

Community Literacies

I like to believe that perhaps, even from our most privileged of positions, and perhaps, even in the smallest of ways, we can claim to have stood in alliance with those whose humanity is under assault, but who continue to try move forward. Perhaps, that is, we help create a world where birds can fly and young children are allowed to look at them in wonder.

—Steve Parks, “I Hear Its Chirping Coming From My Throat”

All communities and cultures construct and disseminate knowledge. This chapter covers a range of pedagogical practices including community-engaged pedagogies and cultural rhetorics. Which means this chapter invites us to consider politically and theoretically rich understandings of teaching writing within, beyond, between, and alongside communities. Community-engaged pedagogy is “grounded in the understanding of writing as a situated, social act” (Julier et al., 2014, p. 56). This approach to teaching asks us to investigate the nuances between language and power and to examine who and what shapes our understandings of knowledge. It challenges writing teachers to consider their own subject positions and histories. In sum, a community and cultural framework for teaching writing encourages us to reconsider our role as educators and how we talk about literacies and to consider the relationships we have with/in communities.

The rise of cultural studies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, complemented with radical educational theories and philosophies (Freire, 1968)⁸ in the late 1960s and 1970s helped usher in the

8 In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire proposes “problem-posing education,” which resists the traditional “banking concept” that treats students as empty vessels and teachers as givers of knowledge. The problem-posing method, accord-

“social turn” in composition studies in the 1980s (Berlin, 1988; Trimbur, 1994). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the “public turn” (Mathieu, 2005) emerged through works like Thomas Deans’s (2000) *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition* and Beverly J. Moss’s (2003) *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches* which focused on community-engaged practices and literacies. Through the 2000s and 2010s,⁹ cultural rhetorics grew in response to the “unease with the facility of Western rhetorical theories and practices to account for the experiences of non-Western peoples *and* from the sense that the exigencies of Western culture itself have gone unexamined in that traditional canon” (Brata & Powell, 2016). These waves in composition theory and praxis have a throughline: writing teachers must pay attention to the social, economic, and political ideologies that affect systems, structures, and understandings about how knowledge gets produced and circulates.

Community-engaged approaches to teaching writing bring awareness to writing as socially situated and explore knowledges and meaning-making practices within communities. Thus, teachers and students investigate how writing has different purposes based on community needs, goals, and values. A community-engaged approach understands that curriculum must move beyond institutionally situated aims and English program outcomes. Some teachers, for example, might build curriculum that asks students to collaborate with community activists and organizations. Teachers might encourage students to partner with a community-based organization or initiative and complete a community-engaged project. Students, then, would work collaboratively with these partners to accomplish community-driven aims. The CCCC position statement on Community-Engaged Projects in Rhetoric and Composition states:

We define community-engaged projects as scholarly, teaching, or community-development activities that involve

ing to Freire, makes education “the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination” (p. 81).

⁹ See Krista Ratcliffe’s (2010) “The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.” See also Cobos et al. (2018) “Interfacing Cultural Rhetorics: A History and a Call” for a robust history of cultural rhetorics.

collaborations between one or more academic institutions and one or more local, regional, national, or international community group(s) and contribute to the public good. We use the word *project* to denote well-conceived activities pursued over time to provide reciprocal benefits to both academic and community participants.

University and classroom partnerships with community organizations should be carefully planned and should be designed with sustainability in mind.

This approach to teaching also critically examines how colleges are positioned spatially within communities. Ellen Cushman (1996) writes that most universities sit in “isolated relation,” socially and sometimes physically, to the communities around them. Cushman asks for a “deeper consideration of the civic purposes of our *positions* in the academy, of what we do with our knowledge, for whom, and by what means” (p. 12). Therefore, a community-engaged pedagogy concerns itself with issues of power and interrogates social and political realities. It encourages critical thinking and deconstructs borders between “academic” and “public” writing. There’s good work in composition studies that has shown the value of community-engaged writing (Young & Morgan, 2020), public engagement (Flower, 2008), community publishing (Mathieu et al., 2011), and service learning as activities of empowerment (Deans, 2000; Gere & Sinor, 1997).

