

**Where the Roads Meet:
Intersecting Perspectives on
Community Literacy**

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None of us ever really work alone, and I am grateful to everyone who has helped me learn the lessons reported in these pages. I am lucky to have a supportive, understanding, and patient committee of advisors who helped me bring these pages into being. Beyond these pages, I learn every day from my children, who teach things I couldn't have begun to imagine I needed to know. And none of what I've done in or out of these pages would be possible without my mom and my husband, who have survived this project with me, and kept me going when I was sure it would never end. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This project is an exploration of the term *community literacy* from multiple perspectives including academic research, local expertise, and personal experience. Utilizing a conceptual and organizational framework based on the model of popular education, this inquiry draws on data gathered from published literature, qualitative interviews, and personal narrative. Juxtaposing these viewpoints creates an enriched foundation for planning future action and responds to calls to include people from within and beyond academic contexts in work that they collaboratively define. This report explores the patterns that emerge from the way that the people represented here describe their experiences related to community literacy.

Patterns that emerge from this data suggest that the way that people define themselves and others and the places where they work are the foundation for the action they are able take together. Local experts who participated in this study suggest that people can and should be co-authors of their communities by practicing community literacy to discern opportunities to participate. These conclusions are considered in relation to a variety of arenas where they might be put into action, from rhetorical theory to cultural action.

PREFACE

My mother's father was one of the wisest people I've ever known, and he refused to be called grandpa. He insisted on the title: The Ramrod, who's rough and tough and not a wimp. He was a born philosopher and a prolific writer. In many of my memories of him, he's sitting in his desk chair, tipped back, "analyzing" as he'd say, studying and making notes or just thinking. I remember the creak as that chair moved. Even when I was young, he gave me the respect to discuss things with me seriously, which as a young woman who took myself very seriously, was a dear honor. But he had trouble taking himself seriously sometimes, or believing that other people would, despite the depth of his research and knowledge or the clarity of his insight, because he only went to school through the eighth grade. It bothered him.

I remember one day: it was early fall, near the beginning of the school year, and he asked me to tell him what I was learning in school. I took this to heart. I sat him down on the porch swing, pulled out my sixth-grade geography text book, and began to tell him about the shape of the world. He threw his hands up, laughing, and walked away. I was baffled, though I had an inkling that I'd somehow offended him. I'd only meant to help. Such hubris. I was 11.

That memory has recurred to me as I've worked on this project. It's easy to project that same well-meaning condescension when we get involved with "work in communities," I think. We want to help, to make things better for the people we reach out to. We want to empower people. But as one popular education facilitator pointed out to a class of do-gooders, nobody wants to "be empowered." People have their own power. This isn't something that can be given to a person. But we all maneuver obstacles differently, depending on the leverage we have available.

Ramrod taught me about leverage. He was not a large man, but even at nearly 70 years old he could move objects many times his weight by placing the right handle in the right place. This project is about leveraging what people already know. Ramrod was skeptical of "educated idiots," but deferential to those who he saw as more knowledgeable than himself in many matters. Among many memorable bits of wisdom he shared, he often reminded me that "two minds create a third." In this work, I hope I've honored that advice and example by trying to build a common ground of knowledge with others.

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CHAPTER I BACKGROUND: *THE APPROACH*

Inventing the University / Inventing the Community

Some words seem made for academics. Like juxtapose. Every paper I wrote as an undergraduate containing the word juxtapose earned an A. Anyone who's ever attended a graduate student department mixer knows you ought to have a pocketful of those kinds of words. In our community built around words we've got some doozies to toss about: hegemony, praxis, problematize, reification, pedagogy, and one that makes me just a bit nauseated each time I hear it: undergird. But these words and others give us a way of talking together about things we think are important, like words.

It makes sense that we have a shared vocabulary. All communities do, and we have to learn the talk before we can join the conversation. Further yet, we have to learn who the important players are, so we can drop the right names, announce our allegiances, establish our lineage. We do this in any community. As a kid, when my family returned, after moving away, to the county where I've spent most of my life, there were three questions everyone asked that I never had satisfactory answers for: "Who're you kin to? Where do you go to church? What's your daddy do?" At that all-important first set of graduate school receptions, I was equally taken aback when asked to serve up a bite-sized blurb of my position, background and interest in a little introductory nugget to each new person I met. I was sure that my clumsy responses in both scenarios marked me as an outsider, made it clear that I wasn't from "round here."

As in any community, learning the language and the key players is part of the price of entrance. For the first few weeks that initial semester in graduate school, I furtively scribbled down words to look up so I wouldn't misuse or mispronounce a password and reveal myself as the interloper I felt I was, to be humiliatingly banished forever from the prestigious halls of higher learning. I had a moment of panic when I realized that though I had entered a program to study rhetoric, I didn't feel I had a fixed understanding of exactly what that meant. I started asking people what they thought it meant, even though I knew I might be giving away my ignorance. I asked students in and out of the department, professors, other people I knew. I never got the same answer twice. I was fascinated. I did a corpus-based collocation study to see what sorts of words were generally associated with the term, what vocabulary rhetoric hung around with. I consulted Plato and Aristotle to see how the ancients weighed in on the topic. I came away with a multifaceted picture that didn't settle the matter for me: I didn't feel as though I had a definition of rhetoric that was, well... definitive. But I also didn't believe that anyone who claimed to have it nailed down completely knew what the heck they were talking about. And I came away with the belief that it is worthwhile to pause and consider just what we mean when we use our words.

It's fruitful to trace the contours of the foundations that... *girk*... undergird these terms we sometimes take for granted.

The inverse is also true. Sometimes we have a complex set of expectations, wishes, or interests to which it's difficult to put a term. As one participant in this study put it, it's really tough to look up a word in reverse: "It's like dammit, 'I know what this is. . . that I'm trying to say.' There's actually a technical name... and if you're looking for that particular point, it has a name and that's what you're trying to arrive at." For me, encountering the term *community literacy* felt like a key turning in a lock. I was studying ways that words work in school, but I also wanted to understand the work that words could do outside of school. As a keyword, "community literacy" cast a wide net, representing to me a web of ideas and work concerned with ways that people use words together across different contexts.

Community literacy researchers raise questions about how we ought to talk about this work that takes place across different contexts as well as how we ought to go about conducting it. There are many ways to answer these calls to critically examine the ways that we talk about community and literacy and to do work that is just and genuinely inclusive. If we reflect critically on these choices, we can try to construct ways of working that uphold our best ideas for what should and could be. Just as David Bartholomae described in his "Inventing the University," my experience as a student approaching a new discourse required the difficult task of adapting to a way of communicating and interacting that was unfamiliar. Approaching unfamiliar territory beyond the walls of the university requires the same sort of inventive action. The way we identify ourselves, others, and the places where we come together is the foundation of what we are able to do together.

This study begins with my identification of myself as a student, as an ordinary, everyday person, and with my hope to work among other real equally-unequal people who hope to do good work in the places we live. As an everyday person with identities both inside and outside of the university, my perspective and experience bridges those different contexts, as is the case for everyone who moves in, around, and through the worlds of college and what Anne Ruggles Gere calls the "extracurriculum" (38). We all have identities that draw us all the time across these boundaries between contexts which require different things of us. As Eli Goldblatt points out in *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*, "we need a more comprehensive theoretical model of the postsecondary literacy environment and that will take many hands to assemble" (9). The selection of whose hands to put to work, then, will influence the ways that those calls get answered, and help determine who gets to shape what we know about community and literacy. With Goldblatt, my interest in community literacy has some personal stake. I am personally called because I live *here*, and I've chosen to take my lead from others who share this space, both

intellectually and tangibly; these are the experts to whom I've looked to lend a hand in my efforts to learn community literacy. The hybrid community this project calls into being is the site where I hope to engage a curriculum drawn from what people know about community literacy in different contexts in which I move.

This project is an attempt to learn in a particular way about a term that has significance across different contexts. While in academic terms *community literacy* represents an interest in crossing boundaries for the purpose of doing good work beyond school, all of the people in the places where that work happens have ideas about what community literacy means. Which community gets to define the terms of community literacy work? This project aims to imagine what that work might look like when different perspectives are taken into account. To accomplish this, this inquiry balances academic definitions of community literacy with perspectives drawn from the experiences of people who live in the place where I live and hope to work.

Popular education, another hybrid term (like community literacy), offers a way of leveraging people's experiences as a source of knowledge and expertise while accommodating identities in and out of school. While this term usually applies to participatory research and education projects, in this case it offers a useful conceptual and organizational framework for both the process and presentation of this project. However, while the format of this report, along with its methodology and philosophy, reflect the trajectory of "The Popular Education Spiral" (figure 1) employed by the Highlander Research and Education Center, this model offers not a strictly linear set of steps to follow but rather a set of interrelated elements that shape the way this work is conducted: "The Call," "Start with the Experiences of the Participants," "Look for Patterns," "Add New Information," "Practice Skills and Plan for Action," "Equalize Power Relationships" and "Apply in Action." These components both highlight the overarching priorities for this project and reflect the process of learning that has taken place through the course of this research.

The popular education spiral diagrams a progressive and recursive process, so rather than representing *the* spiral, this project actually represents many turns of the spiral, many calls, many ways of contextualizing the patterns of people's experiences, many new questions, many ways of finding and sharing common ground. In this way, the process of inquiry represented here echoes other creative processes, like composition, for example, as well as the experience of learning. This report might be called a community literacy narrative, because it tells a story of my experience learning community literacy, but the story is not mine alone, and this report does not represent its end; like the spiral, this work continues.

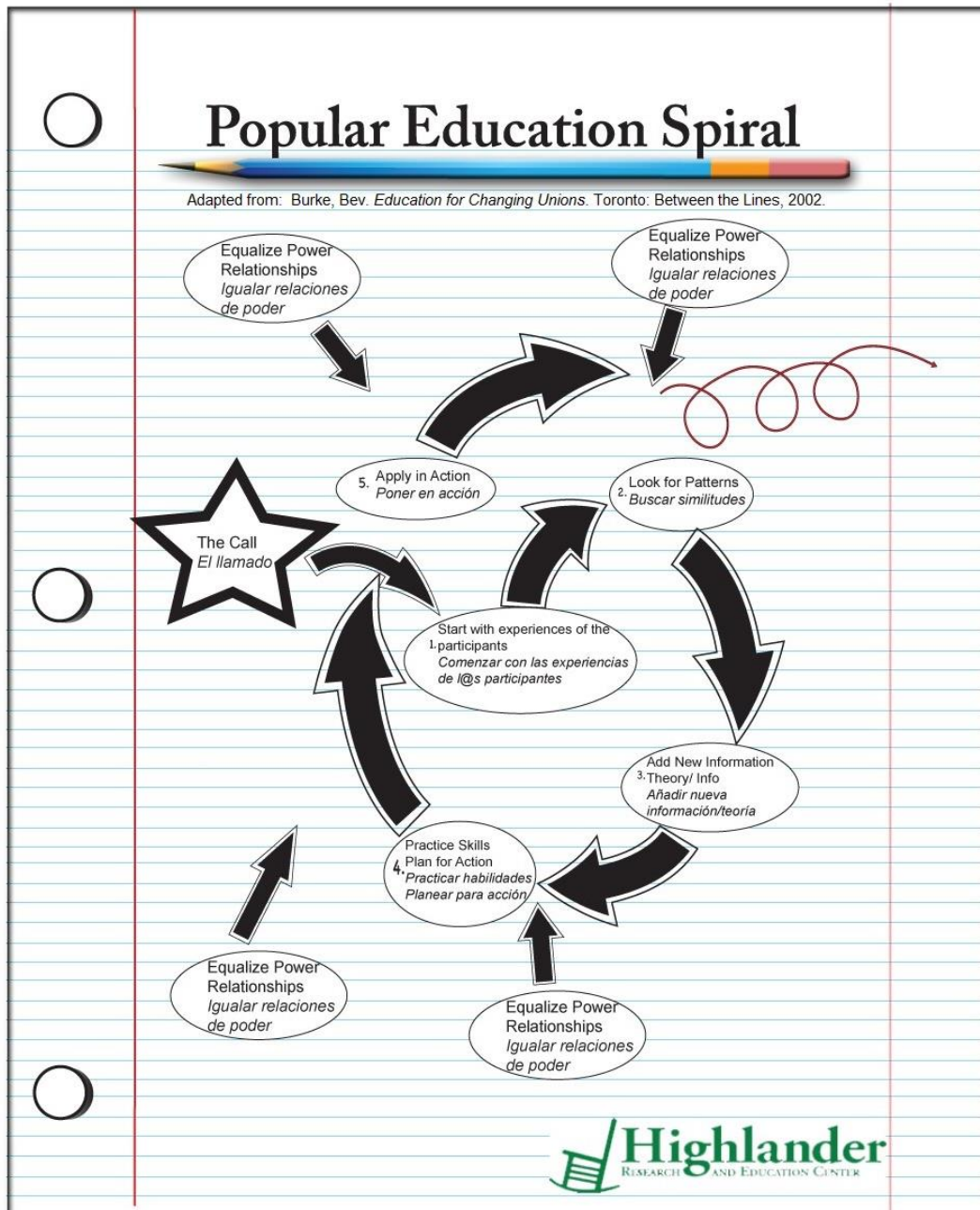


Figure 1: The Popular Education Spiral

Source: Highlander Research and Education Center, adapted from Burke, Bev. *Education for Changing Unions*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002. Print.

This project is an attempt to learn by juxtaposing perspectives on community literacy drawn from different contexts: academic research, local expertise, personal experience. Dissecting the term “community literacy” from different perspectives offers the chance to ask questions about what we mean when we talk about community and literacy, what these concepts have to do with one another and how we can go about answering these questions in ways that uphold our best intentions. The ways that we ask and answer, and the action we take in response to these questions are issues central to the study of the ways that people use words together in contexts within and beyond the academic realm.

Ralph Cintron draws a comparison between what he says an anthropologist might call “‘key terms,’ around which a community organizes behaviors and meanings” and what in rhetorical studies of culture might be termed “‘cultural topoi,’” both of which draw attention to terms that “circulate through a variety of communities in the United States, and what sorts of actions, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings they describe” (11). If we consider the key terms at play in this study in a similar light (whether or not they might strictly fit Cintron’s definition), we might ask what might be learned by discussing the “actions, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings” words like *community* and *literacy* inspire across different contexts. For, as Cintron points out, while academics might examine the significance of these terms through their particular disciplinary lenses, “[t]he availability of critical inquiry to everyone is a position that is important to take” (14). Precisely because these are words that circulate across many communities, these terms are also fruitful sites for critical analysis both within and beyond academic discourse. We all have an idea of what we mean when we talk about community and literacy, yet we ought not assume that we all mean the same thing when we talk about these concepts. A little “anti-glossary” here might highlight the way that these terms provide sites for comparison of the ways that they might be defined differently from different perspectives, precisely because they are words to which it is challenging to assign definitive meanings.

Community Literacy: Linda Flower begins the body her book *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, with the claim that “[a] book on community literacy calls out for definitions—just what do you mean by literacy, and what, among the loudly competing images of community, do you have in mind?” (7). She later summarizes, “community literacy is a rhetorical practice for inquiry and social change,” and that “[c]ommunity literacy is, in short, a working hypothesis about how we might construct a community that supports dialogue across difference” (16, 21). In fact the whole volume is an elaboration of the power of such a “dialogue across difference.” This project is an attempt to figuratively engage such a dialogue, by bringing different perspectives to bear on just those terms that Flower says call out for definition.

Community: Sociologist Marcia Pelly Effrat's claim that "[t]rying to study community is like trying to scoop up jello with your fingers. You can get hold of some, but there's always more slipping away from you" is often cited by researchers who attempt just such a slippery undertaking (1). She further comments about the challenges to defining the term:

The term 'community' is frequently invoked in tones of profundity by ideologues (social scientists as well as 'laypersons') from the far left to the far right. Like motherhood and apple pie, it is considered synonymous with virtue and desirability. Indeed, much of the problem in identifying the various definitions lies in separating the content of the conception from the value-laden imagery of warmth and camaraderie attached to it in many cases. (2)

Joseph Harris makes a similar claim in "The Idea of Community in the Teaching of Writing" that, "since it has no 'positive opposing' term, community can soon become an empty and sentimental word" (12). Considering the meaning of community from more than one perspective offers the possibility of applying some critical tension to such warmly sentimental platitudes.

Literacy: The stakes are high for defining literacy. The field of literacy studies can be described equally validly as emerging or as traceable through history in research across a multitude of disciplines. Over time, definitions of literacy have shifted, along with the ways those meanings are bound up with methods for research and education, and with views of the world and of people, as well as understandings of the implications of literacy for both. Some of those shifts are outlined in a bit more detail in the second chapter of this report. Peter Goggin, in a book length project aimed at mapping (as opposed to defining) the meaning of literacy in one context explains the impossibility of assigning a single definition to the term:

As a highly contested term, *literacy* has been constructed, mandated, defined, and redefined in so many multiple ways and has been reincarnated to fit so many agendas that to deviate from any absolutist construction of the term is to open a Pandora's Box of confusion, and conflict. Literacy is knowledge, literacy is the ability to read and write, literacy is oppressive, literacy is power, literacy is freedom, literacy is a myth, literacy is culture, literacy is an ideology, and on and on. As a stand-alone term, literacy has been invoked to mean everything, anything, and nothing. (xi-ii)

The choice among these different meanings is significant. As Jeffrey Grabill puts it, "[w]hat is literacy, who decides, and in whose interests are these decisions made are questions that focus on the discursive and material power that has the ability to create and shape reality" (4). Those are high stakes indeed.

This project attempts to "start with the experiences of the participants" drawn from different contexts to establish common ground from which to "plan for

action.” To establish a foundation for that action to build upon, this project works to generate some answers to these questions:

- How do we understand the terms *community* and *literacy*? How are these concepts related?
- How does a community build identity through literacy? What is required to participate? What facilitates this?
- How well can a project begun within the university address these questions, and how well does this process begin that work?

Without question, this project is preliminary. It represents an attempt to learn in order to be prepared to take informed action. It is situated locally, and while the themes explored may have universal significance, the results gathered here are meant to speak to the particular situation from which they arise. The particularity of this project is its strength, but the specificity of this study also creates some limits. As such, there are many things that this project will *not* do, but the chapter outline below traces what it *tries* to do.

Chapter I – Background: *The Approach*

This introductory chapter describes my personal experience approaching a new community in the university as well as my proposal for an approach to stepping into contexts beyond the academic. This approach attempts to work in a way that engages and represents knowledge available from different contexts in order to enrich our understanding of community literacy and to inform future action.

Chapter II – Literature Review: *The Call(s)*

Within the field of composition, the call to “go public” is answered in part by people working under the rubric of *community literacy*. As that work goes on, more calls are generated, to define what it means to go public, what we mean when we talk about literacy, and what it means to work with others across different contexts. This section reviews some of the academic literature dealing with community literacy in order to outline some of “the calls” to which this study attempts to respond. As researchers attempt to address those calls the way they define the communities where they work, along with their own and others’ identities in those places, they set the limits for what people can do together there. This pattern creates the opportunity for this project to add to the conversation through the way it defines its community and the roles available there and the way that it constructs the work that the participants do together.

Chapter III – Methodology: *Equalize Power Relationships*

The “Popular Education Spiral” offers a participatory model for learning that engages participants’ experiences to address problems of common interest. Employing such a methodology is one way of addressing calls for critical attention to the ways that we work with others. However, the application of popular education methodology to an academic research project requires some adaptation, and this section explores how the design of this project follows and detours from that model.

Chapter IV – Results: *Start with the Experiences of the Participants and Look for Patterns*

The local experts who participated in this study talked about community literacy on the basis of their unique individual experiences in the geographic community we share. Bringing that expertise to bear in response to calls made in academic literature for reflexivity and inclusiveness offered both a complementary perspective and a way of answering some of those calls. Patterns that emerged from these folks' descriptions of their experiences related to community literacy suggest a set of definitions based on these perspectives: communities are co-authored networks of people who share a common ground; literacy is reading and being read and the ability to discern credible arguments; people can read and write communities through any number of texts, but the biggest challenges are related to engagement—most importantly, *wanting* to participate. This section attempts to represent the ways that these patterns emerged from the experiences these participants described.

