Chief. It wasn't always smooth going for the students or the Cherokee Nation, for instance, a student had created a digital video about stomp dances, and how they were still central to our tribal ethic, and we were told to delete it. We were told that it was inappropriate to write about, video, or photograph stomp dances. So we had a very good accountability check there, as painful as it was for this student to see hours of work not make it to final launch (Cushman and Green forthcoming).

In 2007, I was asked to teach about 55 high school and middle school students with the Cherokee Nation Youth Leadership Institute. We retraced the Trail of Tears, and for that I developed a history curriculum and some writing exercises. Since 2008, I was appointed as a Cherokee Nation Sequoyah Commissioner, which sounds real fancy. Cherokee scholars from around the country were appointed to this commission to help organize the State of Sequoyah conference, write papers and curricula, and together we've been hoping to develop national archives for the Cherokee Nation. In 2010, I taught argumentation and brief writing for 12 high school students in moot court for the Youth Leadership Law Institute. Our moot trial was held in the newly opened

Cherokee Nation Courthouse with the Cherokee Nation Attorney General, Diane Hammons presiding. These teaching experiences have honored me with the opportunity to be with youths, teens, language teachers, and educational leaders of the Cherokee Nation. Though it's not always possible to unite the courses Michigan State asks me to teach with the goals and needs of the Cherokee Nation, I do so when possible and teach with the educational leaders of the tribe as well.

I've tried to make my research relevant to the needs and issues of Cherokees as well and have just finished a book called "The Cherokee Syllabary: Writing Peoplehood and Perseverance." In it, I chronicle the evolution of the Cherokee syllabary to show how it actually encodes our linguistic and worldviews at once. I talk about this evolution in terms of a Peoplehood matrix (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003). The Peoplehood matrix looks at how an understanding of language, history, religion, and place all contribute to an American Indian epistemology. So Peoplehood is very central, Holm et al would say, to Native American studies in general. But it allows us to begin to understand how something like a writing system codifies the language, history, religion, and connections to place. I found that the Cherokee writing system does very important instrumental work and is symbolically important to Cherokee people. Each glyph actually codifies a piece of information; remember how I said one word is an entire sentence? Well, each glyph writes semantic, phonological, phonetic, and grammatical information at once. So it's not like writing with a letter, where a letter indicates sound; it's writing a worldview, where each character indicates a meaningful syllable. It works like a graphomorphic system, like Chinese characters, only without the thousands and thousands of characters needed, because it has the instrumental economy of matching one character to one syllable. Brilliant!

In this most recent example of *gadugi* as it applies to my work, I hope to use the results of my research on the Cherokee syllabary to address the problem the tribe has had in recent years of dwindling

numbers of speakers. Cherokee is an endangered language, and one key problem to English speakers learning it rests in the ways that the alphabet's instrumental and cultural logic blinds Cherokee L2 learners from understanding and learning the language. When Cherokee is transliterated (e.g. *ga-du-gi*), the ways in which the language and syllabary work become obscured and reduced to merely the character-sound level. The syllabary is actually a graphomorphic system that codifies meaning with every character. Given the ethic of *gadugi*, my efforts now turn to making this understanding clear to language learners by developing materials that facilitate their language and literacy learning.

So I was really excited to be asked by Steve to do this talk, because I was thinking of all the ways in which this cultural ethic of *gadugi* does seem to correspond to ethics and tenets of community engagement, but these overlaps only go so far. So caveats are in order, because academe works so differently than tribes, nations, cultures, and communities. As you know, we have epistemologies that are very Western, very individualistic.

Facets of *gadugi* that do not extend to ideas in public engagement:

1) Kinship includes lineage, blood, and family roots, identity, and representation of self (Cushman 2008) and runs contrary to practices of self-identification, i. e. "I am an Indian because I say I am;"
2) Teaching and learning can exclude the use of English, alphabetic literacy, and remediation of important traditions and several American paradigms such as individualism;
3) Cyclic time has no equivalent in Western thinking that sees time as linear.

You can begin to see where the tenets of *gadugi* do not parallel notions of community literacy based as these are on Western epistemologies.

Let me talk about just the first two of these to demonstrate the ways in which *gadugi* unfolds in quite different ways for Cherokees than it does in public engagement initiatives sponsored by universities.

If you begin to understand kinship as something related to lineage, blood, family, and identity, and representations of the self, all of these pieces are a whole for Cherokees and for other native peoples. But those things are usually set aside in academe where you can legally claim to be an Indian without showing any evidence of lineage, blood, family, and identity markers that tribes deem important (Cushman 2008). Cherokees find it odd, frustrating, and at times infuriating when scholars claim to be Cherokee but don't connect their research, teaching, or service with the needs or issues of any of the three federally recognized tribes; don't show any evidence of their lineage or family history; and don't seem to care that while they claim affiliation with the tribe, the tribe doesn't claim them. If there were any parallel in academe, it would be something like saying you graduated from Syracuse, but never attended a university or class there, and no one there would claim you as affiliated in any way to the university. Academic lineage doesn't involve blood ties, however, whereas connections to tribes and nations do.