Another pedagogical approach that does deep investigation on community and meaning-making practices is cultural rhetorics. Cultural rhetorics decenters traditional systems that shape how knowledge is perceived, and thus valued. This approach means problematizing how teaching writing and histories of rhetoric and composition are often tied to Western orientations. It disrupts dominant narratives and “honors the cultural specificity of *all* rhetorical practices/productions” (Bratta & Powell, 2016). A cultural rhetorics pedagogy theorizes and makes visible non-Western meaning-making practices and knowledges. Jennifer Sano-Franchini (2015) defines cultural rhetorics like this:

Cultural rhetorics theorizes how rhetoric and culture are interconnected through a focus on the processes by which

language, texts, and other discursive practices like performance, embodiment, and materiality create meaning . . . cultural rhetorics is an interdisciplinary field of study, a scholarly practice, and a category for interpreting the world around us. (p. 52)

Cultural rhetorics in the writing classroom might start by acknowledging the power of stories. Which also means identifying what community voices and traditions have been silenced. Maria Novotny (2020) says that *story as theory* “orients us to critically engage with whose stories are told, who is trusted to hear some stories, and why who listens matters” (para. 3). She writes that “stories wield power” and cultural rhetorics “reminds us that these stories matter” (para. 5). Through cultural rhetorics, writing teachers center the lived experiences of historically marginalized communities. In *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*, Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson (2015) write, “The stories we tell about ourselves and about our world frame our perceptions, our relationships, our actions, and our ethics. They change our reality” (p. 3). In the writing classroom, teachers and students can investigate what voices are present, what stories are shaping understandings of literacy, and how these narratives affect perceptions and realities. Sano-Franchini writes, “This may mean that, rather than building the rhetorical tradition around Aristotle or Kenneth Burke, we start with American Indian or Asian American or working-class intellectual traditions” (2015, p. 53–54).

Additionally, this might mean disengaging with traditional writing classroom practices, such as assigning letter grades on student writing, because of the colonial ideologies that are affirmed through these processes and practices. How can writing teachers disrupt the power imbalances attached with classroom writing assessment? Teachers might invite students to co-create and co-construct writing assessment instead. When different cultural experiences are shared, and when traditional systems and structures are examined based on their inherent biases, the classroom becomes more inclusive and engaging.

INTERVIEWS

I had the good fortune talking with Steve Parks, Paula Mathieu, Beverly J. Moss, Les Hutchinson Campos, Lisa King, and Candace Epps-Robertson about community literacies, community-engaged practices, and cultural rhetorics. Parks talks about how he became interested in community literacies and activism when he noticed the skills he was learning at the university as a first-generation college student “didn’t do anything for the community” he came from. He also shares best practices for engaging in community work and building partnerships with local organizations. Mathieu talks about the challenges and constraints that hinder the “public turn” in composition studies and relationships between writing classes and community organizations. She urges teacher-scholars to “ask more questions, be humbler, and listen more.” Moss talks about the importance of ethnographies as a methodology for listening and better understanding communities. Campos shares how writing classes can practice cultural rhetorics, and King connects cultural rhetorics with Indigenous rhetorics and offers applications for teaching writing. Epps-Robertson concludes by talking about the power of stories and silence: “The spoken word is powerful . . . but silence certainly is as well. And rhetorically silence always has a meaning. [Silence] has a function.”

Shane to Steve Parks: How did you get interested in community literacies and using the classroom as a site for community-based activism? [Episode 4: 01:46–06:10]

I was in Pittsburgh, and I went to high school during the period that Reagan was in office and all the steel mills shut down. So in my early memory are steel workers who became grocery baggers. There was this massive wreckage of working-class communities. I realized I had to get to college. I was the first person in my family to graduate college. I didn’t do very well. It took me a long time to figure it all out, but one of the things that I had noticed throughout my whole education and through the master’s degree is that all of the skills I was learning didn’t do anything for the community that I had come from. It didn’t do anything

for the people who were trying to figure out how to survive this wreckage of working-class communities.