Chapter V – Discussion: *Add New Information, Practice Skills and Plan for Action*

No matter where we come from, it's tempting to imagine ourselves at the center of the universe, and arguably "literacy" or "rhetoric" can put us there. However, the community literacy experiences explored in this project suggest that who we are able to be and what we are able to do depends on where we draw the circumference of our activity and attention. Ultimately, who is included and who is on the margins is determined by the ways that we define the boundaries of our communities and the way we identify ourselves and others in relation to those boundaries. This lesson applies not only in material communities where we live and work beyond academic settings, but also in the ways that we interact within and across academic and other of the multiple discourses that we all participate in. The roles and resources available to us are dependent on the ways that we determine the circumference of our actions, as academics and as everyday people. This section offers some examples of how we can explore this idea through many different lenses, from rhetorical theory to community action.

A note on format:

Finally, the presentation of this report, like its design, and the communities and identities it represents, is a hybrid. This project includes the voices of others who offer their advice on the basis of their experience, but it also represents different aspects of my own experience. Ellen Cushman employs a similar device in her "Rhetorician as Agent of Social Change," which begins with her analysis of the material rhetoric of "the Approach," a staircase that marks a physical and metaphorical boundary between one academic campus and the community that surrounds it (235-6). Cushman explores the implications of these boundaries in a format meant to reflect her own experience of learning. She explains, "I've included many voices in this paper because this was the only way I seemed able to capture the range of reactions I've had to the theories and practices of critical pedagogues and cultural studies theorists" (235). While Cushman and I may

have had different experiences and encountered different perspectives, like that article, this report is an attempt to represent a process of learning, and like that article, this report includes my own experience. Like that material entryway Cushman describes, my approach to this project is an attempt to connect the worlds in and out of school.

The hybrid nature of this project is in line with many of the projects that come out of the work of the Community Literacy Center, some of which Linda Flower describes in her inspiring book, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. Flower notes that “[a] multivoiced inquiry,” like this one, “can design the text to reflect the shape of an inquiry as well as different forms knowledge takes.” And further, she suggests that doing so may not only “reflect the multiple voices you have collected,” which is certainly a goal for this project, but that presenting the final text in this way might even have the potential “to draw readers into an intercultural inquiry or even a local public dialogue with you” (232). Since the ultimate goal of this whole project is to find a way to take action, if this text has the ability to engage “local public dialogue,” I would count that as a great success.

In a related vein, some readers might ask, “Who the heck is this ‘we’ you keep talking about? Got a frog in your pocket?” Joseph Harris points out “like the pronoun *we*, *community* can be used in such a way that it invokes what it seems merely to describe. The writers says to his reader: ‘We are part of a certain community; they are not’ –and, if the reader accepts, the statement is true” (12). Though Harris warns that these words may create a false sense of unity, in this case, I intend them as just such an invitation to an invented sense of solidarity: If you can identify with the hopes of those whose experiences are discussed here, if you are reading this and share the dream of changing the world for the better somehow, then I invite you to join me in a community of people who share similar aims. I use the term “we” because I identify with the stories offered here of others who pursue visions of how things should be. Join us. We can all be frogs together.

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW: *THE CALL(S)*

Identifying (with) the Community

I used to tell people that I was on the two-year education plan. I'd go to school for a couple of years, get fed up with the lack of concrete action involved in what I learned in class, go to work for a couple of years, get lonely for the conversations about ideas we talk about in school; lather, rinse, repeat. I learned both in and out. And each place gave me a useful perspective of critique toward the other. My own experience as a "non-traditional student" shaped to a large degree my decision to return to school as a graduate student with the goal of being able to eventually teach composition, and my hope to do that teaching at a community college that was likely to have a goodly population of other "non-trationals." It is also what drew my interest to the study of community literacy. Here was a community of folks interested in exactly that border crossing to and from the world of school and the ways that knowledge gained in and out of these different communities could be mutually informative. I'd found my people!

I was puzzled, though, by the way that these folks talked about "everyday people" and "ordinary people." Even though there were moves, like Eleanor Long's, to identify people within academia as also "everyday people who stood to make a difference by using our literate repertoires to go public" (4), there remained a recurring distinction between "academics" and "community members" that I found puzzling. Though it seemed absolutely reasonable to consider the ways that expertise and power were at work in projects that involved people from different backgrounds working together, I was struck by the ways that these writers understood their identities and the identities of others with whom they worked. In one case, a researcher who had lived in a community for decades before beginning her research explained that she could not presume to speak as a member of the community she was studying! While I certainly understand and have experienced that feeling of not-quite-belonging to a community that seems to have complex criteria for defining who is and is not authentically a local, I also wondered if this academic distance was completely inescapable. These instances of a disconnect between ideas of solidarity and reciprocity and the ways that researchers and students actually identified themselves and others were troubling, even as the discussions within this literature worked to explicitly draw attention to the importance of critically examining these identities and the roles and relationships that they made possible.

My sensitivity may have been due to my own identification more with some of those community members for whom everyday tasks of "caring for children and parents" took priority over the "luxuries of literacy" available within academia (Cushman, "The Rhetorician" 242). And I could certainly relate Cushman's reference to Mike Rose's description of one woman working to balance these

priorities and “how many pieces had to fall in place each day for her to be a student” (qtd. in “The Rhetorician” 242). Near the end of the time I was slated to complete my master’s degree, in fact around the time I began my earnest work on this research project, I learned I was to be a mother for the first time. And, while I’m blessed with an incredible support network both in and out of school, this life-changing fact probably influenced my perspective a bit. In the time that I’ve been at work on this endeavor, I’ve twice become a mom. That identity, combined with my position as student-researcher have certainly colored my reception of the research dealing with the “extracurriculum of composition” (Gere 34). I live in that extracurriculum, and identify more strongly at this point with my life outside the university than in, though this work allows me a bridge between those worlds. In this project, I hope to follow Ellen Cushman’s call to “take social responsibility for the people from and with whom we come to understand a topic,” (The Rhetorician 239) and in this section, I offer my thanks to those “scholar-practitioners” who have been my guides through the academic discourse concerned with community literacy.

The attention community literacy research gives to the tensions at the intersections of different discourses, identities and communities is a large part of what drew my interest to this field. Community literacy is something we can talk about both in and out of school. In this and other contexts, this project examines the same questions:

- How do we understand the terms *community* and *literacy*? How are these concepts related?
- How does a community build identity through literacy? What is required to participate? What facilitates this?
- How well can a project begun within the university address these questions, and how well does this process begin that work?

Wrestling with questions like this occupies a great deal of the scholarly conversation about community literacy. In fact, it is because scholars raise questions like these in published research literature that these became the questions that this project asks.

Community Literacy is the defining term for this project. Generative and contested, taken as keyword[s], community literacy, in both its hybrid and component formulations, casts a wide net. In the field of composition, it represents a body of scholarship and special interest; reflects an evolution of focus and methodology; provides a site for invention and dialogue. The editors of *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook* describe the trend associated with community literacy: “The public turn in composition, spreading quickly throughout the profession, has been cultivated by a visionary and dedicated group of scholar-practitioners who have devised ways both to ‘walk the walk’ and provide mutual support for the growing number of teachers interested in community literacy” (Deans, Roswell, and Wurr 10).

Pursuing that public turn, these teachers and researchers in turn raise further calls to think carefully about where, how, and with whom we “walk the walk.” And with those changing concerns follow shifts in the way we talk the walk as well: “Rethinking ... relationships and their consequences is at the heart of rethinking what it means to teach writing, and we can see these more recent priorities in the terms that have moved to the foreground,” Deans, Roswell, and Wurr point out, noting that the use of new terms such as *community literacy* have become more common, “as the use of the word *service-learning* has receded” (4). This evolution in vocabulary continues. As those same editors point out, there is a “significant body of literature. . . that tease[s] out the assumptions embedded in such key terms as *community* and *service*,” which reflects “the contested nature of the terms and priorities for community writing” (Deans, Roswell, and Wurr 6). Defining what it means to go public, setting the terms for the roles and relationships that are established as we do so, and working in a way that reflects the good ideas that inspire us are all part of this ongoing negotiation, and the way we talk about our work reflects these choices in important ways.

Going Public

What does it mean to go public? This question calls for a definition of both a place and the people in it. Consider two perspectives published a month apart: Peter Mortensen’s “Going Public” in CCC, December of 1998 and Ellen Cushman’s “The Public Intellectual, Service Learning, and Activist Research” in the January 1999 issue of *College English*.

First Mortensen’s closing call for academics in the field of composition to “go public”:

...the ideal of professionalism entails democratic values that encompass both academic and social realms--values shared... by colleagues and citizens alike. Teacher-researchers in composition should embrace this new professionalism, or else be willing to cede their authority to others whose aims and ethics in speaking about literacy may be inadequate to the task. To tolerate such inadequacy would mean turning our backs on the Lynns and the Tammys whose literacy it is at once our privilege and obligation to represent. (199)

Then Cushman’s formulation:

The kind of public intellectuals I have in mind combine their research, teaching, and service efforts in order to address social issues important to community members in under-served neighborhoods. You know these neighborhoods: they’re the ones often located close by universities, just beyond the walls and gates, or down the hill, or over the bridge, or past the tracks.... Going public, turning to mass media, dressing our work in plain garb may help preserve autonomy, may even get intellectuals a

moment or two in the media spotlight, but how will this help individuals who have no home, not enough food, or no access to good education? (“Public” 329)

Both Mortensen and Cushman express the need to address a context that reaches beyond the academic; both cast the call as an appeal to ethical responsibility to “address social issues,” “help individuals,” as “an obligation” to “democratic values” and “service efforts.” Both also acknowledge the importance of “authority” and “autonomy” in relation to “professionalism,” while they offer different ways of envisioning the public roles that academics should play. But, beyond *what* Mortensen and Cushman have to say about what it means to “go public,” they also construct a particular framework for going public through *the way* they talk about going public. So, the way they talk about going public defines the location, roles, and positions available within that framework. This way of talking about going public sets up and works from a particular vision of where that public is and who may go there and what they can do once they arrive. To participate, one must identify with one of the available roles: “community members in under-served neighborhoods,” “individuals who have no home, not enough food, or no access to good education,” “the Lynns and the Tammys whose literacy it is at once our privilege and obligation to represent,” “public intellectuals,” “teacher-researchers,” “colleagues and citizens alike,” or “others whose aims and ethics in speaking about literacy may be inadequate to the task.” Even the phrase “go public” implies a particular location and set of boundaries: intellectuals must cross borders to go to a public, “often located close by universities, just beyond the walls and gates, or down the hill, or over the bridge, or past the tracks” or by going public they embrace values that “encompass both academic and social realms,” and overcome boundaries that way. These perspectives establish a dynamic of insiders and outsiders, hierarchies of authority and need even as they overtly challenges these limits.

The agendas that Mortensen and Cushman lay out illustrate the way that as we describe our work we also describe the way that we see the world and our own and others’ places in it. The ways that teacher-researchers (to employ Mortensen’s term), describe our work, then, not only reveals our worldviews and ideologies, but also the way we define ourselves. Mortensen makes an important argument about how the attention given to the ethics of representation in composition research prepares scholars to consider the ethics of representation in popular media. Cushman argues for the value of walking the walk of public action as well as talking the talk. Both of these points are important contributions to the conversation about the ways that people within the academic realm enter the world outside of the university; as such, they both also depend foundationally on the boundaries themselves. Mortensen and Cushman speak from *within* the academic realm—they define themselves as insiders, or outsiders, depending upon where they are viewed in relation to the borders to which they refer.

Naming a Place and the People in it

Anne Ruggles Gere directs our attention explicitly to those boundaries when she opens her often cited “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition” with Simone Weil’s description of prisoners communicating via taps on their cell walls and closes with an open question of “whether we will use classroom walls as instruments of separation or communication” (34, 48). Gere urges teachers and researchers of composition to give the contexts beyond those walls, “a more prominent status in our discourses.” This impulse to expand the circumference of our attention influences many of the most recent and influential trends within the field of composition, and in the larger context of higher education at large. These movements answer the call to go public, heeding Gere’s warning that, “[w]hether or not we rise to this challenge, composition’s extracurriculum will persist and our students can join it as soon as they step outside our classroom walls and enter what Tillie Olsen calls ‘all the life that happens outside of us, beyond us’” (48).

To ignore what happens beyond the walls of the university, Gere and other scholars argue, is to become blinded by those very walls. Cushman points out what, “From the Ivory Tower, We Overlook”: “How can we study ideologies, hegemonies, power structures, and the effects of discursive practices when we overlook community discursive dispositions—the place where these language practices are first inculcated, generated and consequentially reproduced in the social habitus?” (“The Rhetorician” 250). Beyond the call to pay attention to what lies beyond the material and metaphorical walls of our classrooms, the conversation about how best to define (and locate) those “extra” places is ongoing.

In her introduction to *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*, Paula Mathieu includes a section, “A Word on the Word *Street*,” illustrating the implications of her decision to use the term “street” to represent the “out there” beyond the university context, a task that, “has proven difficult and theoretically unsatisfactory for many writers and scholars” (xii). Mathieu rejects “community” as too general, inexact, and too broadly applicable, agreeing with Joseph Harris’ warning about the word’s persuasive power that may create, “a misleading sense of unity” (xii). Harris does not dismiss the usefulness of the term, however. In “The Idea of Community in the Teaching of Writing,” Harris suggests rather that we ought to “reserve our uses of *community* to describe the workings of... specific and local groups,” with all their conflict and disagreement and actual people, and he calls for attention to “the discourses of communities that are more than communities of discourse alone” (20). Harris warns that defining a community based solely on a particular discourse, such as academic discourse, for example, judges all other ways of communicating in contrast to an abstracted ideal that does not represent the actual diversity present in a particular place.

Instead, Harris argues,

I would urge an even more specific and material view of community: one that, like a city, allows for both consensus and conflict, and that holds room for ourselves, our disciplinary colleagues, our university coworkers, and our students.... It may prove more useful to center our study... on the everyday struggles and mishaps of the talk in our classrooms and departments, with their mixings of sometimes conflicting and sometimes conjoining beliefs and purposes.... We have other words—*discourse, language, voice, ideology, hegemony*—to chart the perhaps less immediate (though still powerful) effects of broader social forces on our talk and writing. (20-1)

Harris is then suggesting a view of “community” that incorporates the differences that people bring with them to the shared context of the university. In this view, the “extracurriculum” Gere discusses doesn’t exist “outside of us, beyond us,” as Olsen suggests (qtd. in Gere 48), but rather, it *includes* all of the people who participate in the shared undertaking that takes place at the intersection of the different “ideologies” and “discursive dispositions” (Cushman, “The Rhetorician” 250) that people bring with them to the places they meet.

Eleanor Long argues for a model that incorporates both material and discourse communities. Her *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics* surveys and compares community literacy projects in terms of the “local publics” they engage, create, and explore. Long claims,

the *community* of community literacy might best be understood in terms of these discursive sites where ordinary people go public. From a rhetorical perspective, then, *community* refers not to existing geographic locales... but to symbolic constructs enacted in time and space around shared exigencies—in other words, *local publics* (15).

The “local publics” called into being by shared exigencies both shape and are shaped by the people who participate.

When we work to describe the communities in which we work, whatever we name those place, we are also defining and describing ourselves, and our relation to that place and the people in it. Harris points out that, whatever it is called, the context from which we work affects what do:

We write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions in writing are thus not merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong. (12)

It follows, then, that the ways we define those communities in turn determines our understanding of who we may be and what we and others might do as members of those “local publics.”

The way that we talk about community shapes the identities we define for ourselves as well as others. Long points to the concern with “how ordinary people go public” as one of the organizing principles that unites this diverse body of community literacy research and connects it with the broader field of rhetoric and composition. Research in this vein, according to Long, “share[s] a common theme: we, as everyday people, stand to make a difference by using our literate repertoires to go public” (4-5). So, then, this work also defines a particular identity or set of identities for the people who participate as well as a site for where they may do so. Just as the concept of community is named in different ways, various researchers offer different conceptions of their roles: public intellectual, knowledge activist, activist rhetoricians, public rhetorician, facilitators, tacticians, activists, everyday and ordinary people. And, just like the different ways of talking about “community,” each of these roles depends on a particular understanding of the researcher’s position in relation to the people and institutions involved in their work. And so, when we work to describe an “out there,” whatever we name that place, we are also defining and describing ourselves, and our relation to that place and the people in it, and we are also shaped in turn by those new communities we create.

For example, in “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” Ellen Cushman describes the “luxuries of literacy” practiced by privileged people who are so “surrounded with the tools for literacy all day long, we often take for granted the luxury of the time and space needed for our literacy events.” In contrast to this, Cushman also reports:

The reading and writing used for individual development in many communities is a valued, scarce, and difficult endeavor. We may say to ourselves that reading and writing is more important than some daily worries, such as cleaning, taking care of children and grandparents, and cooking, but often one of the primary ways people build a good name for themselves outside of work is to be solid parents, providers, doers. (242)

Talking about literacy in this way creates (and works from) a framework within which literacy may operate and positions people in the academy and in the community differently in relation to literacy use. Some are “surrounded by the tools for literacy,” while for others the “luxury” of literacy activity is “a valued, scarce, and difficult endeavor.” While some “may say to ourselves that reading and writing is more important than some daily worries,” others may find it more important to “build a good name for themselves,” and “to be solid parents, providers, doers.” This comparison casts a particular set of “tools” and “events” as luxurious and valued, but other resources and practices of literacy are also likely in use by people as they work to build their good names, for example, or as they pursue “individual development” as “solid parents, providers, doers” (242). Embedded in these contrasting descriptions is a way of understanding literacy and a way of seeing the world.

Defining the Terms of our Work

In *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*, Eli Goldblatt describes his experience of what happens when different ways of understanding literacy come up against each other:

Located only inside my campus, I can either come to believe my job is terribly exalted, the top of the literacy food chain, or I can despair that I make no difference in the lives of anyone. Again, the through-put system defines our consciousness and masks the reality of other community and individual objectives in settings off campus. After every Open Doors meeting I remembered that I function inside an institutional framework for literacy that is merely one among many. (142)

The way that we teach and learn is also inextricably tied to the contexts from which we work, a fact that is especially evident in the work of words. “All literacy learning is local,” is the way Goldblatt frames this perspective: “The acquisition and exercise of language is always mediated by and reflective of conditions that can be traced to the geographical, social, and economic locations of the speaker, writer, listener, reader...” (9). In this way of thinking, we might say that all literacy might be called *community* literacy.

Like our definitions of “community,” our ways of talking about literacy are a reflection of the conditions and contexts from which we work, and for that reason, there is no single way to define literacy. As Peter Goggin points out in *Professing Literacy in Composition Studies*, his book-length report of a project “mapping a single ‘slice’ of composition studies” in terms of literacy (xiii), “[a]s with definitions of rhetoric, perhaps the one consistent thing that can be said about definitions of literacy is that over time they are subject to change and reinterpretation”(17). The story of *what* literacy means (and arguably rhetoric too) is then as much a story about *who* defines it as *how*.

A brief sketch of the shifting ways that literacy has been defined and discussed over time illustrates the ongoing evolution Goggin points out. In fact, as Goggin’s study shows, the ways that literacy has been studied, defined, and debated represents not so much a linear history as a layered set of influences that are evident in the ways that researchers write about literacy in their scholarship as well as the way that literacy is discussed in other contexts. Though different frameworks for understanding literacy have been in and out of vogue at different points in time, Goggin’s survey reveals there are many ways that these ideas continue to influence our answers to the question “What do we mean when we profess literacy?”(4) as well as the ways we go about asking.

Even in the time of Plato, literacy was a contested topic, as Ellen Cushman and her fellow editors note in their introduction to *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*, pointing out that in *Phaedrus*, Plato seems to argue that literacy, as opposed to oral communication, weakens the mind, supporting neither thinking nor memory (5). Walter Ong suggests out that Plato’s stance on literacy is similar to that of

people who worry about the effects of electronic technology on modern thought, arguing instead that in contrast to “the orality that was antecedent to it.... Writing is a consciousness-raising and humanizing technology” (30-1). Though he agrees with Plato’s claim that writing does, in Ong’s words, “restructure thought,” Ong argues that Plato’s negative perspective was based on his position in a world and culture in which literacy had not yet become as pervasive as the one Ong was writing from, and because of that Plato’s viewpoint was determined by the context from which he was making his argument (19, 21). Yet a similar argument might be made that contextually situates Ong’s thesis regarding the relationship between orality and literacy and thought. Brian Street, in his influential *Social Literacies*, offers his own such argument in a chapter titled, “A Critical Look at Ong and the ‘Great Divide,’” basing his critique in part on a discussion of Ong’s methodology:

The methodology he employs is mainly deductive: it has affinities with the nineteenth-century methodology in social anthropology known as ‘if I were a horse’ thinking... whereby the observer puts himself or herself into the position of the imagined subject. The classic problem with such a method, ... arises, when the observer knows nothing about the culture and context of those whose thinking he or she is assuming to represent. In Ong’s case, not only does he know little about the rich variety of different cultures that he aggregates together as ‘oral,’ but according to his own argument he cannot ever know about them, since he himself is from a ‘literate’ culture. (*Social Literacies* 155)

We might thus contrast Ong’s view of orality and literacy, which conceptualizes literacy as a discrete ability with objective results for those who attain it with other research that deals with ideas about orality and literacy. For example, Shirley Brice Heath’s ethnographic study *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, employs a much different methodology than Ong and draws different conclusions about oral and written language use.