Teaching and learning also unfold in different ways, especially with language preservation efforts. When Sequoyah developed the syllabary, he did so without any influence of the Roman alphabet whatsoever. I found two documents at the Thomas Gilcrease museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma that seem to be written by Sequoyah, in English. He did know English, even though all the history books say, no, he didn't know English, he always spoke with interpreters. He seems to have chosen to eschew English and alphabetic literacy as a political statement. And the genius of this system was written into each character that represents not just a sound unit, but semantic information as well. With every act of reading and writing Sequoyan, a uniquely Cherokee

worldview is brought forward through the language, enacting aspects of Peoplehood (Miller 2008).

This exclusion of the English language and Roman alphabet extend to the present day. In his interview of September 4, 2009, Dr. Neil Morton, Director of Education Services for the Cherokee Nation describes the ways that the Cherokee Nation's Immersion School is "taking the genius of Sequoyah into this century" in efforts to maintain Cherokee language learning. He credits the 1991 Cherokee National Language and Cultural Preservation Act signed by Chief Smith with the development of the plethora of educational initiatives currently undertaken by the nation, many of these relying on the genius of Sequoyan in multiple forms.[1] In these language learning efforts, Sequoyan and the Cherokee language is privileged before the alphabet and English whenever possible. In the Immersion School, that now has K-4 grades, educational materials are developed solely in Sequoyan and by grade 3 the children, all from English speaking homes, are able to read and write with the syllabary.

I've said all of this to leave us with questions that hopefully can be discussed a little bit more, such as: In what ways can outreach and should outreach and engagement initiatives take into account cultural frameworks of communities? How do we design studies and curricula to do so ethically, and carefully? And we do a lot of good work on that and thinking about that. If this work is to make a difference, then to whom does it make a difference? And how? And how do we effectively demonstrate this? How do we show people this makes a difference? (Grabill and Cushman 2010).

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Endnotes

1. The Cherokee Nation recognized the growing problem of language erosion, and in 1991, Chief Chadwick Smith signed legislation to address the problem. Under the "Cherokee Nation Language and Cultural Preservation Act" (Tahlequah, OK. LA-10-91, 1991), the political arm of the Nation was tasked to maintain Cherokee as a living language by making efforts to:

A. "Involve tribal members to the greatest extent possible in instruction in Cherokee language.

B. "Establish[ ] a permanent Cherokee Language Program within the Tribal Education Department…"

C. "Encourage the use of Cherokee language in both written and oral form to the fullest extent possible in public and business settings."

D. "Encourage creation and expansion of the number, kind, and amount of written materials in the Cherokee language" (702).

Transforming Margins into a Multiplicity of Centers: The Role of Transcultural Citizenship in a Discursive Democracy

Juan C. Guerra, University of Washington at Seattle

Steve and Ellen were talking about how middle age is creating some constraints for them. Well, I'm approaching retirement, so I have bigger constraints to deal with, and one of the biggest is my memory! I just don't have the memory I used to have. As a consequence, I'm old school, so I tend to write my presentations down because I want to have some control over the language I'm using. I just don't trust myself to go on and on and on and not say what I really want to say. So I'll be reading a paper.

Originally, we had decided we were going to have three speakers on the panel, and each of us would have about 20 minutes. So I was going to write a 20 minute paper. Then, because we decided to add a fourth speaker, who wasn't able to make it at the last minute, Steve, Ellen and I decided, "Well, we'll write twelve minute papers instead." At the very least, my reading won't be as overwhelming as it would have been otherwise.

By way of preface, I want to note that over the last twenty-plus years, I've been working in two areas: one of them is language and literacy, and the other is rhetoric and composition, especially the teaching of writing to first-year students. During the first phase of that particular period, I was working with Marcia Farr, who at the time was at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and she and I did extended

ethnographic studies of a group of Mexican immigrant families in Chicago's inner city. While I ended up spending nine years doing ethnographic work with those families, Farr persisted and spent fifteen years working with them. Farr recently wrote a book that I want to touch on in some detail in my talk because she highlights some issues that I addressed in my own work, but she really expands on it in ways that I think are very important.

In 2000 Steve Parks and Eli Goldblatt wrote an essay where they begin to challenge Writing Across the Curriculum because of its inherent limitations as a model. It's a useful model, an incredible model actually. We certainly don't want to get rid of it, but my colleague from the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, Michelle Hall Kells, and I do believe that it needs to be updated. It needs to be reconstituted in light of all that we've learned in the last thirty years. So for the last ten years, Michelle and I have been trying to and have begun to formulate and develop an alternative, an updated expansion of Writing Across the Curriculum, if you will, that she refers to as Writing across Communities. I'll be talking about that a little bit as well. As I read my paper, you'll see those two kinds of things coming together. At the end of my talk, I'm going to ad-lib for two or three more minutes and share a few closing remarks.