I also thought that the way in which the communities were being described made them sound like there was nothing but deficits. That it was just wreckage. My memory is of people helping me figure things out, to stay in school, helping me with jobs. There was a whole communal feel to why I graduated that I didn't see represented in my master's program. When I went and stayed for the doctorate, I was even more confused on how our university sat within the midst of economic crisis. How it could go super elitist. I got into Pitt's program the year before [Gayatri] Spivak came. I got there, and I was stunned by how there was no relationship between what was going on in the community and the university. I was also very poor. I had two kids. No money. It was rough. I didn't think I would finish, so I picked a dissertation topic that would teach me the skills to survive outside the academy. I studied academic activist organizations to learn how to run an organization, so that when I left, I could get a job doing something.

I came to the writing classroom sort of depressed about its possibilities, and I came to the academy offended by its abandonment of the communities in which it sat. In my opening years of teaching, I didn't understand what the value of this classroom was. I was so poor and had kids, and I was working three other jobs. It took me a long time to figure out what the value could be. Until I began to think about, although the university was elitist, the students were still working class. I began to think, well, the skills I'm learning in my dissertation could be useful to these students. I began to think about the writing classroom as a place where you validated students' literacy and their identity, and you talked about writing not just as something that helps you get published in an article, but that those skills and the network of skills that support them can help the community in which you're coming from.

It was then that I began to think, “Okay, this could be a life for me. I understand the kids in these classrooms, I understand their communities, and I understand what it means to be taught skills that you see no purpose for,” and to try to explain that. I kind of felt very at home in a basic writing classroom. I would say that the academy has always disappointed me, but I’ve always been intrigued by what it could do for people on the wrong side of privilege.

Shane to Steve Parks: Could you talk about your approach to building community partnerships? How do you suggest developing relationships with local communities and organizations? What are some best practices? [Episode 4: 18:18–22:15]

You shouldn’t do partnership work where you don’t have long-standing partnership beforehand. All the management stuff that you have to do is too hard if you’re building the partnership and teaching at the same time. If you’re interested in an issue, you should spend some time there. Spend time really knowing the people, understand the organization, what their needs actually are. Then, when you build your class, you can make sure it fits that actual need.

A lot of partnerships become burdensome because they’re fulfilling fake needs that nobody cares about, so there’s no commitment on either end. I think you should wait, have a longstanding partnership, really learn the need, and then align your class that way. I think programs should have two or three long term partnerships that their students return to throughout their career. You have a partner, you find the need, you develop your class.

The next thing that you have to do is have a meeting with your partner before your class begins, and each of you should give an honest account of your resources and your time. You should match what you’re going to do to the resources you have. If you can only devote ten hours of your class to this project, and they can only give two or three meetings, then what you might do is a brochure, or it might be an event that people come and talk about an issue. But it’ll actually

happen. There's an urge to do some huge, massive thing that outstrips your resources. The students are disappointed, the community partner doesn't get what they need, and students get a sense that change can't happen.

Then, when you move into your classroom, very pragmatically, there is an elitism in the university that students are often quick to adopt because they don't want to fail. They want to succeed in college, so you have to begin your class with readings to disabuse them of the academy being the sole producer of knowledge. It disabuses them of what they think an intellectual is. That may be Gramsci, it may be Raymond Williams's "Culture is Ordinary." The next stage has to be teaching very pragmatic skills like: How do you run a meeting? How do you listen? How do you interview? Existing partnership resource meeting, disabuse them of academia is the only place, pragmatic skills that students bring into the classroom.

I would have students go off-campus and go to the place where the community lives, because it's arrogant to think they have to come to our shop. I would build in an assessment tool within the class. Like two students, maybe two committee members, meet every three weeks or something, and talk about what's going on and report back. At the end of the class, I would have the students do an assessment on how it went in dialogue with the community so that they can see that you have to be accountable, and that you can learn what you could've done better the next time.