Heath’s work fits into a broader context within which, “like a number of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, literacy studies has been increasingly influenced by what has been termed the *social turn*, that is, a research orientation to look beyond the individual to the social, cultural, and political contexts in which people lead their lives” (Cushman et. al 3). Street’s “The New Literacy Studies” explicitly calls for this attention to the social contexts that surround and shape what he calls “literacy practices,” and argues that “literacy can no longer be addressed as a neutral technology, as in the reductionist ‘autonomous’ model, but is already a social and ideological practice involving fundamental aspects of epistemology, power, and politics.... In this sense, then, literacy practices are saturated with ideology” (“New Literacy” 435). As Goggin points out, “from this perspective, the question, “what do we mean when we talk about literacy?” is, in fact, also the answer.... A New Literacy approach acknowledges that to speak about literacy is to be aware that we are always speaking from an ideological frame” (17). Of course then, we must also then see

this particular perspective regarding literacy as also ideologically influenced. Goggin's work sets out to map the overlapping ideological influences that show up in the published scholarship he surveys as a way of illustrating the complexity of meaning at work in the ways that scholars talk and write about literacy.

The next step in talking about literacy must critically reflect on how these contexts shape what we think and do, and acknowledge that we are working from constructed frameworks that influence not only how we think and write about literacy, but also how we conduct our work. These constructions can be considered rhetorically. James Duffy suggests that "a rhetorical approach to literacy, draws upon and is meant to unite more recent perspectives, including the view of literacy development as ideological (Street 1995; Berlin 1987), as the product of discourse (Gee, 1996), and as an expression of historical change (Brandt, 1998)" (40). Drawing on Kenneth Burke's conceptions of rhetoric, symbolic action, and identification, Duffy defines his approach thus:

By *rhetoric* I mean the ways that institutions and individuals use symbols to structure their thought and shape their conceptions of the world.... For example, the languages of governments, schools, and media I think of as 'rhetorics'; the ways these languages operate within community life I consider 'rhetorical.' Rhetorics provide the frameworks in which individual acts of reading and writing take place. (41-2)

These frameworks shape the ways that we can imagine people participating in literacy. Considering these frameworks as rhetorical structures illuminates the element of choice available in their construction, as Duffy points out: "Rhetoric... is a term that... retains its associations with agency, social action, and democratic practice. So if rhetorics can be used by institutions, groups, and individuals to constrain human freedoms, so too can rhetorics be the means through which these constraints might be resisted and undone." Further, Duffy argues that, "what the rhetorical approach to literacy does emphatically suggest is that local and national battles in education... are less about teaching or educational philosophies than they are about competing conceptions of the world, and about the position of learners within such worlds" (55). These worldviews and rhetorics shape the practices of education.

Kirk Branch's *Eyes on the Ought To Be: What We Teach When We Teach About Literacy* references Myles Horton (a founder of what is now the Highlander Research and Education Center), who claimed that educators ought to always have their eyes on the perpetually unavailable "ought to be" (18), but also points out that different ways of teaching and talking about literacy are necessarily connected to different ways of understanding the world: "Central to my claim in this book is that educational rhetoric of any sort relies on a construction of a world that *ought to be*, a future world that justifies the educational practices and theories advocated within particular discourses" (20). Branch describes three different contexts for literacy education which represent three very different "rhetorics of literacy": a prison literacy program, an adult education center, and

the Highlander Folk School. Branch points out that while each of these programs pursues different goals based on different sets of beliefs, they are all aimed at an *imagined* future, a hope for what might, should or “ought to be.” Branch notes that teachers most often do not have control over all of the conditions that influence teaching, and in fact often see personal ideologies in conflict with those which shape educational environments, yet he stresses the importance of critical reflection on the ways that these worldviews, conflicting or not, individual or institutional, shape choices about how to teach: “I want teachers to recognize that the work they do is in service of a social project, a future world with moral implications” (Branch 21). So, when we set the terms for our work, we have the agency to make choices toward constructing (or deconstructing) a “rhetoric of literacy” in pursuit of our hopes for what could or should be.

So, then, the way we talk about literacy is a result of and helps to determine what we believe literacy can do, the options available for its use in a particular framework, and how we see ourselves and others in relation to literacy and all of these determine how we go about the work that we do. As Duffy puts it, “... all elements of literacy instruction, including the selection of reading materials, the choice of teaching methodologies, the assignment of essay topics, even the teacher’s conception of the learner are ultimately rhetorical and ideological, ultimately intended to promote a vision of the world and the *place of learners in it*” [emphasis added] (42-3). The trick, then, is to be critical of the ways that these pressures are at work in the ways we go about our work. “Thus,” as Thomas Deans suggests, “every service-learning course and teacher should heed the ancient Greek dictum: know thyself. This demands that service-learning teachers interrogate the assumptions and aims embedded in their own practices and proceed in the light of critical self-awareness” (111). The way we define the terms of our learning through research also directly reflects these assumptions and aims.

When Wayne Peck, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins set their term *community literacy* in contrast to “cultural literacy,” which they see as lacking space for difference and seeking to homogenize, and “the literacy of social and cultural critique,” which they claim has the ability to point to problems without the mechanisms to enact solutions, they set the terms of their work in a way that, “seeks to restructure the conversation itself into a collaboration in which individuals share expertise and experience through the act of planning and writing about problems they jointly define” (575-6). This choice to “restructure the conversation” with a change in methods reflects a way of seeing the world, and presents an argument about how the way things are done affects who gets to participate, speak, and be heard. The frameworks we select to work in and through restructure more than the conversations we can have; through the way we do our work we also define ourselves and our relationships. When we talk explicitly about the decisions we make concerning how we teach and research, we can extend the conversation about what we can learn and from whom, and

we can ask questions about how the way we frame our relationships defines the people who participate, including ourselves, and we can imagine what these choices can do to move us toward what we imagine might be possible.

In her survey of community literacy research Eleanor Long explicitly acknowledges these kinds of choices:

Community literacy requires each of us to make a judgment call. It demands that we venture an educated guess in response to a pressing social question: *How do we engage such issues (of reading and writing, ethics, and border crossing) in ways and in locales that will make a difference?* And it demands that we make that call not only in the theoretical claims we assert in our classrooms and scholarship but also in the theory-driven action we take outside the academy—in what we do with others under material, social, political and economic conditions not of our making or under our control, nor even entirely within our understanding.(3)

As Long points out, the judgment calls that researchers and educators make in response to those demands determine the tenor and results of the work that they do, and at the same time reflects the discourses they are moving from, to and through. Each “best educated guess” made by researchers and educators who each have a unique set of experiences, education, ideology, expertise, and perspective to offer enriches what we can know about literacy. But as Goldblatt hopes, we must both, “constantly ask ourselves why we take certain actions or teach in certain ways.... [and] make common cause in mapping and elaborating literacies beyond the limit of our individual and institutional boundaries” (6).

Establishing Roles and Relationships

Conducting research offers the perfect opportunity to define the ways that we hope to work with others, the types of community we hope to author together. As Powell and Takayoshi illustrate in “Accepting the Roles Created for Us,” beyond the roles that we create for ourselves in designing our research, our identities are also constructed by the others who participate in our work (417). Our choices about how to step into these created roles are as rhetorical as the other decisions we make about our research methodologies:

From the beginning, when researchers formulate research questions and select a site, rhetorical decisions are being made. What questions are most important? What sites are best for finding answers? What relationships (between rhetor/researcher and audience/participants) should the research enact? What assumptions about reality inform those choices?” (Powell and Takayoshi 413)

While interrogating the theories and ideologies that we work from as we make these decisions, we must as researchers also pay attention to the identities we construct for ourselves and others to work from. And, as Powell and Takayoshi point out, these roles are collaboratively authored, whether we plan it that way or not: “To recognize the context-bound nature of rhetoric is to recognize that there are no universally right or appropriate ways of working with participants—there

are only contingent truths determined by the community of people” (416). These relationships, like all other aspects of research, literacy, and rhetoric, are dependent on the context.

So, when making decisions about how to conduct our teaching and research, it is important to make choices that reflect as much as possible the philosophies we hope to uphold. It is inevitable that our work will be influenced by the experiences that shape the “educated guesses” we make (Long 3). It is also likely that despite our best intentions we will often fall short of the “ought to be” that we imagine (Branch 21). So then, if community literacy is concerned, as Long suggests, with how, “we, as everyday people, stand to make a difference by using our literate repertoires to go public” (4-5), then we ought to work to create local publics, “*communit[ies]* of community literacy” (15) that reflect our aspirations as closely as possible. To do so we must take seriously our role as everyday people working collaboratively with others and put the work of defining the common ground of our work and relationships equally into the hands of all involved.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY:
EQUALIZE POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Asking for Directions

The campus of the Highlander Research and Education Center is incredibly picturesque, but the backroads of New Market, Tennessee are no place for a casual stroll. I attended a workshop at Highlander as part of a graduate course on Popular Education. The class focused on Highlander's history and practices and the weekend workshop was the chance to experience first-hand some of the processes we'd been studying in class. It was exciting and inspiring to participate with others who shared similar interests in an interactive and positive atmosphere. After a late night of comradery around the campfire, I got up with the sunrise. I listened to the rooster crow and with some time to spare, decided to join a couple of new friends on a nature walk before the morning gathering. We set out along one of several trails, thinking we'd get some fresh air and then be back before the end of breakfast. We chatted as we walked, as friends do, about our various interests and backgrounds. I'm a little ashamed to say that I don't now recall the names of the folks I was walking with, or remember much about the specifics of the work they told me they were doing. What I do remember is that as we were walking and talking, the trail we were on intersected a paved road, and after some discussion, we decided that rather than go back the way we came, we would follow the road to the entrance to the campus and arrive just in time and according to plan.

Well, that's the thing about plans. Shortly after our detour, we met the first of many dogs who would cross our path on our adventure. This one was alone, but the sketchy way it approached was enough to prevent us turning back once we began to realize that we may have miscalculated our route. At one point, someone wondered aloud whether we ought to ask someone for a ride or directions. Not that we passed anyone that we could ask for either, so the point was moot. We tromped on, still talking about all kinds of things. I mentioned that I'd been told a story about one of the center's neighbors who had known ties to the KKK and one of my companions countered that, according the Southern Poverty Law Center, there was no KKK in the area. As we trudged along, we could not reach the center by phone, and there was no help to be had from the navigation applications on our smart phones. Whatever our status at Highlander or on the campuses of our various institutions and organizations, all of the academic and activist knowledge that we could muster among us wouldn't go very far out here on the side of a country road in rural East Tennessee; the SPLC's "Hate Map" couldn't really help us here. And when we met a group of several more dogs who seemed to perhaps suspect our lack of clout out in this

wild, it was no book learnin' that I called on when I hollered, "Git on home!" in a voice that I swear was my grandmother's coming out of my mouth. Those pups had no care for my interest in participatory research methodology. When we got back, sweaty, hungry, and a little nerve-wracked, the workshop continued and we sat in the circle of rocking chairs that Highlander is famous for, working together to learn about how important it is to leverage what people know by virtue of their experience. I learned so much, but the story of the walk and the dogs sticks with me.

Our experience reminds me of a "mountain story" that Myles Horton, a founder of the school that evolved into the Highlander Center that I visited more than 75 years later, told:

[A] traveling salesman... got lost and he didn't know which way to go. He found a little boy beside the road and he said, 'Hey there son, do you know the way to Knoxville?' The boy said, 'No, sir.' And he said, 'Do you know the way to Gatlinburg?' 'No, sir.' 'Well,' he said, 'Do you know the way to Sevierville?' The boy said, 'No, sir.' And he said, 'Boy, you don't know much, do you?' 'No, sir, but I ain't lost!' (Horton and Freire 150-1).

Who we ask for directions has everything to do with where we think we are and where we want to go. What we want to know and how we ask are shaped by who we think we are and who we think we're asking. How we conduct our work makes an argument about the goals we are attempting to reach: "So you speak not just by words and discussion but you speak by the way your programs are run. If you believe in something, then you have to practice it," Horton contends (Horton and Freire 153).

Conducting research offers the perfect opportunity to define the ways that we hope to work with others, the types of community we hope to author together. In "Accepting the Roles Created for Us: The Ethics of Reciprocity," Katrina Powell and Pamela Takayoshi point out that "[s]hifting our lens to the ethical involves, in other words, a concern with the quality of the relationships we build with research participants-not just in terms of our research questions or the study but in terms of people forming relationships with others" (398). An important part of the way that we construct the work we do is the way we construct our own and others' identities. The negotiation of the roles and relationships in work that involves academics with people outside of the academic context has been a central concern in community literacy scholarship. This project also attempts to answer that call to pay attention to the ways we choose to work with others. This reflexivity is vital to the enterprise of critical inquiry in any field, according to Ralph Cintron, who points out that from a critical stance, "any inquiry into an object of knowledge will become simultaneously an inquiry into how, why, and when the knowledge became knowledge and who made it so" (13). If that is so, then we should think about the ways those relationships we construct reflect our

best ideas about what “ought to be.” Beginning there, with the *why* of this project—a foundational belief in the capability of all people, an underlying respect for individuals’ agency, faith in people as the best experts in their own experience and a belief that people should share responsibility for work that involves them by having the opportunity to define the terms of that work-- this chapter will also lay out the *whats* and *hows* of the way this project is designed to focus on *who* has a say.

Like the course that brought me to Highlander, this project is a hybrid, which, like the terms *community literacy* and *popular education*, juxtaposes different ways of defining identities, communities, practices and ways of knowing. Taking the goal of reciprocity to heart, I begin this inquiry by identifying as a learner participating with others across different contexts. In one way of thinking this is simply common sense: researchers are trying to gain knowledge, and so we are, by our actions, learners. Beginning from this position presents the opportunity to structure this study as a learning project, modeled after a particular way of learning. This choice, like the pursuit of any course of education, has everything to do with choosing teachers, with deciding what context and curriculum and guides are most appropriate to a purpose. It’s about deciding who to ask for directions when we enter new territory. In this case, my position and experience as a newcomer to the field, as well as my identity as someone with much to learn about the place I live, is a resource

The practice of popular education as it is conducted at Highlander follows a pattern of learning that emphasizes the knowledge resources within the people who participate, rather than assigning authority to outside experts. In this view, everyone involved is simultaneously teaching and learning with others. The conceptual model of the “Popular Education Spiral” (figure 1) is one way that Highlander represents its work, which illustrates a pattern of learning that is a concrete application of the principle of “authentic reciprocity” (Powell and Takayoshi 398). This project’s design, presentation, and goals follow the trajectory of the popular education spiral to answer “The Call,” to “Start with the Experiences of the Participants” and “Look for Patterns,” to “Add new Information,” “Practice Skills and Plan for Action”, and, most importantly, to always work to “Equalize Power Relationships” and “Apply in Action” the lessons learned. This project works in more than one context, and aims to “start with the experiences of the participants” and “equalize power relationships” within and among those contexts. The popular education spiral offers a model that accounts for and recruits sources of knowledge from the experiences of people from those different contexts: the experiences reported by community literacy scholars in published research literature, the experiences of local advisers shared through interviews, and my own experiences working to learn more from many sources.

The literature reporting on research in community literacy suggests that the ways we go about our work establishes and draws from the way we define ourselves and others and the communities we share. Following from that, this study is an attempt to complement the already existing literature with information gathered based on one way of defining roles, relationships, and communities. The research questions that direct this inquiry are of interest across all of the contexts that this project attempts to work, but what this study hopes to add is a concrete local perspective. This project is designed to allow the people involved to define the terms (literally) for this work and to establish a point of departure, a common ground to work from as a foundation for future action. Together, the people who participated in this study, including myself, hope to learn by addressing questions about community literacy where we live and work:

- How do people in this community understand the concepts of community and literacy and the connections between them?
- What literate skills are necessary for community participation, and how do people use literacy to build community identity? What facilitates this?
- How well can a project that begins within the university address these questions?

The answers to these questions depend on who asks, who answers, and how the questioning is accomplished. This project is an attempt to learn with others. Philosophically, conceptually, and organizationally, the practice of popular education offers a model for learning from people's experiences across all of the different contexts in which this project is situated.

Research Design: "Hitching your wagon to a star"

How to put our best ideas to work is part of the puzzle facing all people who hope to change the world. Horton tells another story as an illustration of the way that these good ideas relate to the ways that we go about our practice:

I think of my grandfather, who was an illiterate mountaineer and who had a good mind, although he couldn't write his name. He used to say, 'Son you're talking about all these ideas, and you got your wagon hitched to a star, but you can't haul anything in it that's not down on earth.' I know you have to have it hitched to the star, and he did too, but it's also got to be down on earth where something practical can be done. You have to tie the practical with the visionary. (Horton and Freire 176)

Horton and fellow popular educator Paulo Freire explore this relationship between the practical and the visionary along with other theories and practices of education in *We Make the Road by Walking*, a book based on transcripts of conversations the two had about these topics at Highlander. The connection between knowing and doing is inescapable, according to Freire: "*without practice there's no knowledge*; at least it's difficult to know without practice. We have to have a certain theoretical kind of practice in order to know also. But practice in

itself is not its theory. It creates knowledge, but it is not its own theory” (Horton and Freire 98). It is this motion of cycling between theory and practice that drives the trajectory of the popular education spiral, and that forward momentum is necessary for learning, as Horton describes it: “You can’t have a spiral, you’ll just have a circle that stays flat, if you don’t have a theory about where you’re going. The problem is where does the theory come from. Is that a valid theory? The only way you can answer that is to test it out, as far as I know” (Horton and Freire 100). It is in this way, Horton and Freire agree, theory and knowledge are “dialectical” and “always becoming” (101).

It’s not enough to put theory into action, though, both educators also agree: “[c]ritical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply ‘blah, blah, blah,’ and practice pure activism,” Freire says (Freire 30). Freire and Horton suggest taking a holistic approach that brings the “vision” to bear in ways that are appropriate the purpose at hand. Horton explains that there is no one way to put the vision into practice, but that we have a duty to act on behalf of our beliefs, and those beliefs should inform a way of doing that fits the context: “If I believe in social equality and don’t practice it, then what I say is hollow. That’s why I’m less interested in methodology or techniques than I am in a *process* that involves the total person, involves vision, involves total realities” (176). The process that the popular education spiral represents relies on a vision of people as well as way of putting that vision into practice.

The Vision

This study and the practice of popular education share a common vision that in order for any of us to be actors in the world, we have to first recognize ourselves and others as individuals with autonomy and agency. The contexts within which or the degree to which we are each able to exercise those powers may vary, but at base level, this project relies upon that assertion:

[O]ur being in the in the world is far more than just ‘being.’ It is a ‘presence,’... that is relational to the world and to others... that, in recognizing another presence as ‘not I,’ recognizes its own self... that can reflect upon itself, that knows itself as presence, that can intervene, can transform, can speak of what it does, but that can also take stock of, compare, evaluate, give value to, decide, break with, and dream.... In truth, it would be incomprehensible if the awareness that I have of my presence in the world were not, simultaneously, as a sign of the impossibility of my absence from the construction of that presence. (Freire 26)

This view of the world includes an understanding of people as co-creators of reality; as we claim our own agency, we must also acknowledge the agency of those others who as “not I” help us call into consciousness our own presence in

the world as well as theirs. We cannot see ourselves as autonomous individuals without granting that same right to the others who also inhabit our world. The practice of popular education puts that belief into action. As Horton puts it,

If I had to put a finger on what makes a good education, a good *radical* education, it wouldn't be anything about methods or techniques. It would be loving people first.... And wanting for them what you want for yourself. And then the next is respect for people's abilities to learn and to act and to shape their own lives. You have to have confidence that people can do that.... The third thing grows out of caring for people and having respect for people's ability to do things, and that is you have to value their experiences. You can't say you respect people and not respect their experiences. These are the kind of elements that seem to me to be important, rather than methodology or techniques. (Horton and Freire 177)

What is 'radical' about this mode of education is that it is "popular," concerned with people, more interested in fostering identities and relationships than with establishing procedures. So, rather than a rigid set of steps to follow, the popular education spiral represents a model for an ongoing process of learning that involves all participants in a shared project of testing theory in action, which begins with a particular set of identities and roles. Putting these good ideas into practice begins with the way that we define ourselves and others and the places we meet, and what we believe is possible once we get there.