Before I read my paper, you should know that I modified the title a bit. As you know from the 4Cs conference program book, my original title was "When Margins Become Multiple Centers: The Role of Transcultural Citizenship in a Discursive Democracy." The new title for my talk is "Transforming Margins into a Multiplicity of Centers: The Role of Transcultural Citizenship in a Discursive Democracy." Once I read my paper, I think you'll see why I made the subtle changes that I did.

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Like many of our colleagues who never expected to find themselves in the academy, I grew up in a marginalized *Chicano/Mexicano*

barrio segregated from the centers of power in the larger south Texas community of which it was a part. At every step, the educational institution of that larger community *nos aislaban intencionalmente*. That is, at every turn, mainstream members of that larger community marked us as different and then made every effort to devalue that difference. When I walked into my first grade public school classroom as a monolingual Spanish speaker, my bilingual teacher—Mrs. Rosales—was prohibited by state law (a law that was on the books until 1986!) from using the native language we shared to educate us, much less to communicate with us. Along the way, a number of my *Chicano/Mexicano* peers and I—those of us who survived the cruel and unforgiving educational gauntlet designed to push us out of school or to disillusion us to the point where we would "choose" to drop out— found creative ways to make our way through the system and got our high school diplomas. This despite being told repeatedly in fiercely explicit terms that our families, our culture, our *barrio*, our language, our very selfhood, were inconsequential elements in their conception of teaching and learning. The litany of *golpes psicológicos y pedagógicos* that we experienced would have certainly broken us if our community had not encouraged us to develop the socio-cultural and discursive coping skills we would need to prevail.

And what was this dangerous cache of socio-cultural and discursive practices that my *Chicano/Mexicano* peers and I brought to school that our teachers were trained to ignore? In ethnographic work that Marcia Farr and I undertook together and separately over a period of 15 and 9 years, respectively, we identified a number of socio-cultural and discursive practices that adult *Mexicanos* co-residing in an inner city community in Chicago and two rural *ranchos* in Mexico passed on to their children in the context of their everyday lives. These practices are familiar to me because my own family has its roots in a similar socio-cultural and discursive context in Mexico. In my book *Close to Home: Oral and Literate Practices in a Transnational Mexicano Community*, I identified a particular way with words, a "highly valued 'secular ritual'

that many of the participants in our research project refer[red] to as
'*echar plática*.'" *Echar plática* describes intense forms of chatting that
highlight oral practices deeply grounded in a shared identity. While
I focused on three genres of *echar plática* in my own work—self-
oriented personal narratives, other-oriented personal narratives, and
propositional statements in which the narrator's point of view shifted
along a continuum between humor and seriousness, on the one hand,
and narration and exposition on the other—today, I would like to focus
on three ways of speaking among *Mexicanos* and *Mexicanas* that Farr
identified in her book, *Rancheros in Chicagoacán: Language and
Identity in a Transnational Community*.

In her work, Farr describes three powerful discourses that ideologically
inform *ranchero* language and identity. The style most evident among
members of this social network is *franqueza*, a way of speaking that
"emphasizes the characteristics of self-assertiveness and independence"
that evolved in Mexican frontier societies. As Farr notes, "honest,
candid, direct talk is highly valued among *rancheros*: it constructs a
person who is trustworthy and admirable, whose *palabra de honor* can
be relied upon." *Franqueza* reflects an egalitarian and liberal ideology
that values individual progress through hard work and entrepreneurial
effort, which Farr notes are key qualities of *ranchero* identity. This
identity is contrasted with that of Indian Mexicans, who, in the
ranchero view, are communally oriented. *Ranchero* men, women, and
children who enact this discourse generally "construct themselves as
authoritative, independent, and self-assertive in their interactions with
others, peppering their speech with frequent imperatives" (17). Like the
other two discourses I will describe in a moment, *franqueza* is at the
heart of all social deliberations among members of this community.

Respeto, the second way of speaking that Farr identifies, enacts
another *ranchero* language ideology that "calls for deference to
authority, according to age and gender hierarchies, as well as respect
for individual dignity." *Rancheros* who speak with respect to parents,

teachers, and other authoritative figures use linguistic and nonlinguistic behaviors designed to support the dignity or public face of both parties. *Respeto* demonstrates one's commitment to maintaining traditional boundaries based on gender, age, and familial relationship. Because these interactional rules are observed in both the family and the larger community, these culturally specific nuances of politeness are sometimes misunderstood or ignored in the United States, where people tend to move quickly to informality and the familiarity of first names in public contexts. As Farr notes, "this is probably why many students who descend from *ranchero* backgrounds in Mexico tend to enact themselves as deferential in classrooms yet as self-assertive and independent at home and in other contexts" (17).

Unlike *franqueza* and *respeto*, which reflect a commitment to the group's social order, *relajo* (a joking style) is clearly seen by *rancheros* as a discursive practice that intentionally promotes disorder and purposefully violates boundaries and normal rules for behavior and interaction. While *relajo* occurs primarily in intimate, informal contexts, it can also be enacted as a subversive reaction to the discipline and constraints one encounters at school, at work, or in other public contexts. As a language ideology, Farr notes, individuals who engage in *relajo* are perceived to be creative and clever verbal performers who in the process of challenging the status quo mischievously entertain and delight their immediate audiences. In the context of our panel today, *relajo* also promotes "a democratic leveling of participants while building solidarity, and particularly among women, consensus." As Farr puts it, "*relajo* allows a carnivalesque inversion of the normal social order by providing a space for humorous critique" (18).