The last thing I would say about this is when you work with a community partner, you should make at least a two-year commitment. Don't say you're going to come for a semester and leave. It teaches your students bad politics, it's unfair to the community, and it's not how change happens. I think you have to say, "I'm going to be here for two years. This is the type of work we're going to attempt." At the end of two years, you can leave ethically, or you can choose to stay.

Shane to Paula Mathieu: Do you mind providing a brief definition for community-engaged writing? [Episode 22: 11:33–12:49]

It's usually working with community groups, often who are lower income but not always. It's also taken the form of people doing community publishing . . . prison writing or writing between college students and prisoners. So it's not only student involved, it can be faculty involved. It can be also independent community groups who may have started in an institution but evolved to be their own non-profits. I think community writing is the extra curriculum where it's writing when people are doing it for some other reason. They're not doing it for a grade, they're not doing it for credentializing, but they're doing it for some other community purpose, whether it's to make change in their community or record something in their community or help address a problem in their community.

Shane to Paula Mathieu: I'm curious as to whether you think writing studies and writing classrooms have done a good job supporting the kind of public turn you talk about in *Tactics of Hope* (2005)? What challenges do you continue to see working against writing studies and classrooms when it comes to building relationships with community organizations? [Episode 22: 12:50–16:33]

I actually love this question . . . I just want to preface this by saying everything I'm saying is a generalization. I'm not trying to indict specific people or programs or ideas. I do think there's some amazing work going on in community-engaged writing. I think that the Coalition for Community Writing and the Conference for Community Writing is an amazing place for that to happen. The journal, *Community Literacy Journal*, is publishing a lot of that work. There's an incredibly vibrant aspect of our field that is just so exciting and so rich. But at the same time, I feel like the push for writing studies and that terminology, to me, threatens to be more about disciplinarity and what writing means only within the bounds of the university than the full life of a student or a community or the world. I worry

about a push toward writing about writing, or threshold concepts and these kinds of very measurable outcomes-driven scholarship.

Empirical scholarship risks the conscience, and that Paulo Freire legacy of composition and the Lester Faigley legacy of composition: That we need to support the public sphere. That community-engaged writing, place-based writing, getting students to write about places, to think about the vibrancy of a place, to think about the engagement in the world. That can be quite different than, “What does it mean to be successful in your major.” Those aren’t opposite goals. I don’t think it’s wrong to teach students to care about success in the academy, but I don’t think a writing class should be equivalent to success in the university. That’s too small a vision for what writing should be, and certainly too small a vision for what writing studies should be. It’s a generalization to say that’s what people who support a disciplinary writing studies approach would support, but I think there is that tendency to want things to be measurable and to be scholarly and to be very intellectual, very thought based.

I feel like my commitments are to disrupting that a little bit, and to say sometimes *thinking* is the very problem. Sometimes our ideas about who we are as scholars is the problem. We need to ask more questions, be humbler, and listen more; be part of the community and do the antiracist work, and do some of this stuff that doesn’t necessarily look like measurable outcomes-based writing, to be the best version of who we can be as a field.

Shane to Beverly J. Moss: You were a graduate student in the 1980s when rhetoric and composition was moving towards conversations on community literacies. You started examining African American community literacy practices and traditions in African American churches. What questions were you seeking about how literacy was happening in those locations? And how did ethnographies, as a methodology, allow you to investigate those rich practices? [Episode 9: 04:07–06:10]

I don't know that it's a deep question, but I think the question for me has always been, "What's going on here? What's happening? Let's go and look." I mean, and it seems like a simple question, but it's a question of invitation. Let's go see rather than make pronouncements about what people can do and not do. It also, for me, sets up community spaces . . . as spaces that are equally important to study as classroom spaces. What do people value in their community spaces? How can we have a conversation between what people value in the community spaces and what is valued in academic spaces? It was interesting because I think when I started graduate school ethnography wasn't a big thing in composition and rhetoric, but people had started to dabble in it and started to say, "Oh, this might be useful for getting to answer some of those questions about the what's going on here and what's going on there." We were beginning to move outside of the classroom because I think there was beginning to be a recognition that we need to know what literacy practices, what writing practices people are engaged in when they walk into a classroom.