The Practice

The research that we design is an opportunity to adapt principles we admire to our own contexts, purposes, and actions. Though this project is not participatory research, and it is not popular education, it shares an underlying set of beliefs with those practices, and it employs elements that reflect that shared philosophy. So, rather than trying to import popular education methodology as it is practiced at Highlander, this project attempts to apply Highlander's philosophy and process of learning and being with people to *this* situation for learning and being with people.

Research Process and Procedures

This project is designed as a hybrid, juxtaposing elements from both academic and popular education contexts so that each may enrich the other. Both Freire and Horton did the same. Both drew upon both academic and experiential sources of education. They both also understood how these different ways of knowing could complement each other. People have valuable knowledge in their experience, even without an academic influence. As Freire puts it, "the educators [at Highlander]... understood, even though they did not read Marx, what Marx meant when he said that 'the educator himself must be educated,'" (Horton and Freire 156). On the other hand, as Horton points out, based on his own experience, academic vocabulary can give us a way of "naming" these insights in a way that allows us to connect with others. He describes looking for

ways to talk about and analyze the cultural problems he observed: “I had the right sensitivity, but I didn’t have any way of naming anything” (Horton and Freire 232). In the case of this project, the academic term, *community literacy* provides a focus for the critical analysis that the participants are able to provide on the basis of their experience. This is one way that this study attempts to work at the intersection of different contexts for learning, by giving equal weight to data drawn from different contexts.

Source(s) of Data:

Literature Review: Theory

The research questions that direct this inquiry draw from community literacy researchers’ published reports of their experiences. This is one way that this study attempts to “start with the experiences of the participants.” It is common practice to include a review of the relevant body of literature in academic research, and this project responds to calls in that body of literature to “go public” and to critically examine the ways that research is conducted. But further, this study attends especially to scholars’ descriptions of their experiences working with others beyond academic contexts as a source of data. This project establishes a particular set of roles and relationships and way of working that attempts to give equal weight to the experiences of these scholars and those of local participants.

Interviews: Practice

Collecting information via interviews is another way to “start with the experiences of the participants,” in a way that furthers and balances the information drawn from published reports of community literacy researchers’ experiences. It is also one of the ways that this project departs most significantly from the popular education process as I experienced it at Highlander. There, workshops put participants into face-to-face contact to allow them time to talk together about shared interests. Through this in-person interaction, people work together to construct new knowledge based on their experiences while also building a common ground of shared experience. This is an example of one way that the process that Highlander employs has been adopted to the specific context of this project. While interviews cannot duplicate the workshop process’s group interaction or the particular type of energy and shared experience derived from those methods, the interviews for this study are designed so that as much as possible they address some of the other participatory aims of popular education’s practice to “start with the experiences of the participants.” And, while the interactions do not bring people together as a large group, they do include face-to-face interaction between two people at a time, framed as much as possible as a directed conversation between people with equal footing, concerning topic of shared interest.

Autobiography: Reflection

Another source of data for this study is autobiographical. Though it is standard practice in qualitative research for practitioners to acknowledge their subjectivity, in this case, I attempt to take that reflexivity one step further by including my own experience explicitly as part of the shape of this research. In doing so, I do not mean to emphasize my experience but rather to include it as evidence of my shared stake in this work with other participants, my vulnerability, my own process of learning with the others who participated. This is one way that the model of popular education is more appropriate than a different model of participatory or action research, because this study is shaped as a learning project, following an educational trajectory. In this way, to “start with the experiences of the participants,” means explicitly including my own experience as part of the information gathered in this research.

Powell and Takayoshi also “each include our autobiographical experiences within our research projects; indeed, our individual writings about our projects also include autobiographical elements” (Cushman, Powell and Takayoshi 156). Responding to criticism from Ellen Cushman, that research in that vein might, as they interpret her comments, “focus more on the researcher than the researched,” these authors defend their choice with the rationale that : “Our findings are directly influenced by who we are, what we know, and what decisions we make at the research site as participants ask certain things of us” (Cushman, Powell and Takayoshi, 155,154). Gwen Gorzelsky justifies her use of a similar methodology in the introduction to her research:

“Further, following much critical ethnography, I include reflexive sections that depict my own changes. I do so both to provide another kind of data on change and to contribute to the book’s underlying allegory of growth. ... Thus, like other recent ethnographers in composition and rhetoric (e.g., Cintron, Lindquist, and Schaafsma), I use explicitly rhetorical and literary strategies to make my text’s form part of its argument and to accent my research subject’s voices” (6).

Like Gorzelsky, I have included my own stories in this study. This is not to prioritize my own voice, but in an effort to illustrate my own experience of learning, to reinforce my identification of myself as a student-researcher, and to position myself as a learner participating with others on common ground. These anecdotes are both another source of data drawn from experience, and an opportunity to reflect on and connect to the other patterns of experience represented in this report.

Site(s) and Participants:

The data for this project is intentionally drawn from different contexts, which effectively establishes different sites from which participants are included. Each

of these sites represents both a place and the people in it, as well as an opportunity to work to “equalize power relationships.”

Disciplinary Context

A Place: The disciplinary context for this project is the community of folks concerned with *community literacy*, especially within the fields of rhetoric and composition. This discourse community is concerned with the way that people associated with academic contexts “go public” by moving into contexts beyond the academic. This site is accessible through researchers’ published accounts describing their efforts to work in contexts beyond school.

The People in it: This site is populated by a “visionary and dedicated group of scholar-practitioners who have devised ways both to “walk the walk’ and provide mutual support for the growing number of teachers interested in community literacy” (Deans, Roswell, and Wurr 10). In relation to this context, I am a “student-researcher,” approaching an academic discourse, hoping to learn from the experiences of those “visionary... scholar-practitioners.”

Equalize Power Relationships: Though I am new to the field, and do not have the benefit of experience that many of the leading scholars in the field have, my experience as a student can add information in response to the call to pay attention to how contexts in which students move in the “extracurricular” context beyond the university influence their experiences in school.

Material Context

A Place: Taking my direction from Joseph Harris and others who suggest that we ought to reserve our definition of community to represent actual material places where people from diverse interests cross paths, I define the physical site for this study as the geographic community where I live in East Tennessee. In the same way that Eli Goldblatt identifies with the location for his work, *Because We Live Here*, I am personally called to engage with this community *because I live here*.

The People in it: Because I identify as a member of this community, I am able to begin this research in the position of working as a community member. However, despite my strong identification with this place by virtue of spending most of my life here, like other researchers who approach a community with the hope to take action, I needed guidance from local experts about the workings of this place. This also places me in the position of learner.

I sought out advisors who could teach me about the community we share by virtue of their experience. These community advisors were qualified for this role because they had a particular set of experiences with bearing upon the purpose of this study: to explore the meaning of community literacy as a way of understanding local practices and needs as a foundation for planning for action.

The local participants I recruited had particular interest in working with words, either professionally, personally, or academically. These participants also identified themselves as lifetime residents of the community, even if they had relocated and returned. Finally, each participant had a personal history of involvement with the community in ways that gave them experience observing how things get done (and don't), and an informed perspective on what needs might need to be addressed.

Equalize Power Relationships: Rather than approaching this community with the goal of providing service, I've tried to approach from a stance of inquiry. While I identify as a member of this community, I also see myself as someone with much to learn about this community. Seeking out community advisors places me in a position to learn, at the same time giving due credit to the experience that my advisors have to offer and making a move to increase my own ability to engage responsibly.

Project as Context

A Place: The way that this project is designed is meant to reflect the popular education spiral by creating a community of people who learn together from the resource of their experiences. The community, a "local public," according to Eleanor Long's definition, represented in this report is yet another context within which this study works. We are a hybrid community, representing various experiences, sharing both literal and figurative common ground, built for a purpose, holding the potential for further action.

The People in it: In this community I am a participant who, along with others, brings the benefit of my own experience to bear on the knowledge that this group of people has worked to build together. This community is made up of the people whose work has become a part of the way this project builds a picture of community literacy.

Equalize Power Relationships: This context grants me an unequal position of power in relation to the other participants in the study; while I am subject to the constraints of working within this academic context, I am also empowered to design this project how I wish, to draw the boundaries, to define the relationships and to determine the knowledge that matters. I hope to equalize those power relationships by identifying myself as a participant, and working in a way that aims to put all participants on equal footing. Including perspectives from both academic research and citizens from my geographical community as sources of information is one way of addressing this goal.

Naming Places and People

In the same way that Goldblatt does not attempt to mask the identity of the place where he conducts his work for *Because We Live Here*, I identify the community

where I live as the material site of this research, because this *place* is an important part of the shape of this inquiry. Likewise, the scholars who have offered their experience in research literature are identified by name, to offer credit for their work. I will also receive credit for my work represented in this report. On the other hand, the participants in the interview portion of this study are represented in this report by pseudonyms. Usually, people who take part in popular education participate as themselves; in fact their identities and experiences are the very basis for building knowledge. This study is designed to access that same resource of experience, but beginning as it does within an academic context, it is subject to policies developed within that context to protect research participants, including their identities. The use of pseudonyms is part of the Institutional Review Board permissions granted on the basis of my application to conduct this research for this study. And, while the work we did together belongs to all of us, this *report* represents the fulfillment of an academic requirement for only one of us, and so the responsibility and control lies ultimately with me, and protecting the identities of my community advisors helps prevent possible unintended repercussions from my public presentation of our work together. I have also made changes to some of their comments to remove material that could potentially reveal their identities. These are signaled by square brackets around the inserted or changed material. My own interjections in our conversations is represented by italicized text. The representation of the other community participants by pseudonyms, along with other measures to protect their identities is an example of the way that this project attempts to reconcile the differing priorities of the different contexts it inhabits.

Instrumentation: Interview Protocol

The information solicited in the interviews offered another way to start with the experiences of the participants. The interviews were designed to elicit the participants' insights also into the ways that they both experienced and observed the relationship between literacy and community in their own lives and in their communities. In line with the social justice focus of this project and popular education methodology in general, participants also shared their thoughts on what they thought should or could improve and what action might facilitated those changes. This also aligns with popular education process by framing the conversation as a precursor for potential action beyond information-seeking.

Rationale: Just as the pattern of the popular education spiral can be adapted, so can Freire's methods be shaped to fit different circumstances. For example, Freire's use of what he describes of "codification" and "decodification" with Brazilian literacy learners does not translate perfectly from its Portuguese origins to English applications. However, what may be adapted is the process of breaking down "generative words" into component parts, and then using those parts to describe and connect with the experiences of participants in the world.

This process engages and fosters deep understanding that comes from within the learner (Horton and Freire 87-9). As a hybrid term, *community literacy* presents an opportunity to adopt Freire's *idea* of codification/decodification without slavish adherence to methods that are ill-fit to the current situation. Examining community literacy in both its hybrid and component forms, considering the relationships between those components and the ways that they connect to the world, offers a heuristic for accessing the richness of meaning and significance, of value and power within the term(s) community/literacy.

Beginning with each participant's individual understanding of the meaning of the terms *community* and *literacy* was also a way to apply rhetorical theory to the way that this study is meant to access the capacity for critical analysis available to all people. Shaping the interview protocol around a discussion of the meaning of the terms *community*, *literacy* and *community literacy* opens an interesting opportunity to examine ways our understandings and meanings of these words intersect and diverge. Ralph Cintron relates that assumption of shared meaning to what James Gee refers to as "[t]he traditional theory... that has been prevalent in philosophy, psychology, and linguistics for centuries, it is also in fact, our 'folk (common sense, everyday) theory' of meaning" (qtd. in Cintron 36). Cintron terms this the "presence" of language, "that words perform that magic of washing over us so that we believe that they are referencing, more or less accurately, something true, real, commonsensical, or correct" (9). He counters this concept of "presence" with the opposing view of the "partiality" of language as metaphorical, contextual, socially constructed and ideological. This tension is generally invisible in everyday situations; as Cintron reminds us, "typically upon hearing words, we think of the world first and not the fact that words are mediating that world—except when someone... points it out" (20). Yet when the distance between word and world does become visible, when "an audience member sees, as if through a window, into the incompleteness and bias of some discourse – this is the moment of critique" (9). It is that window of critique that this study hopes to open up. The interview protocol, in line with the overall hybrid nature of this project, unites the rationales and approaches described by both Freire and Cintron. Recruiting these other perspectives gives us access to further tools of inquiry and interpretation, other sources of expertise within the participants' experiences.

Structure: The interviews themselves were designed to be open-ended in order to allow the natural flow of conversation and the flexibility to follow up and explore new topics as they arose. The interview protocol reflects this openness. The questions are simple, easy to remember, and set up to invite reflection between different portions of the interview. Participants were invited to suggest any topics for further conversation and to add anything that they felt had been left out of our conversation. And even beyond the initial interviews, the participants' experiences and perspectives were welcomed in opportunities to offer feedback

and further information in follow-up interviews and later member-checking of findings.

Development: The development of the interview protocol is another example of hybrid between academic and non-academic sources of information, both attained via collaborative means. The interview protocol was developed with input from peer review with other qualitative researchers in a graduate level research methods course at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and at the Qualitative Research Network workshop at the 2011 annual Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Additionally, a pilot study offered the opportunity for some participatory input on the protocol from the perspective of an interview subject. While the participant for the pilot study is not included in the results of the final research, feedback from the pilot interview was used to further refine the interview protocol.

Pilot: After developing an initial version of the interview protocol with the help of other researchers, I met with an individual who fit the profile for my research participants to conduct a test interview. The purpose of this pilot was to refine the interview design for the project. In addition to soliciting feedback from the interviewee, I considered the effectiveness of factors like the length of the interview, the structure and order of the questions, the clarity of terms I used, and additional relevant topics that arose during the interview that were not addressed in the original protocol. I also evaluated how well I was articulating my questions and the purpose I intended for the study. Using the information I gathered in the pilot interview, I refined the focus of the study and revised the interview protocol and informed consent procedure for submission with my application for IRB approval of the full study.

Institutional Review

The purpose of the Institutional Review Board process is to ensure the ethical treatment of participants in research associated with the university, so through a somewhat different lens, even this formal institutional process also “start[s] with the experiences of the participants.” Under the direction of my research advisor for this project, I developed an application for Institutional Review Board approval from the University of Tennessee to undertake this research project. The application was submitted for departmental review April 4, 2011 and to the University’s Office of Research April 11, 2011. I received approval to commence research as of May 4, 2011.

Whatever the research format, the process of institutional review is meant to protect the experiences of the participants, and it shares that aim with the practice popular education. In fact, Horton describes the actual experience of participating in a workshop at Highlander as not only part of the learning that took

place there, but perhaps the most important part. “It was that experience that was probably worth more than any *factual* things that they learned, although you know there were some factual things that they learned” (Horton and Freire 169). And so, once I had gained permission to speak to the participants I hoped to work with, when I contacted them, I tried as much as possible to attend to their experiences while participating in this project. I wanted as much as possible to make sure that the experience was a comfortable, enjoyable, beneficial and useful.

Data Collection and Analysis

When I began contacting potential participants by phone, I explained that I was conducting research for a master’s thesis project, and that I was interested in hearing their perspectives on the topics of community and literacy and the relationship between those two ideas, especially within the context of a community we shared. I described the interview process and offered to answer any questions, stressing that they were under no obligation whatsoever to participate. I explained that participants’ identities would be kept confidential and they would be identified in published reports only by pseudonyms of their own choosing. After each participant indicated a willingness to participate, I offered my thanks and asked when and where it would be convenient and comfortable for us to meet and record our conversation. I explained again the approximate length of the interview, repeated that participation was voluntary and confidential and we scheduled tentative appointments to conduct the interviews.

When scheduling the interviews, I asked what would be most convenient and comfortable for each individual in terms of location and of time, and though it was a small measure of accommodation, I hoped it was a symbolic representation of my intention to attend to their needs and comfort in return for their offer of help to me. Each of the participants elected to conduct the initial interview at my home, which allowed me to offer physical hospitality in addition to the symbolic accommodations I extended. After welcoming each visitor to my home, offering refreshment, and settling in, I gave each participant two copies of the informed consent form for the project, one to take home and one to be signed for my file. A copy of the consent form is included as an appendix to this report. The form offers a written description of the purpose and focus of the project in addition to a list of the rights, risks, and expectations associated with participation. I asked each participant to look it over, offered a brief verbal explanation and asked what questions I could answer, emphasizing that we could stop at any time and that we could skip any question a participant wished. After each form was signed, I asked if we could begin and then began recording. For each interview we worked our way through the interview protocol, allowing the participants to respond to each of the prompts as they wished. To help ensure participants’ comfort, I offered breaks between each section of questions.

The informed consent forms, the recording of the interviews, and the use of pseudonyms were all elements that attended to the academic constraints on this work, and to a degree, they created a level of distance between me and the other participants. And while it is true that the distance challenged the schema of conversation between participants with equal footing, the added formality also served to accentuate the knowledge seeking purpose of our talk, in much the same way that a workshop atmosphere focuses on learning together, while capitalizing on the social energy built by interacting with other people. So, while it was a bit awkward to overcome the recorder's presence, the recorder along with the informed consent form were reminders of the purpose of our conversation, and both served to focus out talk on the topics we set out to explore together.

Recording and Transcripts

Recording the interviews also provided another way to pursue a popular education model when analyzing the information collected during our interviews, though the process was, again, an adjusted version applied to interviews rather than workshops. During popular education workshops, participants “look for patterns” in their sessions while they are going on. Since our interviews were asynchronous, it wasn't possible to look for the patterns among our conversations in real time; however, the recordings allowed me to put the interviews “in conversation” with one another after the fact.

Without question, it is very difficult to attain the give and take of a workshop environment without all of the people in the same room (at least virtually). And, while participants did have the opportunity to add to their original input and respond to patterns that arose during follow-up interviews and member checks, that is not the same as being able to challenge, question, and synthesize ideas in direct group conversation. What recording the interviews *did* offer was the opportunity to return repeatedly to sections of our conversations that were especially interesting and to listen to what was said verbatim, a process that is generally not possible during a workshop. Listening to the interviews repeatedly gave me the opportunity to listen deeply for larger patterns. Transcribing the interviews offered an extended opportunity to listen carefully. The transcripts themselves offered another way to deeply listen, and another way to bring the content of the different interviews together.

Analysis

Having both the audio recordings and the transcripts to work from allowed me to easily compare and cross-reference among different interviews. For the actual method to “look for patterns,” I took my cue from a “card sorting exercise” described in *Grassroots Participatory Research*, a working paper developed in a workshop at Highlander focused on describing participatory research methods by and for practitioners. That exercise began with participants listing on notecards the main ideas they had gathered from presentations participants had given,

describing their experience with participatory research. The participants then grouped the notecards into categories. Finally, the participants reflected on those themes together and decided how the information that had developed together best fit into them. Those themes then provided the organizational topics for a report presenting the information developed at the workshop (Williams 57).

Though there are many tools used to explore, reflect upon, report about and use the knowledge that people build from shared experience, this method seemed particularly appropriate for moving stories from their narrative form to a formal explication of patterns as “findings” for an academic audience. However, since my co-participants were not meeting as a group, we could not work to develop these patterns together in person and so even this method also needed to be adapted to fit the context of this study.

As I listened and then read over our conversations, I began to notice some themes emerging. The transcripts made it possible to see whether these patterns repeated across all of the interviews and among different parts of the interviews, and to begin to see concretely where that happened. I selected comments that seemed significant from the interviews, those that seemed to best illustrate the patterns I had been tracing, and created individual “notes” for each. I was able to move these tangible notes around, grouping and shifting them to better visualize how they “spoke” to each other. I was then able to build those patterns into a tentative set of categories.

Member Checking

At that point, I contacted the other participants for our follow-up interviews, offering to talk in person or over the phone. For two it was easiest to talk via phone and for the third, a short meeting was more convenient. During the follow-up interview I took the opportunity to ask for the pseudonym each had chosen and to clarify any issues specific to each interview. Then I shared the patterns I believed I had found and asked for feedback. I was specifically interested in how these folks might challenge the patterns or make connections between them, and in any contextual information I might be missing or issues I failed to consider.

I also asked for input regarding the project in general: next steps, areas for improvement, writing advice, what interest each had in further involvement in the project. In addition to new information to supplement and inform the data I had already collected, I was also offered kind words of support and editing services if needed, as well as more member checking of further findings and help reading and revising the final report of our work together. With the feedback gathered from the follow-up interviews I was able to make connections between some of the patterns I had found and returned again to the audio recordings and transcripts, seeking places to trace these connections through our original conversations. I began to formulate some initial findings based on these themes. After I had sketched the initial outline of these findings, I contacted those

participants who were interested in commenting for further feedback on the themes I'd identified.