So what do the discursive practices that members of the so-called marginalized communities that Ellen, Steve, and I have shared (or in Steve's case, will soon share) with you today have in common? First and foremost is their utter absence from the kinds of teaching and learning that take place in K-12 classrooms and in the academy.

Despite the fact that we purport to encourage the inclusion of different practices, what I refer to as the "learning incomes" ("Cultivating" 296) our students bring with them, the overriding institutional apparatus in K-12 schools and our colleges and universities is strictly framed and formulated to teach a particular discourse. Whether we call it Writing Across the Curriculum or Writing in the Disciplines, we explicitly invoke our primary goals and outcomes. Second, our practices restrict opportunities for students to enact different forms of citizenship, to imagine themselves able to participate in public spheres in deliberative ways that recognize, call for, and honor what David Fleming calls "situated citizenship."

I would like to spend my few remaining minutes speaking in a very condensed manner (I'll be glad to provide more details later during the Q & A or after the panel is over) about one aspect of the Writing Across Communities project that Michelle Hall Kells and I have developed over the last 10 years and that was implemented in September 2005 at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. In the spirit of calls by Steve Parks and Eli Goldblatt who have argued that "students and faculty [must be given opportunities to] see writing and reading in a wider social and intellectual context than the college curriculum" (586), what Kells describes as a Writing Across Communities approach is a critique and an effort to extend the reach of Writing Across the Curriculum approaches to the teaching and learning of writing. Because of time constraints, let me cut to the chase and declare that the ultimate goal of our project is to cultivate what I call transcultural citizenship among students who come from marginalized communities so that they can actively and productively participate and engage others in deliberations that take place in what John Dryzek calls a discursive democracy. Of the litany of concepts that Kells and I have described at length in publications and other conference presentations—among them *Writing Across Communities, the critical practice of transcultural repositioning, transcultural literacies, transcultural citizenship, and discursive democracy*—let me briefly touch on the next to last item.

In our minds, Writing Across Communities is a space with a multiplicity of nodes or sites—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conception of a rhizome comes to mind here—where students can both enact the discursive practices they bring with them and develop a complementary set of rhetorical practices in writing classrooms to call on while in school, but especially after they leave school. To become transcultural citizens, our students must first develop the metawareness that comes from knowing that discourse operates in very different ways across the varied communities to which they belong. In this respect, the primary goal of Writing Across Communities is fairly straightforward: If we frame the rhetorical, literacy, and discursive practices that we want students to develop in the context of a Writing Across Communities approach, we are more likely to remind ourselves and our students that our varied ways with words do indeed intersect in ways that make it possible for us to traffic in an array of dialects and registers. We are also more likely to keep students engaged long enough for them to discover the consequences of becoming double agents who are willing and able to engage in deliberative or discursive practices that reflect the sociopolitical values and beliefs we all profess to honor.

It's clear that members of this panel firmly believe that we need to think of the broader spaces in which students learn and use what they've learned as metaphorically informed, but not by a tree with a deeply rooted and dominant core with the multiplicity of communities we've described as auxiliary elements connected to an all powerful and life-giving core. Unlike a tree, as Deleuze and Guattari note, "a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. . . There is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community" (9). "Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome," Deleuze and Guattari

conclude, "is that it always has multiple entryways" (10). The question for all of us, then, is: When will we finally stop talking about and start doing something in a concerted and comprehensive manner to develop these multiple entryways for students from the communities we have described who bring with them as much, if not more, than they find in our classrooms?

As a post-script, one of the things I'd like to have you keep in mind is Deleuze and Guattari's description of a rhizome. In your mind, you can obviously imagine a rhizome, which has several nodes or points connected with lines, but there's no center. There's no hub that they all connect to. One very interesting thing Deleuze and Guattari say, I think, is that it's more important to focus on the lines than on the nodes. What we tend to do, of course, is we tend to focus, as the notion of situated citizenship suggests, we tend to think of a student as situated in a particular place, and we conceptualize that student as having to negotiate that space. What Deleuze and Guattarie argue, what I'm suggesting as well, is that the notion of transcultural citizenship for me, the reason I like that term, is because of the embedded notion of "trans," of moving across cultures, which forces us to really focus on those lines.

In the end, it's really, I think, what happens when students are on those lines, so to speak, that becomes important in trying to understand how they will negotiate a space once they get to it. A lot of stuff happens when we're on those lines on our way to one of those nodes. This is why students face the burden and task of negotiating and figuring out, anticipating what's going to be the discursive practice that they will have to call on. They think about their own practices, from their communities, as well as from what they've learned in school, and then in a sense intervene in that setting, and become engaged citizens. So, unless we begin to think of those moments, while they're travelling that

line, and anticipate the kinds of resources they'll need to better enact a particular kind of citizenship once they get to a node, then, of course, we, I think, are missing the point.