Shane to Beverly J. Moss: How do you see community literacies as necessary to our understanding of teaching writing? [Episode 9: 06:11–08:01]

There's the impact that the research can have on what we do in classrooms. I also have been thinking about what it means to engage students in ethnographic work. Classrooms don't necessarily set up well to introduce students to doing an ethnography . . . but to use some of the methods and to think about it as a way of framing how we come to understand what's going on. I've engaged students in work that encourages them to think about themselves not only as students but as researchers, as people who are pursuing a line of inquiry. That allows them to think about and push against what the role of expert is, so they form a question that takes them out of the classroom. That expands the classroom beyond university walls to really start to see the

complexity of literacy, the complexity of writing. When we talk about writing, it's not just what we do in those four walls in the classroom. It's not just what we do on a computer. We do it for different reasons. Let's look at the different reasons that people in these different community spaces write and how they use writing. Ethnography allows you to do that.

I'll introduce students to a different way of thinking about how knowledge is constructed: Who constructs knowledge? Who produces knowledge? What counts as knowledge? That's another way to think about ethnography. It's not just reading people's ethnographies, which I think is important, but it's also being in the middle of being an ethnographer.

Shane to Les Hutchinson Campos: Can you provide a brief definition of cultural rhetorics and explain how you incorporate a cultural rhetorics pedagogy? [Episode 32: 01:30–04:39]

So the way I was taught cultural rhetorics follows four sort of tenets of practice . . . those four tenets are *story*, *relationality*, *decolonization*, and *constellation*. There's no sort of ranking. All four of those things work together at all times. I'm going to go in reverse. *Constellation* means putting together different forms of knowledge—when you're constellating different kind of cultural approaches to rhetorics. At the heart of cultural rhetorics we believe that all rhetoric is culture and cultural, and all cultures are rhetorical. When you're constellating, you're constellating different rhetorical traditions. That decolonizes rhetoric by saying there's not just the Western rhetorical tradition. All of the other cultures throughout history have had rhetorical traditions. So really learning those and putting them together. That's a decolonial project in that it's removing the colonial imposition that the Western rhetorical tradition is the only, or most preferred rhetorical tradition. It's decolonizing our knowledge, returning to Indigenous epistemologies and respecting those, and the ways of being that those bring.

Relationality is really understanding that all of these knowledges and all of us all coexist together. When you put those things into a classroom practice, you're really sort of challenging the traditions that most of us were educated within which is a primarily Western rhetorical tradition and view of writing and all of that. One thing that I try to do is really encourage students to become more metacognitively aware of their own knowledge and their own rhetorical traditions that they come to the classroom with already.

So really prioritizing the fact that you all have so much knowledge already. You aren't necessarily here to have knowledge dumped into your brain, but we are sharing in a communal space of the classroom. A lot of my assignments, especially early on in the semester, are about students reflecting on those knowledges. I've had an assignment where it's very land-based. What were the traditional knowledges and Indigenous knowledges that you learned growing up in your homelands and how are those shaping the way that you've come to know where you are? At MSU (Michigan State University), most of my students came from, at the closest, different parts of Michigan, and, at the furthest, other countries. And then in sharing those knowledges in group settings and group conversations, students learn, "Oh, I see how these rhetorical traditions are all over the place." And then we start to practice respecting everyone else's knowledges.

Shane to Lisa King: Do you mind interconnecting cultural rhetorics and Indigenous rhetorics? [Episode 7: 01:53–04–51]

Indigenous rhetorics as a field of study is broad. It overlaps into Indigenous studies and cultural studies. In a sense, what we're looking at and what we're thinking about, and the places that we're writing from is the orientation towards Indigenous rhetorical traditions of these lands. The founding rhetorical tradition are Indigenous traditions. Of course, that means reorienting fundamentally the way we think about rhetoric as something that comes from

the Greco-Roman tradition as it has been translated and enhanced and changed from the European tradition and imported here.