I've shared drafts of this report, especially the findings section, with the other participants at their request. Reviewers were asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality to protect the identities of the participants. A sample of the pledge is included as an appendix to this report. These folks offered challenges and possibilities to the themes I identified, helping me refine the content. They've also been willing to offer suggestions about editing and the structure of the report.

Presentation:

The presentation of those findings, and this report as a whole, is another way that this study attempts to balance its academic and community contexts. Horton describes a manual for teachers that was created by transcribing recordings of teacher training in progress and reproducing it verbatim: "Now we figured that would be as authentic as you could get. We made a manual out of what they had already said. No one wrote or spoke anything specific for the manual" (Horton and Freire 79). While the advice that these local experts gave has come to represent to me a sort of manual for approaching the community, the academic context for this report requires not only the recounting of stories, but an explication of their significance. For this purpose, the popular education spiral again offers a useful model, in this case organizational as well as conceptual.

Trustworthiness and Dependability:

Determinations of the trustworthiness and dependability of this research rely upon the context in which it is judged and what counts as valuable to that community. In fact, one of the research questions this study attempts to explicitly address is how well a project begun within the university can address a participatory goal. One measure of participatory research and popular education is the action that it leads to, and the final chapter of this report, titled "Add New Information, Practice Skills and Plan for Action" adds information by reflecting on the ways that this project does (and does not) succeed in its purpose, and by looking for other places to add information, as a way to inform planning for the next steps for research and action based on what we can learn from this project's attempt to answer "the call" to "equalize power relationships," so that we can "start with the experiences of the participants," as a place to "look for patterns," to guide us as we "add new information, practice skills and plan for action."

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS:
*START WITH THE EXPERIENCES OF THE PARTICIPANTS
AND LOOK FOR PATTERNS*

Surveying the Landscape

The place I live is snuggled up among the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains in the south and traces the curves of the Tennessee River in the north; it's beautiful land. Driving from one end of the county to the other, the landscape varies against the backdrop of the ancient Appalachians: rolling hills and deep hollers, stretches of green pasture, farmland nestled in coves and valleys, rivers--lazy ones shaded by trees hanging over their banks and lively ones dancing over stones in the sun, some widening to lake-sized dam-controlled reservoirs dotted with fishermen and jet skis in the summer, when the water's up. Sometimes, in the mornings or evenings, or just at the start of or right after a rain, a misty fog lays over everything and the mountains live up to their hazy name. In the fall the forests shade to a rainbow of red, orange, yellow, brown and green against a sky that is sometimes so crisp blue that you forget about the winter that follows, which is *usually* mild and filled with more grey drizzle than white snow. And when the spring comes, full of dogwoods and azaleas and peonies and lily-of-the-valley, mayapples and other tender green things only the old folks know how to name, it's easy to forget the heat of summer that will follow. Summer usually is hot here, and humid, and accompanied by the rhythmic creeeee ditta-ta-deee, ditta-ta-deee of cicadas (Sometimes they sing so unbelievably loudly they make the rest of us just shut up for a while. Then they molt and take their voices away, leaving their ghostly shells behind). By the time it's time to pick the last of the tomatoes, the garden rows are often baked dry orange clay, but by then fall is just around the corner again. It's a beautiful place to live. I've lived here most of my life, and these are the sounds and sights of the land that feels like home to me. But I don't know if I'd call myself a true local.

True locals understand how things work here; they know what it takes to, "move things," as one participant put it. Despite the fact that I've lived here almost all of my life, in spite of the fact that I attended and graduated from both high school and college here, even though I'm raising my children here, and my family lives here, and I vote here, own property here, have operated businesses here, I've never seen myself as a true part of the workings of this place-- I've always felt somehow apart and I know I'm not the only one. On one hand this is useful; the position of outsider enables a critical perspective. On the other hand, it's tough to imagine taking part in the shaping of a community when the mechanisms that make it work remain mysterious. Because I live here, I'm personally invested; I have a vested interest in addressing some of the problems that I can see from

my outsider's perspective. But to truly make a difference, to be effective, I need to somehow access the knowledge that people have about how things get done in this place. This is a challenge that faces anyone who hopes to move things in unfamiliar territory, "colleagues and citizens alike" (Mortensen 199). Before approaching this community with the purpose of attempting change, this project began with a set of research questions meant to build a foundation of common understanding to work and plan from:

- How do people in this community understand the concepts of community and literacy and the connections between them?
- What literate skills are necessary for community participation, and how do people use literacy to build community identity? What facilitates this?
- Finally, how well can a project that begins within the university address these questions?

I selected community advisors who seemed to fit my own idea of true locals. These were folks who had lived here all or most of their lives, with extended family and social connections in the area, people who teach me things about the community, people who are well-informed, or at least better informed than me, about local history and politics. These are people who know the lay of the land, so to speak. Among the three folks I interviewed I found, among many other things, a poet, a journalist, an independent researcher, a non-traditional student returning to community college, an entrepreneur writing a business plan, a self-directed learner participating in GED preparation and testing. These folks, with their connection with this place combined with their work with words, seemed ideal people to ask for their definitions of community literacy.

The insight these local experts offered was about what people can *do* with community literacy. According to them, what we choose to know and do in places where we connect with others is the measure of our community literacy. The opposite of community literacy, then, is not a type of *illiteracy*, but rather community *alliteracy*, a failure of participation rather than a lack of skills or the absence of resources. Engaging in community literacy, in this view, means participating in a community, and, as one of them put it, "the will to want to is probably the one thing that's missing." The choice to participate begins with the choice to identify with a particular community, they said. When these folks talked about their communities, they talked at the same time about how they saw themselves in relation to those communities. Further, they described evolving communities, collaboratively defined by the people who share common ground. And, they said, in order to be a co-author of these changing communities, people should be informed so that they may recognize opportunities to intervene. To do that, these folks observed, people have to do some of the same things they do with any text: Read. Evaluate. Respond. Among all of the things that can be done with texts, though, to *discern* is the most vital practice, according to these

experts. People must *discern* where community texts might read, *discern* among credible and flawed arguments in those texts, and *discern* available and appropriate responses.

A Place and the People in it

A working definition of community literacy first begins to take shape in the ways these locals talked about themselves in their communities. As they described their communities, these folks also described the way they saw themselves in relation to those communities. Each participant offered a different perspective and a different way of understanding the connection between individual and community. Together these different voices helped to build a picture of evolving communities made up of and by people interacting on common ground that changes over time. Identifying with a community, these experts suggest, is the first step to participating in the making of the community.

Winston

Winston says, “I think my personality is, and my upbringing has surely cemented a lot of it, really renegade to a degree.” This idea also shows up in Winston’s description of his community:

I wouldn’t classify myself to start with at all... I’ve had friends and people I know all over the spectrum my whole life, so my community is more the town... if I even had or wanted to define one, it would be the whole town, ... probably the whole county. But I don’t vote; I’m not civically involved; I don’t trust any of them.”

So you’re defining your community geographically then, as the county where you live?

Every person I meet is my community, until you piss me off.

The way Winston talks about his community reveals the rebellious position he claims: he “wouldn’t classify” himself, “doesn’t trust any of them,” and connects tentatively “until you piss me off.” Common elements recur in this and the other participants’ discussions: people and the way they interact around the common ground they share. These attributes appear in each description, though the tone differs with the voice.

Mr. C

Mr. C identified himself as closely connected to his community: “I’ve lived there all my life.” Mr. C’s description of his community reflects some of that connection:

I guess a community I’m part of, we all we sometimes have little things over... where we try to get together [with] each other, and . . . sometimes there’s groups that go out and check on the elderly, and a couple of churches give out food to the elderly and check on them.

So what community is that, do you think?

The [neighborhood] community

So that's like a subset within, that's a geographical sort of community?

Yeah and then sometimes we'll branch off. We'll go to, [other neighborhoods], and just check on like the different communities, because we have so many different communities here... now and it's rapidly changing and it's good when you get to know different people.

The common ground Mr. C describes is geographic, based on different neighborhoods, and demographic, "many different communities here" that are populated by "different people," and social: his community "get[s] together" to work together from a shared cause to "check on the elderly" and to "get to know different people." He describes a place, the people in it, and things they do together. Like Winston, Mr. C's characterization of his community reflects his attitude toward that community and positions him in relation to the other people there. A similar correlation shows up in the way that the last participant describes himself and his community.

Carlo Geary

When asked for a description of a community that he is a part of, Carlo explained, "Community can be very wide. It can be very narrow,... but not quite... approaching the narrowness of a cult." According to Carlo, community is both a particular place and particular people, as well as the interactions among them:

Community involves socializing; socializing can be very broad or very specific.... Community can be: how well do I get along with the register guy that runs the little market on my corner, and that could be the only time I have contact with him, but it is the community store. Community can be the girl... the sales clerk... when I go down to buy my favorite CD because she's usually the one that works when I go in, you know. I don't know very technically because I don't have a dictionary handy whether that's more socializing or community, but nonetheless socializing I guess is basically a subset of community. Community can be the sumbitch that lives next door that rides his lawnmower through the yard at two thirty a.m. in the morning, you know. Don't particularly like him but I live beside him. That's the community; we both live in the community.

Carlo suggests that "socializing... is basically a subset of community," explicitly addressing the way that people interact in relation to a shared interest. Midway in tone between Mr. C's image of collaboration and outreach and Winston's alienation and distrust, Carlo describes relationships in his community ranging from the casually friendly interactions with a "register guy" or "sales clerk" to the grudging tolerance of the "sumbitch that lives next door" who he may not "particularly like" but with whom he shares a common ground because he "live[s] beside him." Despite the differences in the ways that they characterize the tenor of the community and their relationship to it, each of the participants' descriptions shares the assertion that communities are made of people who interact around some shared common ground.

A Work in Progress

These differences in attitude also emerge in the ways that each of these folks talks about a more abstract definition of the term *community* and the ways that common ground is established. The common ground around which people interact evolves over time, these experts agreed, and, like their descriptions of their communities, the way these folks talked about that process of change reflected their different understandings of their relationships with their communities. “Community,” according to Mr. C, “is any group of people that are together for a common good and they’ll really look out for each other no matter who you are. They’ll look out for each other, they’ll be there to help you.” The example Mr. C offers of what a community looks like, along with his description of his own community, make clear his impression of this “common good”:

I guess, to give an illustration, it goes back to like when our grandparents were coming up, when everybody was sort of together. They would watch out for your house when you’re out of town. Maybe if they have like a big pot of soup or something, you’re always more than welcome to stop by and get something to eat, and I think that’s one thing that I think of when I think of the word community: sharing, compassion for each other.

Mr. C’s view is based on a nostalgic image of a past that he did not directly experience, but may have been told about: the time “when our grandparents were coming up.” In another comment, he says that people should, “understand what communities really mean and what communities used to be like and how they can still be like that.” The disparity between an idealized past and the reality of the present is echoed in a similar contrast of what ought to be and what actually is in Carlo’s definition of the concept of community, though in Carlo’s description, things are improving rather than deteriorating:

To me, community should be a place where you can live with a very reasonable expectation that you can live peaceably, orderly, feel protected. There can be a diversity of views—should be—and you should be able to all live together. And please notice that I said ‘should’ several times.

Okay, is there a difference between should and actually?

Yes. For the most part I think our town fits that much more so than some people would think, but there are still divisions along what you might call traditional lines: labor vs. anti-labor; conservative versus liberal versus moderate; to some degree yet, black vs. white, but I think that’s gotten better over time. It’s probably not as much a problem for a generation younger than me, but it’s something that will probably always still be a work in progress.

While each of these descriptions highlights a different trajectory, what they have in common is that they trace changes in a community brought about by the actions of those who participate. The work and progress toward a “should be” that Carlo describes and the change from “what communities used to be like and how they can still be like that,” that Mr. C points out both suggest an element of

agency and authorship available to the people who make up a community. Winston also refers to the common good of a community as co-defined by the people participating in that community: "I think it [community] sets a limit on what at least a majority think is their view of what is the right thing to do, the way to see things, the right attitude about things... like hunters traveling in packs, their purpose, at least on the outside, is shared by people. They define rules, laws, aiming in that direction... values." Beyond determining *what* it values, a community also determines *who* it values, or whose values, Winston says: "I think a community could be defined as how many people you want to let in." If change takes place, there must be some mechanism at work that allows it to happen. There must be something that makes this joint limit-setting possible. These local experts describe communities as made up of people interacting on common ground, but those communities are also made up *by* those people who participate.

Making Community

These descriptions of community depend on an element of composition: communities are made up of people, and people work together to "make up" the communities they are a part of. The common ground they work around might be tangible land, or a shared area of interest, but, either way, the people associated with the community define its boundaries, in terms of geography, values, and membership. They decide what the rules are and who gets to participate. As Mr. C says, referring to a slogan associated with one of the local college's community outreach efforts: "Your community can make a better community." What mechanism allows that work and progress, though? By what means do people in a community establish the "common good"? How do people participate in the making of their communities?

Practicing Literacy

According to these community advisors, people can (and should) co-author their communities by practicing community literacy. Practicing community literacy means discerning and engaging community texts, which are made up of and by people who share common ground. Practicing community literacy involves the same activities as engaging any text, according to these local experts. Whatever the scale, whatever the text, the practice of literacy requires the same practices, according to these folks. Reading, being read, understanding and evaluating, recognizing and making credible arguments, engaging appropriate audiences and inventing effective responses, these are all ways to use literacy, according to these folks, to engage texts in order to know, understand, and communicate.

Reading

Carlo defines literacy this way:

This is my definition.... I think it can be pretty close to the dictionary, but it's my personal creed and philosophy: being literate is both being able to read, and even more importantly, understand what you're reading. There

again, to keep from getting off on a tangent, I'm not talking about agreeing with what you read, but I'm definitely talking about understanding what you read. I know people that say they think illiterate means that you are not able to read. Now that's one, but like I said-- what I said aside, you can go into a dictionary and the technical definition of literacy is reading and understanding what you're reading.... In the bible they call it discernment, and that comes with practice.

Carlo references the bible and dictionary as sources of authority for his definition, and contrasts his own "personal creed and philosophy" with what other people say about what it means to be illiterate. He does not mention writing or other forms of composing here, and even in pointing to the negative "illiterate" he refers to the lack of the ability to read without referencing writing at all, but he repeatedly stresses the importance of "understanding," and his reference to "discernment" highlights the importance of not only comprehension but evaluation, whether "agreeing with what you read" or not.

Winston's definition is very similar, especially with the concept of *discernment* being fundamental:

It's more than just being able to read: being able to read, reason, and form independent thought. That's to a degree how much information, I mean, if you're only getting one side of something, obviously you can't make a good decision. The ability to read, the willingness to pursue things... when something sparks you and you think, "maybe I should know more about this," willingness to go find more, and then I guess at that point I'm assuming you'll be able to judge rightly or wrongly.... Literacy isn't just being able to read. I think it's wanting to read, and the intelligence or independence, whichever it is, to form an opinion... a reasoned decision. I mean it isn't just what you're reading, but the ability to "well that's just bullshit, what he said."

Winston's definition adds "the willingness to pursue things" to the reading, understanding, and evaluating that Carlo includes in his comments. Winston claims that it's not enough to be able to read and understand; literacy includes also "wanting to read." In fact, he puts the "willingness to go find more" ahead of the ability to "judge rightly or wrongly," suggesting that whether it is "intelligence or independence" that allows one to make a "reasoned decision," the important thing is having enough information and then the ability to call out the "bullshit."

Mr. C's definition broadens the domain of where people may practice literacy. In Mr. C's view, "Literacy means the ability to read, and basic math and basic math problems... And also to an extent, I'd say science is part of that literacy." In addition to science, and math, and reading, Mr. C mentioned technology as an area of literacy, as well as knowledge of a wide range of subjects, from world geography to a knowledge of appropriate decorum in different contexts. "I think

people need to know a little something about every little subject,” he said. People should practice literacy, he claims, by engaging many texts, reading broadly, so that they can understand. According to Mr. C., “To be illiterate is not to understand the curriculum you’re given.” So, though he mentions several “types” of literacy, Mr. C’s definition of literacy is in line with that of Maverick and Carlo, focusing initially on reading and comprehension. And why is that important? “It’s important so you can know the truth and understand,” Mr. C says, adding the ability to discern the “truth” to his list of literacy practices.

And what’s the use of that? What does literacy *do* for you? What is the benefit of “literacy where you can understand and function with it,” as Mr. C puts it? For one, it can help you practically, economically, according to Mr. C, who said, “If we can read confident, it will help you get better jobs in the future. It will help you be able to progress in your life and not have to worry about being passed over for a promotion or jobs, and that’s pretty much basically it.” Beyond those concrete material benefits, literacy further provides a set of tools for learning for its own sake. “It educates you. It gives you understanding. It’s never complete understanding, but, you know, you can have as much understanding as you’re capable of,” Carlo said.

Being Read

Beyond knowledge for its own sake, the information that reading makes available provides context, a basis for action, for decision-making, for taking a particular view. Literacy requires this ability to read and understand and to make judgments about the credibility of what one reads, according to these advisors.

Winston describes himself using literacy in this way even at a young age:

I read... [from] natural curiosity, wanting to make up my own mind about things.... I remember the guys in my neighborhood when I was growing up. You know, they’d talk a big game of whoop this or that, and they’d spout something and not know enough detail about it to really make you believe they knew.... As much as I can, [I] get my own answers, my own facts to make decisions.

Discernment works both for reading and being read, according to this view. Efforts to get independent “answers” and “facts” and “wanting to make up my own mind” fosters the ability to recognize when someone lacks the credibility “to really make you believe they kn[o]w.” Following from that recognition is the sense of what is necessary to build credibility when using literacy to produce texts to be read by others, to respond with authenticity and authority, in a way that will be judged well, as knowledgeable, literate.

Writing becomes an explicit part of the ways that my advisors talked about literacy when they discuss putting literacy to use in this way. For example, Carlo

says he uses literacy to pursue individual research because, "I have interest in it. . . . [It] might be nothing more than a hobby. It would be a literate hobby.... I'd like to eventually write, but I would like to be able to write literate... literately, knowledgably, with some authority." Mr. C. gave a very similar response, though he described an academic rather than a personal situation: "If I write a paper I want it to be sort of authentic, and nothing like I just conjured something up out of my mind." The same rules apply to professional situations as well, Mr. C said: "You have to know really how to really speak, and how to give proper interviews and how to just be able to write a proper resume. The employers are going to look at you, sort of size you up just by the way you speak and the way you understand things." So then, literacy is about *reading* but also about knowing how you will *be read*.

Practicing literacy, then, means reading, understanding and evaluating material to gain knowledge that gives you the ability to take action, to make decisions and arguments, to write, to be heard. According to Carlo,

Writing is just an extension, or it's the old cliché, it's just the other side of the coin, of being able to read and understand.... It's the natural progression... from speaking to writing to radio to television, it's all the... media. Writing is a form of media. You can be heard and possibly influence people; that's why people write letters to the editor.

Putting literacy to use in this way can have multiple positive effects, Carlo suggests "it could educate some people, could start a nice lively debate."

Further, he said, the ability to put these skills and practices to use offers a level of efficacy and agency, a way to move things in the world, the opportunity to make a difference:

You can get your view out there or your group's view... You can explain yourself. Literacy is important because if you can find that rational person and you can make a rational, not rationalized but rational, logical argument, the natural . . . and they may not always agree, but they will stop and think about what you said . . . It speaks to that in the bible too. That's called having a conscience.

In this way of thinking, a literate person makes the effort to identify texts and read them critically, evaluates and investigates their arguments, determines credible responses and addresses them to appropriate audiences. In this view, practicing literacy means engaging texts in order to know, understand, and communicate.

Discerning

The same rules apply when engaging any text, according to these experts: Read. Evaluate. Respond. Yet those actions do not represent discrete steps in a sequence, but rather a set of interrelated actions to employ when engaging a

text. Carlo describes this reading/evaluating/responding: “You know, you want to be able to counter people's arguments... You have to know what they are first; you have to be able to develop the flaws in their argument, where they contradict each other, fallacies, whatever you want to call it.” So, while engaging a text by reading, a person will also evaluate the arguments being made, while also making a judgment about how (and whether) to respond. Likewise, when responding to a text, a person must refer to what they've read to inform their own choice of argument and audience, to evaluate what is needed to be successful in *being read*. In order to do all of these things, people must be able to discern available texts and media, credible and flawed arguments, and appropriate audiences.