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Organizing Against Your Own Interests: Universities and Working-Class Partnerships

Steve Parks, Syracuse University

Note: With the exception of small clarifying remarks, the following represents my talk as presented from notes at the panel.

I'm going to talk about working-class politics and working-class literacy. So it's probably important to note that whenever you come to "C's," you are reminded of all the folks who aren't here. The adjunct faculty who can't afford to attend, the full-time faculty who are facing their low days and can't afford to attend, the grad students whose travel funds are being capped, or the graduate students who are dropping out of graduate school because they can't afford to it anymore.

It's also important, I think, to note the ways in which that issue of class is infected by issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. And that while we're re-mixing the field, the theme of this C's conference, a lot of people are the same people, just in different positions. Which I think goes a little bit to what Juan was talking about. Those issues of who's here, who's not, who's allowed to speak, who do we listen to, are all present in issues of community partnership, community literacy, community publishing.

I would like to start my presentation by reading a poem by someone who couldn't be here today, and then I would like to talk a little bit about that poem. The poem is by Olive Rogers, and it's called "One I Was a Washing Machine."

Once I was a washing machine.
Or was I a cooker? I'm not really sure.
I think I alternated every other day.

One thing is certain -
I needed very little maintenance.
When did I stop being a washing machine?
Well you know, that's a fine question.
I believe it was when I realized
that when my parts wore out
they could not be replaced.
But I, as a whole, could.

Not that I left my mechanical age unscathed.
Oh no. There are scars I bear to this day.
How my joint aches when it rains.
They tell me it's the wear and tear or rust.
I believe the answer is to keep oneself well oiled.

Yes, I used to be a washing machine/cooker,
But I'm liberated now.
Well, I will be,
Once I've washed all those filthy socks and underpants
And cooked the evening meal for six hungry people.

That poem was written by a member of a Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP). The FWWCP began about thirty years ago in the United Kingdom. It was part of a moment that followed worker education programs in the 1950's and 1960's, when all over the country, working-class residents began to sit down and write history, fiction, stories, and autobiographies. In what must have seemed a sudden or spontaneous "happening," over the space of three to five years, working class writing groups developed everywhere – in pubs,

in recreation centers, senior citizen homes, and mental health facilities – and represented diverse demographics of the working class, such as Caribbean, Pakistani, Gay/Lesbian, Mental Health, and Women's writing groups. With the invention of the mimeograph machine, these began to reproduce their work, taking it to go farmer's markets and street corners, selling their books for twenty pence, fifteen pence, or five pence. They would knock neighbor's and sell them. Over the course of time, these working class writers either sold or distributed close to two million books all across the country.

Eventually this network of writing groups formed into the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers – the group from which Olive Rogers poem emerged. The FWWCP began to argue that these writers represented a working-class aesthetic that that should be represented in the "arts" as it were. So the FWWCP applied for a grant to the British Arts Council arguing they represented a new literary writers' movement. That Vivian Usherwood, a fourteen year old boy in London, who wrote a book of poetry that sold tens of thousand copies, just in his little neighborhood of London, was an important writer. They also noted that in addition to writers, the FWWCP had all these readers – millions of readers, in fact.

The British Arts Council receives their application and to paraphrase their response,, "We have read your application, and we've decided your writers' movement has *no literary merit* (their actual words). So we're not going to give you any money, and really the world doesn't need more writers. It needs good writers. So you guys should all just read some of the stuff that we're giving awards to." Not a very welcoming response to say the least. So there was a moment in the FWWCP when they're like, "Well, you know, we tried to align ourselves with the middle class, it didn't go. What do we do now?" And so there began to be alternative moments/strategies. And it's one of those moments that occurred in Brighton, England, that I now want to

focus on. (For a full accounting of the development of the FWWCP and its battle with the British Arts Council, see Morley/Worpole.)

Brighton is a beach town in southern England. It's not unlike Atlantic City, except it's smaller and maybe more quaint. During the period I'm discussing, Brighton was attempting to gentrify itself. They were taking these classic old buildings and trying to turn them into hotels, taking former community centers and trying to make them into private developments. There were all these movements that were slowly pushing the working class further off the beach and driving all the tourists away from the small working-class businesses into beachfront tourist traps. So what did the working class do? They began to write memoirs. They began to write poems. They began to circulate these writings among their community. They also created maps. They would take these histories within the stories being written and they would make an alternative map to drive people away from beach and towards a local restaurant that's been there a hundred years. They would argue "Isn't that more interesting? Isn't that more what you want?" And as they began to develop a sense of a working-class common consciousness, as they developed that collective voice, they began to argue back against the developer, against the community council, and eventually they won.

And one of the lessons I think from these two stories is that when you're doing working-class politics, there is a reason and purpose at certain moments to align with the middle class, ala Dewey. But sometimes there's a reason and a purpose to organize the working class in their own interests, de-centering Dewey's framework, and see yourself as in a power struggle with folks who want to take your land, as it were.