We have to rethink how we understand rhetoric as meaning-making with language. Indigenous rhetorics wants us to think about Indigenous peoples here, the traditions that already existed past and present. Contemporary work just as much as historical work—the ways in which Indigenous peoples have developed their own practices. Most of what we're interested in is ways in which Indigenous peoples have negotiated, especially with colonization, colonization in education, and what that represents now in terms of erasure of Indigenous peoples from the rhetorical tradition, from our campuses, from our understanding, from recognition in the United States. When we talk about Indigenous rhetorics, of course, that goes worldwide.

It's past but it's also very much present. It's imagining futures for us in terms of meaning-making practices. We talk about digital in terms of bits and bytes, but we can also talk about it in terms of fingers as Angela Haas talks about in her article, "Wampum as Hypertext." I love teaching that article because people don't think of digital in the older meaning, which is to say your digits, your fingers. I think those are the links that broaden Indigenous rhetorics application when we start thinking in broader terms of cultural rhetorics, right?

Of course, we work with language, we're working with English, we're working Indigenous languages, we're working with cross-cultural situations. We're working with the writing classroom. We're working with what goes on in Indigenous communities. We're also thinking about visual representations in terms of art, performance, mascots, stereotyping, how people think about Indigenous peoples. Where did those assumptions come from and what do we need to do to work through that and to change that? Or if invisibility is a

problem altogether: How do we help cultivate a narrative of presence and encourage people to take that up rather than continuing to ignore Indigenous peoples?

Shane to Lisa King: How do writing teachers do this work in the classroom? [Episode 7: 04:52–08:36]

This kind of work is intimately tied to decolonial practices. I don't mean decolonial in terms of an academic buzzword. I mean it in terms of really thinking hard about the ways in which our classrooms, our institutions and programs, are structured along old colonial lines that are so taken for granted they're invisible to us. And about what it means to communicate well on paper in a particular language for this or that reason. What other possibilities are there? I think the field is moving into interesting and exciting directions in terms of opening up what rhetoric means.

When we think about Indigenous rhetorics in the classroom, it means thinking really hard about decolonizing our classrooms in terms of what kind of work or ideas we're promoting. I'm thinking perhaps about whose work matters and whose language matters and whose work is valuable and whose isn't, whether that's implicit or explicit . . .

It's almost something you feel in your bones and it's hard to articulate. It's a vision that hasn't quite materialized, but we're working on it. This is exactly the kind of work we need to do. It also means that if you're thinking about the rhetorical tradition . . . what other orientations can we take to rhetorical practice? What if we start thinking of it in terms of Indigenous terms that are fairly consistent across Indigenous communities, such as relationship, reciprocity, responsibility? What happens if we start teaching with those? What are the strategic alliances that can be made or strategic reorientation? What I think many Indigenous reorient us towards is *community* again . . . we're asking for a fundamental reorientation of the syllabus or that classroom

practice. What does it mean to be in community for Indigenous peoples or for specific tribal community? What does it mean within your students' own community? This is how I structure my own classes.

Shane to Candace Epps-Robertson: Your book, *Resisting Brown* (2018), examines how African American community members in Virginia responded after *Brown vs. Board of Education*. You write about the Prince Edward County Free School. Can you talk about social justice-based work and the importance of listening while incorporating and amplifying marginalized community voices? [Episode 19: 04:28–07:54]

Really to be able to understand how social justice operates, you have to listen to the communities who are experiencing, who are fighting, who are working in these areas. That's become even more true for me as my research moves away from traditional archives to thinking about digital practices of citizenship and engagement in social justice and online spaces. My students certainly know what that looks like. I've learned a great deal from them just listening to their experiences both as participants and also as observers in some of these movements as well . . . so really to be able to learn from them is something that I'm indebted to and I really value. Listening plays a large role in terms of how I interact and even think about studying social justice, but also how I'm learning from my students.