Practicing Community Literacy

Community literacy, as these folks describe it, requires applying those same actions to community texts. When they talked about their observations and experiences of community literacy, these experts described not only where a community text could be found but also what practices could be employed to engage with it.

Identifying Community Texts: Practicing community literacy means engaging community texts, according to these folks, and these texts are written in various ways by the people who together make up a community. In order to engage those community texts, people must first discern that there is a text available. These local experts suggested a community has many layers where people might discern and engage community texts, from the material landscape itself to the people who occupy it and the connections they create with one another, as well as the words written about the community to establish its interactions and to report its activities. To be community literate, they claim, is to read these texts, evaluate them and to intervene in appropriate and credible ways.

Engaging Community Texts: Some of the most vivid descriptions these locals offered of their observations of community literacy were of examples they considered to be failures. However, stories of failures and successes alike included examples of different types of community texts as well as the ways that people engaged those texts. And, while these illustrations of community literacy in action highlight different aspects of these practices, they all also show how reading, evaluating, and responding are interrelated components of community literacy. So, a particular example may draw attention to the importance of reading, for example, but evaluating and responding are also part of the equation. Additionally, according to these experts' definitions, the examples recounted here are themselves illustrations of community literacy in use by those very experts.

Reading and Righting the Law

The following examples show the interrelation of all of the elements these experts described as parts of the practice of community literacy: reading, evaluating, responding. My advisors suggested in their definitions of community literacy that one of the ways that a community writes itself is by establishing a set of shared values. The most concrete way those values are promulgated is through documents governing legal policies. Laws, contracts and covenants are some of the most direct intersections of reading and writing with the interactions among people. The formal documents that govern a community might be the most concrete example of how a community writes itself. These are the ways that a community formalizes the rules for participation. These documents and policies can be read and evaluated for the arguments a community makes to establish its identity. Winston offered a reading of one such document:

[according to] that homeowner's agreement,... [it] would be patently illegal, in the forties and fifties, for [an African American person] to even be inside your house during the daytime.... Somebody wrote that in years ago... So I mean all the people the aluminum people hired, and they built homes and they all had the same level to a degree and... when it was written, it meant a lot of people—went along with it; it's how they wanted their town.

The agreement Winston describes is a concrete example of the way that a group of people established their community identity by formalizing rules for “how they wanted their town.” In this case, the people involved are establishing both a set of values and a limit on membership by including a clause that excludes on the basis of race.

Failing to Right: Directly, when “somebody wrote that in years ago” or at a remove as those who “went along with it,” the people who created and signed that document take part in the argument that it makes about their community. That argument is repeated whenever new contracts including the clause are signed. Winston reasons that the clause could only remain because people are unaware of it:

That's one of the things about information—I didn't know this until [a friend] saw it and told me. How many people don't even know that? I mean surely you don't know.... [It's] too many papers; you can't read it all. I mean some people... obviously don't care, but... if there were people enough that knew that... and it mattered - then they'd probably take it out of there but...

I mean it's unconstitutional on its.... It wouldn't take any kind of legal challenge to have it removed, and it would just take someone following up [to] file it... Since you could never enforce it legally like it was written, anybody even tried to get away with it, I think there would be resistance.

There's enough people that aren't like that there, but since it has no value...

As an example of a community text, the document Winston describes is both an example of where the community might be read, and an example of the way a community can be written.

Winston's reading of this community text reveals both a critique and an exigence. The original argument is flawed, he suggests, and the continued use of the document presents a missed opportunity to right the wrong. While the initial agreement represents a failure of justice, it might be considered a successful use of community literacy; its authors were able to use it to establish "how they wanted their town." On the other hand, the ongoing failure has to do with a lack of engagement. To engage with this community text, first someone would have to discern that there was a text there to be read, then take or make the time to read it and evaluate the argument that it made, and finally decide whether and how to respond. Those in a position to re-write the argument might do so, Winston suggests, "if there were people enough that knew... and it mattered." And yet the document remains unchanged.

Failing to Read: Practicing community literacy means reading in order to discern opportunities to respond, but it also means understanding how a response will be received, whether it is appropriate and credible. Not every effort to engage community literacy to address issues of justice ends in success. Choosing to engage is an important first step, but understanding appropriate and credible responses is as important as recognizing that there is a problem to be addressed. Carlo offered one group's attempt to make an argument to address inequality as an example of a failure of community literacy:

There's a lawsuit... The idiot city councilmen had to vote to sue themselves because they voted to, I think it was the planning commission, the ... seats on the commission had to be filled based on a quota. Quotas are federally illegal; it's against the law to use even the word. Also, unless you take a remedial civics... political seats cannot be in any way, shape or form set up to be filled by sex, race, or gender, for the simple fact that any citizen... [eligible for] that seat can stand for election, so you cannot base seats on how many women you want and how many blacks you want.... They put all of this stuff into writing and that's idiocy... so let them suffer the consequence.

I mean stupidity in trying to be more politically correct or idealistic than realistic.... As far as I'm concerned, I hope that those guys have to pay out of pocket because... on the one hand,... they felt compelled to represent the community. That can be a positive thing... but when you take that commitment and you take that responsibility... part of the

responsibility is you have to learn what you're supposed to be doing and ignorance of the law is still no excuse.

Carlo presents this as a clear failure. Though their intentions were good, he explains, the council neglected to educate themselves and so failed their duty. The problem is not a failure of engagement with a perceived problem, but rather a failure of adequate reading and research to inform an appropriate response. The lawmakers, like all people engaging in a community, should have taken the responsibility to be informed. These examples of community literacy “fails” illustrate the ways that community literacy practices can be used to engage a community text, both in the way that the people who made the laws used (with different degrees of success) community literacy practices to participate as co-authors of the community and in the way that Carlo and Winston analyze those texts and the arguments those authors make in them.

In each of these examples, the use of community literacy includes all of the activities of reading, evaluating, and responding. In Winston’s story, by failing to read and evaluate, people fail to engage an opportunity to respond to a community text. In Carlo’s story, the legislators failed in their attempt to respond because they failed to read in order to be able to evaluate the appropriateness of their response. All of these advisors suggested that reading the community is required for understanding and participating in the ways the community establishes its identity, and the community texts that can be read in turn represent various available means by which the community can be written.

Read to Know

The stories that Winston and Carlo told about failures of community literacy concerning legal texts might be traced to a lack of sufficient information. To participate in a community by practicing community literacy, then, these locals suggest, people must engage community texts to ensure they are adequately informed to make judgements and take action. Winston explicitly outlines the connection between “reading” the community and discerning an opportunity and exigence for “writing” the community:

I mean, that's the biggest thing. How do we share ideas and how do we share information? Because, I mean, if somebody's getting screwed and you don't know about it, you obviously can't do anything about it, whether you would or not. But something really bad happens and it makes the news, or what have you, and enough people see it as wrong and you don't need a political proclamation for action...

I think once you have all the necessary information, I think... from there you know which way this is going. I mean, you know if it's time to shout or organize... or see if you can get a group going, which way you need to

act. I think once you get the information, how to proceed with it is probably... whether or not you want to do it.

Reading is vital to the practice of community literacy, according to these experts, so that people can both recognize opportunities to intervene and appropriate ways to do so. The key is making sure to “have all the necessary information,” as Winston puts it. Mr. C agrees that reading the community is essential, for young people especially, but all community members should, have more background of understanding about what the community is about and what it used to mean and stand for, and realize that it's their time to try to get educated because eventually they'll have kids and they'll want to educate them the best possible way. Learn about the history of the community and don't take it for granted... because it's always good to learn about the past, so it can help you build for a better future.

My advisors listed many resources that people could access to “get educated,” as Mr. C suggests: the library, the courthouse, community events, local educational institutions, public records, mass and social media, personal conversations, to name only a very few.

Read Broadly/Read Critically: All of the many texts written by and about the community are subject to the same rules of engagement, according to these folks: Read. Evaluate. Respond. All of these involve being informed. To have enough information, people must first know where to find that information. Carlo's advice is this:

First thing, you read the damn paper! I think, here's a very personal view: people that don't shouldn't be discussing anything. Even though it's done in simple terms, short and concise and to the point, you can learn so much from the paper. You can't learn everything from the paper. If you have a real desire to learn, to be educated, you'll follow that up. You'll take quotes from an article, go to the library, go online, find the damn article. If they quote from another, just follow the paper trail. It's a lot simpler than people think. We have a diversity of publications in this area. You've got two daily newspapers; you've got weeklies, semi weeklies and monthlies that discuss a broad spectrum of views. Now some of it's highly prejudiced, both sides, but still yet you're getting to see both sides by reading lots of publications.

Carlo recommends a practice of reading about the community from a variety of sources, considering issues from multiple perspectives. More than just reading, he stresses the importance of following up to find out more information, broadening one's perspective on issues by engaging with many viewpoints. And, as Carlo points out, it's also important to consider how the perspective offered by each publication is shaped by the choices that its authors make about what information they will make available and how it will be presented. So, in addition

to reading broadly, people should also read critically when they engage with community texts, according to this advisor.

Winston agrees that readers should think critically about how the choices that authors and editors make affect the content of local publications. Those choices mean that what is included does not always represent issues of the greatest local, personal, community interest. “Every wire story that’s in your local newspaper is a story that is something local that could be there, that could be of much greater importance to you if you live here,” Winston said. Those “people that you’re buying that wire story from, they can do nothing in your town in terms of really getting to know what’s going on and telling little stories, getting people, ‘hey this is something we might need to think about. Should we talk about this?’” So, Winston and Carlo make similar points that it is important for readers to keep in mind that any publication is subject to the priorities and decisions of its authors.

Being able to use local publications as a reliable source of local information helps community members learn and make informed judgements, according to these experts. An informed reader is better able to evaluate new information as it emerges, better able to engage when questions arise. Those familiar with the context are better able to recognize repeated instances of wrongdoing by public figures, for example, Winston suggests:

You know. This isn’t something you just dismiss because... that person never would have done this; their position is too high. I mean, you know: you have concrete proof. You’ve seen it with your own eyes, or read it, or have enough information about it that, “yeah, he maybe could have done this. Maybe I should check... before I make my mind up on this.”

On the other hand, Mr. C suggests it’s important also to push back against some patterns of representation. Mr. C recommends a critical reading of the representation of his community in the news:

You don’t have to really believe everything you read, like... all the negative press that was in the community about all this drug activity.... Every time you pick up the paper...that community was on the front page, where it’s always about drugs or something, when really that’s a symbol of all communities in the United States of America. There are drug problems in all communities...

So, it is important to apply the same rules of literacy to any text. First, read, but read critically, considering the source and presentation of information, as well as the context which surrounds it. As all of these experts suggest, part of considering that context is following up with further research and each of these experts suggested that part of understanding the context surrounding current community events was understanding the history of the community.

Follow Up: Winston calls the local paper a “vital timeline of the community,” and suggests that despite any possible flaws, that fact will protect the existence of that local publication, as a record of current and past events. Mr. C suggests it’s best to try to understand “the history of the community as a whole,” and points out that the community’s history is written in community texts all over, from library archives to the streets of the town:

The library has all these different archives.... You can go back and look at old papers.... They've got old archival films on everything you would want at the library.... Look up all that kind of information... You could always go up to the librarians; they will be willing to help you get started on that.... There are a couple of books up there in the library that can help teach you about the community, about how the names for these streets came about and just a different little tidbits that are fun to know, so that when people ask you what kind of, what's the history of that community, you'll have something to fall back on and not just make up anything....

Like Carlo and Winston, Mr. C suggests consulting more than one source of information. In this example, again, reading a community’s history, as with any community text, requires the same practices of literacy as engaging any other text. Mr. C’s connection of reading and being informed to credibility —“when people ask you... you’ll have something to fall back on and not just make up anything”—is strikingly similar to his comments about using research to build credibility when writing a paper in school, so that it will be “authentic, and nothing like I just conjured something up out of my mind.” That authenticity is attained by reading broadly, reading critically, and by following up, employing whatever texts are available.

Read Beyond the Page: Some of those texts might even be literally inscribed on the community, like those street signs described in the books at the library. In fact, each of these local experts described examples of words that were literally inscribed on the community. Carlo pointed to the monument to local veterans on the courthouse lawn and talked about how the people represented there helped to secure some of the rights and freedoms enjoyed by current members of the community. Mr. C recounted time spent exploring a neighborhood cemetery and the stories he learned of how those resting there contributed to and shaped the community. Winston described a historical marker commemorating the fort that established some of the earliest settlement of the area by Europeans: “there's a list of names of the original people that were in Mr. Craig's fort... and then you look at some of the richest people in [town] that you can identify at least that you know because of their jobs... same names.” Each of these examples illustrates the practice of community literacy. These folks know where to find these words on the land. They use them to further their knowledge of the community and as jumping off points to learn more, and they read them critically, looking for the

ways that these words, and the people who authored them, fit into bigger picture of the way the community works.

What a community builds together materially besides monuments is another type of community text. Mr. C says it is important to understand how people were “able to build communities, because these whole communities were nothing like this 75 to 100 years ago and they basically built these houses from the ground up.” Winston describes how the actual structures that create the material existence and identity of the community on the landscape are yet another community text to be read:

I always tell people, and I think it's staggering, that in my lifetime, 50 years, there's been one new building built on Broadway in downtown.... One in fifty years! And some of the others have been torn down... I mean really, so who's making the decisions? Because everybody in this town ain't poor... but their money isn't going into anything new downtown... I mean you don't want to keep turning things over, but at a point, there's such a conservative thought line, and I don't think that's necessarily political, but...

Winston suggests that the way the landscape of a community is developed is a type of argument, made as a result of “decisions” reflecting a “conservative thought line.” His comments illustrate an element of evaluation in his reading of the community text he's describing: he questions whose interests are being represented and he critiques the argument being made that isn't bringing “anything new downtown” by reading the text written materially in the very shape of the community.

Know the Co-Authors

Knowing where to find those inscriptions, and paying attention to the process of development is one way of reading and understanding the landscape of the community, but truly knowing the lay of the land means also understanding the people who make it up, those who leave their mark on the landscape and the community. In fact, when I asked them directly what was the most important thing to know about a community, all of my advisors talked first about people. On one hand, this means knowing the co-authors who write the community together, and on the other hand this means understanding the network of connections among people in the community as another type of text written by the community. A community can be read in the stories of the people who live there, in the past and in the present, according to these local experts, and those stories are not only written in words.

People are simultaneously part of the text of the community and authors of it. “I think that also goes along with understanding community, understanding the people, and the makeup of your community and you're got to sort of go to their

strengths and weaknesses,” Mr. C said. But what does it mean to “understand the people, and the makeup of your community”? Carlo described this as a matter of self-interest:

I take it most people have an auto, I take it most people have a job... since you're driving on a road... you might want to know something about your road commissioner. You might ought to know how they get the money to fix that road. If you have a view one way or another, you ought to know your county commissioners, your city councilman, so you can express that view. If you have children that are school age you probably want to know about who the hell sits on your school board and who the teacher is.... You're worried about the protection of your person and property: Who's your sheriff? Your police chief? How well is the department funded?... We have a sheriff for a reason. We have a school board and a school system for a reason. We have a highway department for a reason.... To me that's just everyday stuff, that's why you read the damn newspaper.

Carlo is describing the importance of knowing the people who have the power to affect the circumstances of our lives, the means to influence directly shape the community through official positions of power, and he says that one way to access this information is by reading the newspaper. So then, local publications are a community text that offers access to another, non-textual place to read the community. Carlo points out the importance of reading this community text of important people in the community critically, just like any other. People should not only be informed about the people in power, but also the material circumstances within which those people work: “You might ought to know how they get the money to fix that road.” and “How well is the [police] department funded?” These things are important to understand, “if you have a view one way or another...so you can express that view.” Further, this knowledge helps you to find an appropriate audience for that expression, from government officials to educators.

The same critical perspective should be applied to any text, including those that may be more difficult to discern, like the networks of association among people in the community, these advisors suggest. These associations facilitate access to an audience with direct power to govern the course of official community activities. “A lot of times the government is still the biggest cash distributor anywhere, and then it's all down to who gets the contracts If you're wondering why... your water bill went up, and the city just put in a new water main and they hired a private contractor,” Winston suggests that understanding the relationships between those in power and those who might stand to gain from those interactions is an important part of reading the community. In Winston's

view, practicing community literacy means reading these networks, like any other community text, critically. He said,

I think we should know who our mayor eats dinner with, who he goes to church with.... Like minds travel together.... On the national level it's a lot easier to... know who the senator plays golf with... than it is for you to know who the mayor went fishing with. Now that's not always necessarily your business, but that's where deals are made; that's where people get abused, screwed...

These relationships affect how things happen in a community, and the interactions among people who share the common ground of a community are part of the text that they co-author together. These interactions can help or harm. It's important to understand not only "who [the] mayor eats dinner with", but also the interactions among other people in power and community members. This community text is made up of the people who occupy the community and the network of relationships that connect them. These readings evaluate the ways that people in the community co-author this text of connection through their actions and interactions with one another. The culture that people create together is a community text made up of relationships. It is vitally important to pay attention to these relationships, these folks said, and to read critically the play of power in community interactions, because, as one put it, "It ain't Mayberry when you get behind the covers a lot of the time."

Respond Appropriately

Addressing any community problem requires reading and evaluating, not only to recognize an opportunity to act, but also to determine appropriate ways to respond. If the choice is to intervene, there are many avenues available. People can intervene individually or with others. Carlo describes the importance of discerning, among all of the available approaches, the appropriate way to intervene in a credible and effective way:

Just one example I could think of... I'm very anti-abortion, but I personally don't believe that I can get that much done at the polling place-- I do vote. I don't think I can get anything done by going to an anti-abortion rally. I might get a little bit done giving money to something if they educate. I personally feel that if I'm anti-abortion my place is somewhere there's a confused 15 year old girl that doesn't know what to do, and that's where your place is. It might be harder to find, but... that would be one way... and... you know... I damn sure ain't gonna go down to the abortion clinic and shoot somebody. One form of murder isn't any more acceptable than another. Either way you're killing somebody, so that's no solution.

From the full range of available ways to intervene that he describes, Carlo places one-on-one interaction as the most effective. Mr. C describes a similar spectrum

of options for intervention, from his work with community groups, to his individual actions, including,

my own little project that I do pretty much just by myself where I just from time to time go around the neighborhood and just pick up trash, just try to keep the neighborhood looking clean and just do it on my own, not really to get all the accolades, but just want to do something for the community, so young people can see where I'm trying to do something, where they might want to take initiative and do something.

Again, like Carlo, Mr. C suggests that that an individual can make an argument through individual actions. Winston described his efforts to send a message with his actions as well. Reading and being read are, as Carlo phrased it, two sides of the same coin. The ways of intervening, then, of "writing" are almost limitless, including textual and non-tangible arguments. Once the choice is made to intervene, according to Carlo, the options only depend on the willingness to engage:

There are all kinds of abilities, but there'll always be people that are willing to stand up. Sometimes they don't all do it for the same reasons. With some they genuinely care, some just like a sense of being in some sort of what they think is control a position of power.... But I believe, again it's probably more idealistic than realistic, if you're truly committed, you don't necessarily have to be in a position of power, you can be active in other ways, you can be active solo if it comes down to it, but you have to want to do it, no matter what.

Whatever medium a person chooses, and whatever reasons a person has to intervene, to respond one must, as Winston phrases it, "meet and convince the right people." That is, they must discern not only an effective response, but also an appropriate audience to which to address their response.

Identify an Audience: The ability to "meet and convince" the right people by begins with identifying an appropriate audience. According to Winston, it's important to know how to find the people to convince, to locate those who are in a position to listen and themselves in turn intervene: "Where do you meet or where do the people that make far-reaching decisions? Where do they meet? Where do they get together?" People gather in connection with a common ground that they share, Winston observes: "that's one of the things about schools... is schools become a community unto themselves. I mean parents' kids go to school there, obviously they're going to support their kids the friends, and you rally around a single thing, rallying point." And in connection with that common ground, people "become a community." That community might be a place to find an audience, especially if the argument you wish to make has bearing on that shared common ground.

Make an Audience: Intervening, making an argument, being able to “meet and convince the right people,” also has the potential to *create* a community. “The right person will eventually meet the right ear... At some point a lot of people feel the same way about a certain thing but then the voice articulates it perfectly. It’s clear. Before, there’s... feelings, rumblings, uneasiness. Now it has a direction,” Winston said. He offers an example of the way that sharing information can help create community:

Facebook is tremendous. It’s the biggest thing for sharing ideas and information... people just talking to each other in their own words, their own language... They launched... Occupy Wall Street.... I mean that’s just a bunch of people getting together, their ideas congealing, and then bang! Not looking good anywhere else, and it’s so important. The whole thing is talking—communication.... I don’t know anybody that does it better than that right now.