That is, I am persuaded by Cornell West's discussion of Dewey in *The Evasion of Philosphy*, that Dewey aligned pragmatism with the middle class. And one of the things I at least want to pose as a question for

later discussion, is what extent have we taken community partnership models, service learning models, and aligned them with middle class values? And when you think of Brighton, what might that tell us about a different sort of alignment?

I want to read a second poem, once again from someone who could not be here. And this poem is by Linda Campbell, who's a program coordinator of elderly services at the Syracuse Housing Authority. It was written probably six to seven years ago. It's called "Working Class Blues."

> God, country, family, friends,
> Where are we when our jobs come to an end?
> We work hard all our lives for working pay,
> When jobs disappear, who among us can say?
> Dreams evaporate as though never there,
> Home foreclosed as we sit and stare.
> No sense of worth, no job, no job,
> No sense of self. Where is God?
> Who will take care of our family that we pledged and sweated to do?
> Who will take care of us when we're scared through and through?
> I hear the same crying any number of ways,
> Many workers who count and count the days.
> Uncertainty has taken a weighty toll.
> No work, no welfare, to charity at all.
> "We'll make it," we say. How could we not?
> We come from the working class, how can we stop?
> No sense of worth, no job, no job,
> No sense of self. Where is God?
> I know my God. I will find a job.

That poem was written as part of a two-year project, sponsored by the Syracuse Writing program and *unseenamerica*, a national project

sponsored by SEIU 1199, which supported about 10 labor union members forming a writing group. Originally, the group was to write about their jobs, but with employment being so wrapped up in life, they soon moved to other topics. During the course of this project, my undergraduate writing classes would also sit down with the labor writing group. Both the workers and the students also flew over to England, to meet the FWWCP writers and share their work. FWWCP members also came to Syracuse. Eventually this collaboration produced one book published by Syracuse University Press, called *Working* and a second called *Pro(se)letariets*. (For a full accounting of this project, see Parks/Pollard, 2010.)

Now there's one way to say that that is actually a very solid model of community partnership. Community voices in the Syracuse that were not being heard found an audience. Students, who might have a narrow sense of who to "listen to," learned to hear different voices, that they learned a broader definition of the term "intellectual." You could almost say the project created a creative democracy, to invoke a Deweyian term. There was a sense that everyone involved were talking equally to each other. There was a sense that everybody was listening.

Of course, nobody found a job.

Nothing actually changed for the workers involved in this project. Nor did anything actually change in Syracuse University – these book sdidn't suddenly cause an increase in working class rights in the city or on the campus. So as I began to think that although we created a creative democracy, but we didn't create a democracy. We didn't put the pieces in place that push against power and actually increase economic rights. I began to think we needed to think about writing differently. In his talk, Juan Guerra invoked my article "Writing Beyond the Curriculum." In some ways, the *Working* book project was a *WBC model* – WBC, Writing Beyond the Curriculum. Today, though, I want to invoke three different letters – CBA – Community Benefits Agreement. For folks who don't know what a Community

Benefit Agreement is, it's an agreement between a community and a developer to ensure that that developer hires local contractors and provides resources to the community, such as a park or funding for literacy initiatives. The idea is that the community is empowered to force the developer to do right by the folks who live in the effected neighborhood.

Here I return to Linda Campbell's poem, "Working Class Blues," as a call to action. Not action through curricular reform, which was what WBC was about, but actual action for the folks who are writing in the community. So over the past four months, roughly, I've been involved in a Community Research Fellows project where ten students are going door-to-door in a local Syracuse community in the midst of a redevelopment project. They are asking the neighbors, "What do you want your community to be? What do you imagine? What is missing in your community? If you had a chance to bargain, what would you bargain for?" As with earlier projects, I expect that publications, such as newsletters, posters, books, will follow. Such work will continue to build that cultural solidarity.

Unlike the first project, however, this work is also aligned with the Syracuse Alliance for a New Economy. Their role is to take such work and help the community organize as an independent voice to work with the developer to insure the "community benefits" from the proposed construction and revitalization efforts.

And this is where it gets interesting. In this case, my university is helping to sponsor the development. When I was doing my two-year project, my students and community partners went to London. Writers came from London to Syracuse. We published a book, classes. Funding was readily available. It was very harmonious. In this case, the university has promised to work with residents to rebuild their community, pumping 54 million dollars into the area. So here are my students working residents and SANE to create a community

movement that conceivably would have a role in how the developer makes decisions. In the first set of alignments, the student/labor writing groups, I think, there was clearly a middle-class project. The workers learned to write a bit; the students got a more diversity-driven idea of the future. It was all very sort of tidy and nice. Important, but tidy and nice. You work with residents to develop an independent organization, you get a call from powerful folks from the university, the foundation world, from the business world, wanting to meet with you.