The same thing can happen in face-to-face interactions, too. Winston describes the mechanism that he sees at work when communication builds community:

Community starts, I think, the first time when people meet... At that point it’s just me and him in that community, but if something I’ve said is of value to that person and they go on and they talk to this person, and... this person that I’m talking to, the first person, they’re really popular, right, they’re really tall, beautiful, popular athlete, well-spoken. People listen to them, kids follow them.... Then that kid, because of who they are, his community and my community as well, expands, and multiplies by ten people that he knows and they go, ‘Well that kind of makes some sense,’ and then they talk to someone and there’s 10 by 10, there’s 100 people thinking kind of the same way.

These examples illustrate how sharing information can help to create a group of people who are connected through the common ground of a shared interest, a community. Those communities are then able to act in concert, like in the example of Occupy Wall Street that Winston gave.

Work Together: Mr. C describes a process of group working together to invent a plan for action that is very similar to the way he described the process he used when writing a paper:

I guess first you have to brainstorm it, look at all the different possibilities of what you’re trying to accomplish and see the pros and cons, you have to have those, make sure you get to the right people. Know the people that are going to help you, because if you’re not going to help you’re going to be a hindrance, don’t waste the time with them and that’s one thing and just sit down and just talk it over and focus on this idea, don’t get caught off guard and going in too many different directions, just stay focused on

that idea that you're having and I think with careful study and planning... it can pan out.

So you can basically have ... like a brainstorming ideas and then maybe have your planning session then, raise questions based on all the ideas, take the ones out that are not as valid, take the ones out that are realistic that you can accomplish. Have some short-term goals. What are your long-term goals for this project? Because if you start with the short-term goals, then you start seeing some of the successes. That's going to catch people on fire, and more people'll be jumping on the bandwagon and saying 'we want in on this.'

So for both individuals and groups, there is benefit to joining with others who share similar interests and goals. Carlo also points to involvement with community organizations as one way for people to promote their interests: "People who are willing to take time and go up there and do something that they believe in, which to me is the perfect form of volunteerism. You know what you want to do; you do it." Carlo goes on to discuss how these organizations, including churches and national service organizations make choices about the ways that they work together in response to limits that would be imposed by outside forces, such as guidelines for accepting federal funds, or decisions about membership policies, or established ideology, but points out how collective action as a group can be, "the acme of what you're trying to achieve, and showing what you can achieve if you pull together."

Though he uses different terminology, Mr. C describes a similar mechanism when he points out how association with a group can provide a degree of "clout" that can be gained by building coalitions:

Sometimes it's just like...all the nonprofit organizations have to really pool their resources together. And that's what [a community organization] has been about. That's why we partner with different organizations and work closely with the [government offices],... and I think that's one thing that's sort of helped sustain [our organization] and really have our [government officials] take us seriously now. And, once you get that clout behind you, other big organizations are taking you seriously, the [government officials] have to take you seriously.

So, building coalitions is a way to "pool resources" in order to have more "clout" to move things within a community, by virtue of the associations among community members. Building a network of people increases the power those people have to shape things.

Winston also points to the positive aspects of these kinds of interactions. He describes how association with a group can provide access to resources and influence within a particular network of people.

I think more than community, it's cliques, and I think that's everywhere. The church you belong to still matters a great deal. I mean it's one of the big ones in... I mean, they have influence, impact. I mean.... the guy next to you, the deacon next to you, owns the hardware store and your kid needs a summer job—pow. And that's over simple, but I find that happens a lot. I mean, bankers, lawyers, judges they go to church somewhere... so, I mean, they control a lot of that, but then,... when something is bad or something is done wrong, it's easier to cover up because of the same mechanisms.

Winston draws attention to the way that the same advantages of group membership can be used for positive or negative purposes. He sets “communities,” in opposition to “cliques,” which he criticizes for their exclusion of difference, and their preferential treatment of members, including potentially masking wrongdoing. He elaborates on this tension inherent in the ways that people choose to be together:

I think that [the] more and more people live together in group settings, community settings, is probably a good thing. I think we're all probably as human beings selfish natured to a degree, and community in its pure sense [is] sometimes sacrificing. You may like it; it may be okay for you, but it doesn't work for the whole town, and it's a decent enough thing and the town is worth it to let this part of me go, or whatever... And you get enough people making those kinds of decisions, you really have a community in its pure sense.... I swear the most dangerous thing is you start... setting off in churches and cliques and I don't know...

So, Winston makes a distinction between engaging with communities of interest, of like-mindedness, and participating in a community that encompasses difference. He distinguishes between communities that form around shared interests by choice and communities based on shared interests of requirement, like a geographical community where people of diverse interests share a literal common ground.

Engage Difference

In those communities based not on choice, but on material circumstances, people have no choice but to engage difference. So, though there are advantages to teaming up in cliques to gain clout, in the broader community, people are forced to engage with difference. There are different ways to respond to those differences, these folks suggest, and there are also different ways to engage those differences in the work of composing the common ground of a community.

Be Different: In some cases, simply by being different, people have the ability to bring change. Both Winston and Mr. C talked about the ways that people could change a community just by being there and being different. Both also described

ways that people together can “write” community by setting terms for action and membership. Winston points to the ways that changes in the population begin to change the community:

The influx of so many different people from other areas, who arrive with their own independence, their own means, intelligence, what have you, greater thinking, right or wrong, that weren't here when Mr. Craig built his fort, but these people can't be ignored or pushed aside or run out of town, or run over.... They're intelligent enough, or financially situated, or what have you enough, that they fight back... and there's enough of them now... and I don't think, until it gets to the point where you start to get... political party changes on the government level, I don't know how far it goes, but there are more.

There's been enough people move in the last 10, 15 years to where people aren't set in their ways, everybody's not part of the same old network.... You can't just stiff somebody because they have other avenues... That part is encouraging... There's been lots of people, businesses, resources, whatever, means... They can't shut 'em up like you could before when everything was run through... like if you got a job you went here, it was the employment office, it was the courthouse, there was a certain number of places where the decisions that affected lots of lives were made... the power base was... set. Too many smart people have moved here, with their own ideas, and they're not going to take crap. They know the law; they have the means.

Mr. C offers his reading of the changing demographics in his neighborhood, addressing the significance of paying attention to what the people who make up the community have to offer through their participation:

I guess maybe about a decade ago is when I started noticing the change.... Over the decade or so we had a lot of the older members of the community pass away and a lot of the people that filled their houses... it showed the different makeup of the community now, and what the future could hold in the community, that's why it's better to get prepared for those changes.... Get to know those individuals.... You can never have too many people come to the table that you can share ideas with because... you don't know what person is going to come to you that's going to bring a different idea to the table that can be something that could solve a problem and you've got to be cognizant of that and know who that person is, and that's why it's good to get to know the people, get out in the community, know the people.

Mr. C describes how a change in the “makeup of the community” shapes what is possible for the “future could hold in the community.” Just as it is important to follow up and seek further information about something of interest in other texts,

it is “better to get prepared” by seeking further information. In this case the research Mr. C recommends is personal, social, but following his advice to “get to know the people,” has the same result as seeking supplemental information in other ways. In all cases, he suggests, it is beneficial to “bring a different idea to the table that can be something that could solve a problem.”

Exclude Difference: So, in these examples, people have the chance to change a community simply by moving in and by being different. Those differences can be engaged in different ways. They can be a resource for action; the differences that people bring with them can challenge the status quo. However, the response to those differences can either welcome them as a resource or reject and exclude them. Winston points out, not everyone responds to new arrivals with welcome:

If I was a millionaire and I wanted to actually go out here and build a house some of these places, not everybody in those houses would want me to be their neighbor. I don't know how much there is legally; there are other ways. You know, I have the money the means and all that to live where I want to live, but, I mean, they won't let you live there. Or if you when you go to this church, and that church is real nice and you go there and nobody really talks to you and you know how people are snickety—they don't want you in there they don't want you a part of their clique.

Winston equates the exclusion from a material community that “won't let you live there,” with an example of a similar situation that could occur in a community of choice, built around a shared interest, where people “don't want you in their clique.”

Avoid Difference: What if, as Winston points out, the people “don't want you in their clique?” Carlo describes one response to that exclusion:

Off the top of my head... if you were a gay person and you know that this... church down the street has a very pronounced view that marriage is only between a man and a women. You don't agree with that, then why would you want to go there? There's a certain... [a] lawyer friend of mine called it 'walking around sense.' You know, it's personal responsibility.... And you're not going to change those people's minds; they're not going to change yours, so why do you want to be confrontational about it?

This stance is similar to Mr. C's comments about brainstorming with a group, when he says it's important to engage the “right people. Know the people that are going to help you, because if you're not going to help you're going to be a hindrance, don't waste the time with them.” One way to engage difference is avoid it, then, in this view.

Approach Difference: In contrast to these comments though, Carlo also argues that it's important to challenge group conventions and to make moves to interact across difference. His description of doing so is somewhat at odds with his

description of avoiding difference. Carlo describes himself, saying, "I think I'm a tolerant person, but I'm not a pushover. I've always... sort of had this anti-authoritarian streak, so I can get, you know, a burr in my saddle just over the party line, and I don't give a damn whose party line it is...." He described a similar peeve in discussing his reading habits, saying, "I'm not askeered [sic] of different views, but on a very personal emotion level, I'm sort of very contentious of people who are." So in this view then, not only is difference unavoidable, but it *must* be engaged. Describing his work with organization, he says,

Collectively, we don't approach people, so I... took the time to go to one of his [a politician's] meetings and .. I was the only one from [that organization] there. And he was courteous enough, and he flat out stated "you know there are some things that we are going to just fundamentally disagree on." And I said, "okay, that's fine. Lets try to see what we can agree on." He said, "there's no problem with reaching across the aisle." What I personally saw from that, it was a nice enough experience, it could've been considered more smoke than fire, but he did this survey every year, and after that he put a related question [to the organization's mission] in there every year after that. That had never been in the survey, and when I told my superior... what I was going to do, they just sort of shrugged and said, "well okay, so what?" It may not seem like much but we you know we didn't even have that before that effort...

This is a concrete example of how engaging difference in dialogue can change what happens in a community. Carlo points out that the change is small, but claims that it could not have come about at all if someone had not taken the steps to "approach people" across difference. When we are able to engage in a productive way, to exchange ideas in dialogue with one another, we are able to work together to read and write the community. He suggests that there are rules or guidelines for the way that people should interact when they choose to engage with others across difference:

Most people understand about... free speech and exercising free speech in this country. When you do it there's there is always a general agreement that you're offering that person a chance to respond,... and... if you don't like what this person's going to say, don't say anything to them... or at least, I'm saying don't go south of a particular topic: If you're prolife and I'm pro-choice and we know that and we get along otherwise, why discuss it? There again, we're not gonna change each other's minds and that to me is a combination of common sense and civility...

Sometimes you can't avoid confrontation in the sense ... it can just be verbal, but there again... you have to be thick skinned. If they're having a public forum and you feel strongly about something and you feel compelled to go and speak out, and somebody screams out, you know,

“you're a commy-lover: and you get your wittle feewings hurt and you cry, maybe you shouldn't speak out.

It sounds sort of chicken shit, but still it's [a] consideration. How much are you personally, how much can you hold your chin for? How much can the other person hold their chin for? How politely and rationally can you discuss something? How much are you going to be able to realize, “Ok,... if I'm trying to convince a majority,... this person's not going to change his or her mind; I'm going to need to change mine....”

Mr. C sees these efforts to approach others across difference as a powerful tool for learning and community building:

We're able to communicate with one another and that will help us sort of bridge some of these gaps that we have and we get to learn about each other and we might not always see eye to eye but we're still able to be on a rapport with each other where we can know where each other stands and were not so quick to judge where learn from that individual because whoever it is you can learn something from 'em.

Taking part in these conversations is an important step to dealing with difference in communities, Carlo explained. He offered an example of one legislator's comments about the civic debate surrounding a controversial state bill: “I loved what he said: ‘Everybody is going to have their opinion. People are going to speak out, and this is fine because what we are going to do is we are going to have a discussion about this, and it's going to be from both sides,’ I said you go dude.” So, then, by participating in situations in which people have different agendas and ideas, people have the opportunity to be part of determining the shape of their communities, or at least the chance to expose others to different points of view.

Step Out: Winston suggests that an argument can also be made by choosing *not* to participate, by stepping out, by excluding oneself. He says that his own experience of exclusion leads him to hold himself separate from the community in some ways, because, “why do you want to get too deeply involved with the town when you know at any moment that can happen?” He describes that aspect of the community from which he is excluded as “the one that I'm not a part of.” He suggests that avoidance or withholding association is one way to respond, but he further suggests that even in groups that one chooses (or is able) to join, “you've got to be careful.... If you're in a community, whatever it is, you have to be careful, and be willing to step out of it if it conflicts with something that you know is wrong.” The sacrifice he mentioned as beneficial to the community may be a sacrifice of group membership: “I think instinctively we all know when we're hearing something—you say ‘bull shit,’ but all of us make that on and off switch decision all the time. Is it worth keeping my place in the group or...?” In the same

way that he described discernment as part of literacy in textual reading, Winston suggests that discernment plays a role in community literacy.

Being an Audience (or not): The choice not to participate can be proactive as well as reactive. In fact, the choice of whether or not to read, by listening, giving attention, being an audience, is perhaps the most basic way that people may work to “write” the community. People make an argument through what they decide to give their attention to, or not. Carlo offered an example of how in some situations, even more than direct communication, withholding attention has the power to bring change:

If you don't like the corner porno store, don't go to the corner porno store. Don't go down there and protest. Don't write a whole bunch of letters because...you're giving them free publicity....If you ignore them everybody else will....There was one... and it shut down because when everybody shut up about it, everybody shut up about it.

In another case that Carlo retold, the lack of an audience also had a tangible effect:

A few years ago, a bunch of kids started a newspaper called *The Underground*, and one of their mission statements was that they felt that [the] county needed to understand diversity a little more, to be more multicultural, and be more globalistic in outlook. Now applying the laws of supply and demand, the old capitalist creed, you find the need and then you fill it.... Okay, if I remember correctly, that paper lasted exactly three issues, which is an excellent statement on just how much [the] County needed what they were selling.... There's a saying in music that says, 'don't worry about it; your audience will find you.' And if nobody finds you that simply means you don't have an audience.

Whether the lack of attention was intentional or not, without an audience, the publication ceased to exist. On the flipside of that, Winston explains the power of simply providing an audience: if someone, “comes up to me and says this or that, or wants my advice on something, or what have you, or just wants to talk, and their thoughts, ‘cause a lot of times they don't say anything to anyone else... but I'm listening to your story; I care about your plight....” Ultimately, the choice comes down to whether or not to pay attention. And that choice can be made actively, in the decision to give or deny audience as a way of engaging. On the other hand, the choice not to engage can be more passive.

Checking Out: Winston describes a situation where people made an argument by choosing where to place their attention and what to neglect. He recounts an episode at a school board meeting as “one of the wildest things I ever saw:”

It was brought before the school board [a controversial issue] the very same night that they were approving the budget for the next year to buy the books to pay the teachers. The meeting about [an employee], and all

the pros and cons, and all the people speaking for and against, went on for like an hour and a half. When... they finally started to realize they're not going to get anywhere and they said, "we'll just table this here and rule on it another day, and—okay the next item on the agenda is next year's school budget..." They left the room! I mean they packed the house and then there it was sitting empty! ... Wait a minute -- that's how you buy the books! They didn't care!

In the case of the school board meeting, the agenda proceeded with or without the audience. The budget could be discussed and accepted with or without the participation of a public audience, though the people who left lost an opportunity to participate by learning more and having a say in an element of the community that might affect them.

Do SOMETHING

Citizens are also responsible to be informed and to act when they see that it's appropriate, participants agree. "Some don't know. Some know and don't do anything," Carlo points out, continuing that, "it's part of the attitude." The attitude he is describing is a perceived lack of concern among members of a community for matters of importance. All of the participants at some point express concern over what they see as a lack of attention by members of the community. "That's the sad thing about communities too, no one cares or enough people don't care to say, 'stop this,' or 'hey, look-- watch out,' or to do something. Bodies have been run over... and no one will ever know or care. The right person didn't raise their voice," Winston says; "It's not enough to sit on the couch with real strong opinions." According to Mr. C, you can't engage if you "just sit around on your do-nothing." Once a person decides to take responsibility, to get informed, to get active, "the problem is making sure you hear the right voice," Winston says.

Whatever medium a person utilizes, my advisors suggest that following "reading" and listening, *being* an audience in order to discern a problem, the next step is the choice whether to further engage that problem or ignore it. Winston says that sometimes the choice is clear: "If you see a kid about to step in front of a bus, stop him; say something." Carlo points to legal motivations for action: "If it's a matter of law; speak up." The responsibility to address these issues lies both with public and private parties, he says: "It cuts both ways. It's a public servant's responsibility; it's a private citizen's responsibility. It's a mutual thing." But deciding when to act is ultimately a matter of individual judgment, Winston says: "You can never hear too much; it's all in what you act on. You live your life and see a chance to make a difference; sometimes you do and sometimes you don't."

“The Will to Want to”

One of the questions that began the study was about what would facilitate the practice of community literacy. And these experts offer various examples of resources that are available to support people who want to participate in their communities as co-authors: educational institutions, libraries, local media, electronic and in-person social networking, government programs, community and religious organizations, to name only a few. All of these resources are available if people choose to seek them out. And the willingness to engage, to find out what is available, to find answers, to participate by being informed or by taking action, “is probably the one thing that’s missing,” according to these participants. So, my advisors agreed, whatever the texts and however people choose to engage them, the key thing that facilitates the practice of community literacy is, as Winston puts it, the “will to want to.”

The field of community literacy in the academic context represents a group of people who certainly do have the will to want to engage in communities and to participate as co-authors of the common good. In the following section of this report, I’ll explore some ways that we might “practice skills and plan for action” within various boundaries we might draw for our work. Further, I’ll consider the final research questions: “How well can a project that begins within the university address these questions, and how well does this project begin that process?” Following this work to “start with the experiences of the participants,” what can we do to “apply in action,” the lessons we’ve learned together? The answers will depend on how we define the communities and the people who we work with.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION:
*ADD NEW INFORMATION,
PRACTICE SKILLS AND PLAN FOR ACTION*

Drawing the Circumference

Once I picked up a book that began with a diagram of how its material ought to be considered the center of the universe. The image looked like a sun or a wheel, with the area of study at the center, and spokes representing all of the associated fields of study reaching out from that central hub toward the edge of the page and the rest of the world. My work on this project has come to seem much the same. At times it's tough to imagine seeing the world without my "community literacy goggles" on. At this point I could connect most topics back to the themes of community and literacy; I've lived with the idea of community literacy long enough for it to be a lens that I automatically apply to my thinking about topics ranging from education to current events. I recognize that this is in large part because this is the way I've become accustomed to directing my attention. However, I think that in spite of that fact, there is some argument to be made for thinking about how community literacy crosses and blurs boundaries, and represents a nexus where many fields of interest intersect.

Picking up Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Rhetoric* recently, I had the same impression. Booth, in a compelling and enjoyable way, simultaneously bemoans the marginalization of the study of rhetoric and champions rhetorical studies as central to any study concerning communication among people, applauding the "flowering" of attention to the "rhetoric of ____" everything in the last few decades of the 20th century. I have a hard time disagreeing with him. But, as Booth also points out, it's easy to think approvingly about arguments with which we sympathize. So, his inclusion of the woodcut of "Rhetorica," waving her voice-sword over all the other disciplines of knowledge makes sense to me, as does his inclusion of Andrea Lunsford's definition of rhetoric that, in line with her textbook, explains why "Everything is an Argument." All of this places us, as students of rhetoric, at the center of the universe. And arguments like this may help to move the study of rhetoric off the endangered list, where many fear it is, despite the "flowering" (5-9).

Yet it is also important to remember that the ways we draw boundaries has the power to determine who ends up at the margins as well who is at the center of the universes we define. And so, rather than focusing on how to "bring the margins to the center," as Eli Goldblatt describes (19), we might think instead about how we might make those boundaries more permeable, so that people and knowledge may pass through more easily. A colleague explained to me that he'd been told that we rhetoricians are the frogs of the academic world because we,

just like those thin-skinned beasties, are the first to show the effects of environmental change. We ought to see that mutability as a sort of superpower. What the academic environment needs is more six-eyed salamanders and two-headed newts. The association that first came to my mind at the mention of amphibians as mascots was their equal ease on land AND in water. As arguably one of the oldest fields, the study of rhetoric has a long-established history of change and adaptation. So, rather than mourning the queen Rhetorica, we might be better served by following the frogs across their diverse habitats. Community literacy may represent a cozy little marsh where some of these evolutions could flourish.

And so, what next? The element of action is what sets apart, for me, the field of community literacy from many of its disciplinary neighbors. Action is also the element of popular education that, in balance with theory, keeps the spiral turning. Taking informed action requires that we “add new information,” to deepen our understanding of the patterns of experience that we’ve discovered, and that we use what we learn to help us “practice skills and plan for action.” In keeping with the hybrid form of this project, we might, like Myles Horton, take our ways of naming from academic terms and use them as tools to apply the lessons we’ve learned from the experiences of the participants in this work.

Kenneth Burke’s geometrics offer useful ways of analyzing how we direct our attention. For example, he describes the ways that the “terministic screens” employed by various discourses work like filters on a camera lens, pulling some details into sharper relief while allowing others to blend into the background:

When I speak of “terministic screens,” I have particularly in mind some photographs I once saw. They were different photographs of the same objects, the difference being that they were made with different color filters. Here something so “factual” as a photograph revealed notable distinctions in texture, and even in form, depending upon which color filter was used for the documentary description of the event being recorded.

(Language 45)

What we’ve gained since Burke’s time, through the wonders of digital image manipulation, is the ability to easily merge these images that throw different contours into relief. What Burke might have accomplished by layering transparent slides of differently filtered shots of the same image, we can accomplish through High Dynamic Range imaging (HDR), a technique that combines differently exposed versions of otherwise identical photographs in order to illuminate details that are lost in a single exposure. If we take the hybrid work that this project has attempted and, rather than only juxtaposing information attained through different terministic screens, instead start to overlay these images of “community literacy,” we can begin to create an image with a data-rich

image that may come closer to describing “what our eyes [actually] see” than any single exposure can (Prindle N.p.).

We might also consider how we can apply Burke’s Scene-Agent ratio as a way of talking about *where* we might go about further applying and developing our definitions of community literacy (*Grammar* 7-9). We can use Burke’s discussion of “Circumference” in reference to that ratio to describe how the way we define the circumference of our attention and activity is a factor of what we are able to do in those places, in other words, how our identities within those different circumferences are functions of what we are able to do there (*Grammar* 77). As the spiral turns our attention to how we might “add new information, practice skills and plan for action” in order to apply the lessons learned through the experiences of the participants, we might define the circumference for the spiral according to the different scenes in which we move as actors. The lessons my community advisors offered might be applied across many contexts, and this is all part of drawing a richer picture.

Applying these lessons across contexts does not mean that any single application or definition is correct, but rather that we gain as we enrich the image of community literacy across all of these contexts we can travel. In all of our overlapping circumferences, we can think about the ways that the participants in this study addressed the questions raised in this inquiry:

- How do people in this community understand the concepts of community and literacy and the connections between them?
- How do people use literacy to establish community identity, and what literate skills are necessary to participate? What facilitates this?
- How well can a project begun within the university address these questions, and how well does this project begin that process?

In the community of interest established within the scope of this project and report, the participants include many people who are interested in exploring answers to these questions. What we might say has been learned from the experiences of those participants represented here is that the answers to all of these questions depend on how we establish the bounds of the communities we’re discussing, and how we define ourselves and others in relation to those boundaries and one another. All of this determines what we are able to do together in the communities with which we identify ourselves. In the communities with which we choose to associate, we can participate as co-authors if we learn to listen so that we can make informed judgments about ways to act for change. And more than anything else, the choice to engage is the element that facilitates these practices of community literacy.

Disciplinary Context

One of the things that my local community advisors suggested was that the “will to want to” engage is “probably the one thing that’s missing,” in regard to community literacy in their observation. This will is something of which there is no shortage within the academic discourse on community literacy. Paula Mathieu puts it in terms of gingerbread men (xvii-iii), Linda Flower draws on the “prophetic pragmatism” of Cornell West, and other thinkers like John Dewey (75-6), and Goldblatt states plainly, “Like many in composition and rhetoric, I am unabashedly committed to providing a rich and democratic education to the widest array of people in our country” (14). With titles that include words like “hope,” and “engagement,” these scholars, and others like them, certainly have the will to be “good *for* something,” as Myles Horton puts it (Horton and Freire 102). Scholars of community literacy are among those who are following an interest in action, those who are already willing to engage for the cause of justice and empowerment. Yet, beyond the will, as we’ve seen, the debate continues about how best to go about engaging that will. Following our model of popular education, we can consider in this context how we might “add new information,” “practice skills and plan for action.”

Add New Information: We might consider some of the definitions that the community advisors I consulted offered and see how those insights could be re-contextualized within the discourse on literacy and community. For example, we might label Mr. C’s definition of literacy as leading to better jobs as a description of the “autonomous model” of literacy, or we hear his comments about “knowing a little bit about everything” as a reference to “cultural literacy,” and we might consider how this evidence of the continuation of these influences in the way people define literacy speaks to the “social turn” within literacy studies. We might make connections between the calls that these local experts made for community members’ participation and calls for institutions of higher education to engage in the communities where they’re located. Or we might examine the ways that these community advisors talked about cliques versus communities versus coalitions in terms of publics and counter-publics, or in terms of Burke’s concept of identification (*Grammar* 544-5). We might cast Winston’s discussion of “the right voice meeting the right ear” or Carlo’s description of examining and countering arguments, or Mr. C’s mention of making writing “authentic” in rhetorical terms of audience, invention, or ethos. We might talk about these local expert’s advice to “listen” in light of Booth’s definitions of “Listening-Rhetoric” (10). But beyond the myriad ways that we might study the insights that these folks offered in theory, the ways that we might put them into action are determined by how we define the bounds of our activity. The questions above might be addressed within the discourse community concerned with composition, rhetoric or community literacy. However, if we consider the material bounds of

our academic communities, we might think about what happens if we set a “campus as our unit of measure” (Goldblatt 12), or if we consider our classrooms as our domains of action.

Practice Skills on Campus: In “Writing beyond the Curriculum: Fostering New Collaborations in Literacy,” working with Steve Parks, Goldblatt points to the ways that interdisciplinary interactions often end up with adherents from one discipline casting themselves or their studies as superior to work done by others in other disciplines (345). Jeffrey Grabill also describes what is lost when because of perceived disciplinary boundaries we don’t engage with the resources available in other disciplines (5). I’ve seen first-hand how the study of rhetoric and communication is viewed (and funded) differently on opposite sides of the same street, and how differently educators in different fields are perceived and handled by each other, despite their common purposes and challenges. This is old news. But we could add our call to others who suggest we have much to gain by blurring disciplinary boundaries. An anecdote, that I think of as “two scholars walk into a bar,” from the final chapter of *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies*, illustrates this point with a story of scholars from the fields of rhetoric and cultural studies jealously guarding their overlapping territories. Not to suggest that it would be advisable or even possible to entirely do away with distinctions between disciplinary ways of learning and communicating what we know. Rather, we ought to engage these differences as resources for enrichment, as Mr. C suggested. The authors of that essay write that in their own work, “like the children of divorce, we have sought fostering from a mix of surrogates,” including those from both rhetorical and cultural studies, which they further point out, “[b]oth also profess a hope, if not always an optimism, that their respective fields will contribute to a better society” (Frentz and Rushing 314-6).

Community literacy provides an area of study that might be considered “transdisciplinary;” Peter Goggin’s discussion of this attribute of literacy studies can usefully be applied here:

Literacy studies thus can serve as a transdisciplinary lens through which we might scrutinize composition’s role in the academic cosmos, as a reflexive lens for examining the literacy ideologies that inform our approaches in our scholarship and teaching of writing, and as a conduit through which composition might find a voice in other disciplinary conversations. (39)

Goggin’s suggestion that, “[i]t could be said that any field that has human communication as its object of inquiry studies literacy by default,” sounds much like definitions of rhetoric that place that field at the center of the universe. Goggin goes on to suggest, however, that it is precisely the lack of strict boundaries that lends usefulness to the study of literacy:

Even as an object of overt inquiry, literacy theory as a field of study is far more diffuse than it is cohesive. However, unlike composition, existing scholarship that deals specifically with literacy draws not only from and across multiple fields and traditions but is increasingly drawn on as a transdisciplinary field as more schools of knowledge begin to pay attention to what they mean when they profess literacy. (Goggin 39)

The element of public action added by the qualifier “community” to “literacy” engages an even broader field of interest and resources. Indeed, the move to “go public” is also a transdisciplinary movement, being engaged by people across many disciplines within the university and in many places outside of the academy. Aaron Shutz and Anne Ruggles Gere point to this in their “Service Learning and English Studies: Rethinking ‘Public’ Service”: “Unencumbered by a disciplinary identity, service learning has, for a number of years, moved freely within the academy, sometimes attaching itself to sociology or psychology, sometimes to education or social work, and, in the past few years, to English” (1). Those authors go on to the importance of both action and reflection in service learning, along with the way this pedagogy, “combines community work with classroom instruction” (1).

Plan for action in Classrooms: The service learning roots of community literacy begin with the move to educate through experience, and to address needs both inside and outside of the university. A good deal of the conversation surrounding these moves to “go public” in service learning and community literacy are concerned with the ways that these activities negotiate the balance of “community work with classroom instruction” (Schutz and Gere 1). These questions about how best to go public preoccupy much of the discourse regarding community literacy, as illustrated by the literature to which this study responds. However, if we reset the bounds of our attention to the communities that exist *within* our classrooms, there may be some benefit to applying the same principles suggested for our activities in the “extracurriculum.” Consider, for example, Shutz and Gere’s discussion of the roles and relationships established in these projects:

Service learning provides a way for those in positions of privilege and power in the university to place themselves in the position of ‘learners,’ as they request and negotiate entrée into communities, often disenfranchised communities, within and beyond their own and attempt to discover, in conjunction with those in these new communities, what they can offer to those they wish to ‘serve.’ ‘Public’ service focuses not on ‘helping’ others but on joining them as relative equals in a common project of social change. Service learning projects can encourage us to engage in dialogue about the implications of a *specific* literate activity for a *specific* context and to the *specific* goals we intend to pursue. (146)

The authors are describing the roles that student tutors might assume when they enter communities beyond the university, but if we instead cast university educators as the ones who occupy that position of “privilege and power in the university,” we might productively apply the same principle to our own relationships with students within the communities of our classrooms.

This is one way that we might bring the extracurricular *into* our classrooms, or rather highlight its already-existing presence there within the experience of our students and selves. As Joseph Harris points out, “Our students are no more wholly ‘outside’ the discourse of the university than we are wholly ‘within’ it. We are all at once both insiders and outsiders” (19). Rather than designing programs to help our students have the experience of service, we might turn our students’ focus on how they already are (or aren’t) engaging in communities with which they identify. This would also require that we be forthright about the ways that we are engaging in our own communities. This would be an example of everyday people engaging and encouraging others to share their own stories of engagement. This offers us the opportunity to share on equal footing with others working to engage in their own communities. It offers the chance to learn from those students. This again is not a new idea, but is in line with the model of a radical educator who teaches as an individual with a unique set of experiences engaging with others who also have unique experiences that enrich the opportunity to learn together. Without ignoring the complexity of the role of professionalism as a teacher, I find myself sympathetic with the way that Freire and Horton discuss educators and neutrality: Freire says: “It is a problem of not being neutral, but of how to be different.” And Horton puts it this way: “You honestly say these are my ideas and I have a right to my opinion, and if I have a right to my opinion then you have a right to your opinion” (Freire and Horton 104-5). By being forthright with our views and experiences, we offer students the invitation to also be forthright with their own, which is a way to start conversations based on mutual respect for experience.

Mathieu gives a list of heroes in her book whose actions of engagement are carried out for their own purposes, not as part of any formal institutional agenda. Rather, these individuals engaged because they were called personally to do so. However, as examples to others, they are models for ways to make a difference. Those examples are stories of engagement that could be told by all of the everyday people who populate our classrooms (Mathieu 126-32). Mathieu’s strategy of tactical intervention that capitalizes on sustained networks of relationships rather than institutionalized programs for community outreach, is a model which could be fruitfully applied not only to the design of service learning courses, but also to individual community engagement. It may be that as teachers we have as much to offer through either approach if we consider

whether “community literacy” can be taught or only “acquired,” in the vein of James Paul Gee, by practicing it alongside someone (527).

Extracurriculum

Where then do we then find these opportunities to engage as individuals in the communities we are ourselves a part of beyond the classroom? We might look again to rhetorical theory, and to Booth, for a set of tools. Booth describes the study of rhetoric as applying both to the work of rhetors who *use* rhetoric and rhetoricians who *analyze* rhetoric though he also argue that these are not necessarily entirely discrete roles (11). We could apply this distinction to the way that the local experts who participated in this project talked about community literacy. As *rhetoricians*, they raised and evaluated examples of their observations of the practice of community literacy, and through those discussions, they described the various avenues available to engage as *rhetors* in the co-authoring of communities.

Add New Information: Universally, the local experts I spoke to suggested that it is vital to “read the damn paper.” *The Daily Times*, which bills itself as the county’s “only hometown paper,” offers its own definition of *community*: “noun: an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location” (“Community,” TV1). Further, that publication offers an ongoing array of examples of community literacy in practice as well as plenty of opportunities to take action.

Practicing skills as a rhetorician: *The Daily Times*’ coverage of a recent debate over a contested potential plan to build a Walmart near a longtime drive-in movie theater offers an interesting illustration of community literacy in action.

Walmart vs the Drive-In: To briefly sketch the issue, efforts by a development company associated with Walmart to secure zoning variances raised concerns about how the addition of the third location of that retail chain in the county might impact the operation of the drive-in theatre to which it would be adjacent. An article in *The Daily Times* titled, “Opponents banding; City... responds to concerns about potential development,” catalogues a broad spectrum of engagement with the issue through various channels: an online petition and multiple Facebook pages, attendance by citizens at public meetings with the City Council and Regional Planning Commission, a forum organized by a local business and attended by the city’s mayor, an op-ed submitted by the city manager outlining the process of permitting that occurs ahead of commercial developments in order to address and correct information being shared about the issue on social media. The online version of the story also included a map of the proposed development in relation to the existing theater, and a link to the op-ed and to other coverage of the story by that paper (Bales-Sherrod N.p.). Coverage

of the issue also found its way to the front page of a newspaper in a neighboring city. Whether the engagement makes any difference in the outcome of the development and the fate of the drive-in theatre, the diversity of modes engaged make it an interesting example of the practice of community literacy in action.

Plan for action as a Rhetor: The folks I interviewed for this study wanted to know what I planned to do with the information I was gathering. Each of them offered different suggestions for ways to take action. Some suggestions were concrete, like finding a way to expand the Newspapers in Education program to provide newspaper to local GED classes. Others seem less easy to plan, like finding a way to provide citizens with more access to government officials. We discussed the possibility of a co-operative community publication and the potential for a tutoring program that would partner adults and youth in mutual skills exchange.

It is more difficult to imagine how to apply these lessons locally, because the possibilities seem endless. I can imagine writing in response to the current dialogue concerning the uses of the confederate flag by tracing the complicated history of that contested symbol in this community from its historical significance to its connection with the identity of a local school. I can imagine working on a candidate's campaign for school board. I see ways to engage as a mother, teacher, and citizen. I can imagine inventing a business that does a social good but pays for itself, in the model of "social entrepreneurship" in the vein of TOMS or Sevenly, businesses that do good in ways that sustain both business and justice. As Winston pointed out, "you can never see too much. You see a chance to do something, and sometimes you do and sometimes you don't." I'm not sure what happens next, but all of my community advisors suggested that once we pay attention, then the degree of action depends on our judgment of what is appropriate. They also taught me that the scope of our action is perhaps less important than the "will to want to" participate by paying attention and getting involved.

Add New Information: The final research questions for this inquiry ask, "how well can a project begun within the university address these questions, and how well does this project begin that process?" Like the rest of the questions this project engages, there is no one answer, and the responses depend on the context. However, within the scope of this project, I can offer some reflections.

Regarding the scope of this project, I define this as a learning project because ultimately it represents my own process of becoming more educated about community literacy. As such, any weaknesses are mine and not those of the others whose experiences are represented here. And, as an account of an individual learning project this report offers lessons that I've learned so far, but the learning continues, though the paper is due. One of the most important things

I've learned is that there is so much more to learn. I think of two very smart teachers who gave me good advice: one told me that papers are "never done, they're just due," and the other reminded me that there's no need to try to save the world with every paper. This paper is due, and it's not going to save the world. But it is one step in a larger process. Ramrod used to say, "you do the best that you can, for as long as you can, and that's all that can be done." That sticks with me as a reminder to strive for the vision but to attend to reality.

The questions this study raises absolutely can, and have, been addressed by a great deal of work that begins within the university. This project represents an end and beginning. It marks the end of the academic purpose that generated it – my academic tenure as a master's student. One way or another that part of the journey is over. It also represents a beginning. The spiral is always open, but it is incomplete until the lessons are "appl[ied] in action." Though the argument could be made that this report represents a type of action, since it directly addresses only an individual need, the true continuation of the spiral is yet to be realized, in my opinion. I do have some hope that by sharing my own experience of popular education for community literacy I've added in some way to the bigger picture, and I'm anxious to close this chapter and see what happens next.

Finally, it's worth repeating that the lessons learned here are not new. Horton pointed to the same thing regarding his own work, and *We Make the Road by Walking* closes with his quoting another earlier statement of the principles that he chose to work from: "Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But the best of leaders, when the task is accomplished, the people will all say we have done it ourselves.'... written in 604 B.C. by Lao Tze" (247-8).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Community Literacy & Communication

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to gather information about how you think about and engage in “community literacy.” Community literacy includes not only the traditional things associated with “literacy” like reading and writing, but also other skills that people use to communicate, solve problems, and learn and share together within a community. This could include many things: talking with others, writing, publishing, reading, teaching, working together, and being informed about the place you live.

By participating in this study, you’ll help to create a picture of how you and people in your community use these practices. This information is important in itself, but further, with this information, it may be possible to find new ways to make opportunities available for folks in the community to talk, work, and learn together.

WHAT YOUR PARTICIPATION INVOLVES

Your participation in this study involves being interviewed about the ways that you engage in community literacy practices and the ways that you see community literacy happening in your community. Each interview will be audio recorded, but you will not be asked for any identifying information. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and the original recording will be destroyed. You may be interviewed an additional time, if you are available and would like to, in order to follow up and clarify any information from the initial interview and to give you the opportunity to offer feedback on the analysis of information you provide. Each interview should take about 90-120 minutes.

RISKS

You are not required to participate in this study, and you can end your participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this project. The results of this research will be published, but your identity will remain confidential. You will have the opportunity to choose the pseudonym associated with your responses in published materials. Your identity will not be associated with any of the questions you will be asked, and you may choose not to answer any question within the interview.

BENEFITS

By participating in this study, you have the opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences while you help add to the body of knowledge about how people your community talk, work, and learn together. This information could be useful in better understanding how your community communicates and how opportunities to do so could be improved.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information collected in this study will be kept secure and confidential. Information from the interviews will be stored in a password-protected electronic file containing no identifying information about interview respondents. Once the interview recordings are transcribed, the original recording will be deleted and the transcripts will also be stored in a password-protected electronic file with no identifying information about participants. Any printed documents associated with this study will be stored in a locked file drawer accessible only by the person conducting this study. The transcripts without identifying information will be shared with the researcher's qualitative research group for data analysis/validity checking, after members have signed a pledge of confidentiality. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link your identity to your responses.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Valerie Spence, by mail at 301 McClung Tower, University of Tennessee, Knoxville TN 37996, by email vspence2@utk.edu, or by phone (865) 254-2673. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Print Name

Appendix B: Pledge of Confidentiality

Reviewer Pledge of Confidentiality

As a participant in this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading drafts in process of the final report for this research. The information in these drafts has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews and identities would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these drafts, regarding content or the identity of participants, whether stated or inferred, with anyone except the primary researcher of this project. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Reviewer

Date

VITA

Valerie Segar Spence lives in East Tennessee with her family. She earned an Associate of Arts degree from Pellissippi State Community College and a Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in writing from Maryville College. She then attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she wrote a master's thesis, "Where the Roads Meet: Intersecting Perspectives on Community Literacy," and graduated with a Master of Arts in English with a concentration in rhetoric, writing, and linguistics in the summer of 2015.