Let me be clear, here. When the project started, I didn't imagine such a reaction. Also, the calls were not attempts to stifle the students or the project. The calls represented the concern raised when "community partnership" work touches upon real class interests, real dollars. The calls represented the fundamental question of what it means for a university to align with working-class interests and the attendant tensions that ripple across such a moment as different models proliferate. For everyone involved imagines themselves as aligned with the community and its residents – what that means, however, is the fundamental question we are all exploring. It is the fundamental question of whether "community partnerships" can support working class interests around issues not just of literacy, but of labor and community rights. It's beyond "creative democracy;" it's economic democracy.

I don't know how this project will end. It could go really bad. I'm hoping not, but it could. But I think the sheer fact that ten students knocking on doors in a seventeen-block area causes such a reaction, on so many different levels, shows that what it means to be aligned with a different set of interests. And my sense is that if we're really talking about Writing Beyond the Curriculum, and if we're talking about supporting folks who typically don't get in to our classrooms, it involves doing this type of work too. Maybe this isn't pedagogy in a strict sense, but certainly my students are learning a lot about writing, public sphere and writing.

And I just want to return to my first comment about the folks who aren't here at this conference. Those who can't afford to attend C's. It strikes me that writing programs themselves would not be a bad place to think about trying to do a community benefits agreement, an agreement where you would work with the community to insure a common set of educational/labor values. Common values that would lead the local community, who often are the "workers" at a university, to say "I don't want my students taught by people who are economically exploited. When you do your budget cuts, I don't want the cuts focused on those already most exploited." Or when the city is cutting back essential human services, the university writing program faculty might make similar arguments. It strikes me that maybe we need to rethink what we mean by "writing beyond the curriculum," what we mean by an activist WPA, what we mean by all these terms.

And I think it means we align ourselves with the working class, which would entail a whole different disciplinary identity.

But do we really want to de-center Dewey to make this happen?

With that question, I'd like to open up the session to questions from the audience.

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Audience Response

Amber: This is for Steve, but feel free to jump in, of course. You keep talking about it as Dewey and kind of middle-class alignment, which I agree with, and I'm wondering if you see the door-to-door work that your students are doing as also Deweyian, aligning more with the hands-on and expansive nature of education that he advocates for.

Steve: These are the hard questions she asked in my graduate seminar as well. I think any particular tactic can be embedded in any strategic model. So that the tactic of door-to-door can serve the purposes of the Christian Right organizing against abortion or knocking door-to-door can serve a different paradigm and a different set of interests. So I would say that since this model is connected to SANE, it's connected to the CBA, it does change the alignment in a sense. It's more aligned with the working class interests than my previous project in the sense it's aligned with the actual economic interests of the non-employed class of the community. Now CBAs themselves are a result of a neo-liberal political moment where unions aren't quite strong enough and need to broaden their alliances with non-union members, so it's not a clean moment of "good unions, bad developer," but more a moment of trying to find common ground in the self-articulate interests of the community residents. But since I don't believe in purity anyway, I'm not upset by this fact.

Arlene: Hi, thank you all for the presentation. I'm thinking out loud, which is always dangerous, but one of the things that you posed was that there are somewhat artificial boundaries between the university

and the town outside. And where I teach, the town is very much a part of the university. It is a community college that is becoming four-year college and that is supporting people who are first-generation college students. So they are receiving it as something that must belong to them. They are the working class or one of the working class. I'm fascinated by the projects and the openness to all the different classes happening in academia. And as I think about this out loud, I'm wondering, what other things happen for both participants, the kind of binary participants, people who are in the community and people who are in the schools, that breaks down this notion of "us" and "them," if that makes sense.

Juan: Obviously in terms of what I'm talking about, being at the University of Washington in Seattle, and having spent 20 years at the University of Illinois in Chicago, I'm talking about these huge institutions that are unfortunately clearly divided from their communities. University of Illinois, Chicago, for example, when I started there in '68, literally had a wall surrounding the campus, and everything outside the campus was black and poor. And it took them 30 years to finally tear that wall down. So finally they got rid of the wall, but there are still other problems there. I guess one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that projects like the ones we're describing, and in my case "Writing Across Communities," is not simply for research in institutions, and we're fortunate in that Michelle Hall Kells, and her colleagues in the English department at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, instituted and implemented a Writing Across Communities project at the University of New Mexico in 2005, so this is the fifth year. And it has picked up speed, and now the state wants it to be a state-wide program that will be implemented in community colleges as well, across all levels of education, because they are persuaded that the argument for New Mexico, one of the poorest states in the country, needs a way to address these issues in a fundamental sense. And so it's possible, but clearly there are boundaries and there are borders. That's why I think

the notion of lines becomes important again. We keep just locating ourselves and situating ourselves in a particular space. We forget about the lines that connect us one to the other and what happens when we're traversing those spaces.

Ellen: We're really fortunate in Michigan State to have a number of administrators at the very top levels who take the land grant mission of the university very seriously. And though we have a tremendous amount of problems with adjunct labor, and problems in our writing courses, and other things such as that, the university administrators actually have put in place a number of mechanisms to help us do work that aligns with communities in various ways. And to some extent professors are trying to meet them halfway and take advantage of those resources. But then there are also some professors who are very wedded to their disciplinary boundaries. A metaphor that they talk about a lot resonates with Juan's, about trees and rhizomes, is that at the administrative level, they're anti-silo, but at the disciplinary level, especially in the really traditional disciplines, they're not interested in making those connections. So they don't necessarily reward work that professors would do. So we kind of broke off and developed out own department of writing and rhetoric. That actually has helped out quite a bit. The residential College of Arts and Letters, actually, has developed a number of initiatives as well. It was sanctioned by the Provost, who wanted to see arts and humanities do something much more engaged and much more related to student teaching. So there are possibilities if we can articulate, but we have to have a vertical as well as a lateral, together at once.

Question: I really appreciate your work, and really respect you, and I'm curious as to how we use this ethical practice? I'm trying to push the boundaries of theory here.

Ellen: I'm not sure it would be a principle that would readily apply easily to the kinds of work that we do theoretically, or in terms of

our everyday work because it's such a tribal ethic. It does have overlaps and resonates with some of the ideas that we're using here, but there are many important distinctions that must be honored and maintained. When I'm in Tahlequah, it just doesn't abide. I speak very differently in Tahlequah than I do here. And so what my job is to mediate that back and forth, all the time. The emic, the etic, the outsider and the insider. And so I don't know that is necessarily applies wholeheartedly, but what I think is important is finding the lines, and then asking students to bridge it into their own knowledge-making practices. And that actually was a really good point brought up in another article in a special issue of Reflections written by Terese Guinsatao Monberg about students sitting within their own communities to develop the epistemological frameworks for themselves, to help them make sense of the institutions and the epistemologies in institutions, so that they can see as they travel from one rhizomatic place to another.

Long answer.

Chris: I have students work in a neighborhood that's gentrifying. It's actually at such a point in the gentrification process, a process we want to stop, that a lot of people already left. And so my question has to deal with the whole idea of organizing students, and working with students to kind of go door-to-door. Is there a danger that students take on the role of the vanguard? In other words, they become the leaders of that struggle, or is there a danger of that perception happening. And if there is that danger of that perception happening, is that necessarily a bad thing, given that in the community I'm working in, there's such a sense of hopelessness already on the part of the residents that are there? There's been a long history of gentrification going on for decades now. And I guess it's my feeling of hopelessness, but it's like, "Well we have these students!" And so my impulse is to say, well, let's organize the students to kind of be the vanguard and be the leaders of that struggle, but of course understand

that people have problems with that. And so it's a dilemma of sorts, and I'd just be curious to hear what your responses are.

Steve: I would say, not to be too blunt, but I don't see any way students can be the vanguard of a community that they're not going to live in for significant amounts of time. And I also don't think the student label integrates them into the community in a way that's significant or sustained. When I was saying our students go door-to-door, what we've actually done is we've worked with the community to find long-term residents, and they go door-to-door with a long-term resident. And as part of that, we recruited the students that all had to speak Spanish, because it's a diverse neighborhood. So that in fact, what happens is the long-term resident knocks on the door, asks some of the questions, the students ask some of the questions, and that's sort of the model. I also think that it's wrong to teach students that they are the vanguard. I think…

Chris: There is that perception, that comes from where people start seeing them that way, so we have to actually work actively to counteract that.

Steve: Yeah, I agree with that. And that's why we have community members with them.

Ellen: Well real quickly, I was thinking about teaching and learning models, and the ways of getting the perspective of our elders and of our kids, of everybody, so that nobody does seem like the vanguard coming out there. But it is a model of learning that Suzy Rumsey describes in Heritage Literacy, where people begin to learn generationally, across elders and parents and youths, about the kinds of meaning making that are important to each generation. And then that becomes the purpose, that becomes the goal, and it's driven together at once, so that it's not a purpose or a goal that's initiated at the university level, or even at, you know, the vanguard level of a really good academic idea. Do you know what I mean?

Question: Ellen, you had mentioned the need for accountability. And there are many out there that argue that these kinds of initiatives pull away from real classroom writing. I was curious if you had proof if there was meaning in the outcomes of your course and in what ways you prove that.

Ellen: Well, that is a fabulous question. It's a fabulous question. And I'm going to credit my colleagues because they have much more robust ways of demonstrating through many different kinds of evidence, both quantitative and qualitatively, the ways in which our work is meaningful. And so it's not just through multiple displays of our students' work and multiple public presentations, and getting publics into our classrooms to do evaluations of our students and have them help us write that into reports that we then put forward. And there are actually, if you go to Kairos, a number of those particular institutional artifacts that we just give out to people. I have to tell you it was mostly Bill Hart-Davidson, Danielle Devoss, and Jeffrey Grabill that have worked so hard to develop those models of institutional assessment that really answer that question perfectly. And I've learned so much from them, because what you're doing is translating your work for multiple audiences. You're showing how it's meaningful to everybody,and how it makes a difference to everybody. But we don't have a really good way of developing that language. Thank you for asking that question.

Steve: So we're out of time, but a couple quick announcements, but I want to take a moment and thank Ellen and Juan for participating in this session.