I think also, in terms of thinking about my own research, listening is always where I begin. I can't think of another way really to start any of the work, especially a project that involves race, marginalized communities, or literacy because these are areas, Shane, that are so personal and so charged that it is my duty as a researcher to start with listening. My first project where I looked at the Prince Edward County Free School Association as a counter response to White supremacist ideologies really began long before I even went to graduate school because my grandmother was from Prince Edward County.

I grew up with these stories about what happened when the schools closed and how the Black community persevered through in spite of massive resistance. When I got to graduate school, I had identified this project. I knew that it would keep me connected to that community that actually helped me get to grad school in the first place. I knew there was an archive, but I also knew that there were going to be stories that just weren't represented in that archive. It was important that I found a way to have that community be able to speak and share their own stories. In many instances it just involved me doing a lot less talking and just a lot of listening.

Shane to Candace Epps-Robertson: In *Resisting Brown* (2018), you write, “My grandmother, like scholars of rhetoric and literacy studies, knew that stories were not just talk. For her stories were a tapestry of lessons and histories and often a catalyst for action . . . the experiences of my family members are with me through both the silences and the stories.” Can you talk more about the power of silences and stories? [Episode 19: 10:04–14:28]

The spoken word is powerful. We'd all acknowledge that. But silence certainly is as well. Rhetorically, silence always has a meaning. It has a function. I can't say that I'll speak for all Black communities with my interpretation or with how I'm thinking about silence in this particular instance, but what I do know from my experience is that some stories, some experiences, are either so sacred or so precious or so painful that to make them public is a heavy decision. When I spoke with family members about my project on the Free School, sometimes they would say they had no problem talking with me and sharing their experiences in our own private home space, but they didn't want it to be made public for fear of it getting out into the world—into a space where it could be critiqued or misunderstood. I think this was especially the case for family members who were unable to relocate from Prince Edward. So who went the longest without having any access to public school.

There was often this sense of shame around not having access to literacy in that particular way through formal education.

The idea that people wouldn't understand or they would ask questions I think also comes from the fact that, often-times when researchers would come into Prince Edward, especially in those early days after the schools closed, and then once they reopened, researchers would sort of swarm into the community, do testing on the students, ask questions or whatever and they'd leave. Well, what happens once you have an interview with someone and you have no idea where that interview ends up, or you take a test and you have no idea what happens to the data that's being collected? I think the idea was that this is a way that we can exercise, or I can exercise some control. I can decide who actually gets to hear my story.

I think for many of us who are talking about race or writing about race, that certainly holds true. There's some instances where the material, the story can't be shared because the concern is about how it will be received. I think this is something that I'm thinking a lot about now with my second project, whether or not it'll be received at all. Just because you tell the story certainly does not mean that anyone has to listen to it or take time to pause and reflect and experience it with you. When I think about the Free School Project, and when I think about my current project now where I'm thinking about transnational citizenship and public pedagogy, I know that I often have a concern: Will people understand why I'm writing about this, or how will this get taken up in different spaces?

I have to believe in the work, and I do. But any time you share your story, you risk that people may not be as attentive or respectful as you want. It's something that I am very aware of any time I enter into a community as a researcher. And also it's just something that I'm attentive to as a person of color any time I'm sharing my own personal stories

about race. Many of them are quite painful to reflect upon and to make those things public. It's a big risk.

DENOUEMENT

Teachers need to problematize traditional histories, standards, and power imbalances that exists within and beyond academia in order to center all rhetorical practices/productions in the writing classroom (see Bratta & Powell, 2016). I see community-engaged pedagogies and cultural rhetorics as practices that help make writing classes more inclusive and as approaches that break down the walls of the ivory tower (e.g., universities). Which is to say that these pedagogies address how power manifests in systems that ultimately oppress individuals and communities, and they help reimagine whose stories and histories are being told. These approaches resist the exclusionary status quo that reproduce biases, disenfranchise individuals, and privilege only some ways of knowing, being, meaning-making, communicating, and languaging.

For additional resources on community and cultural literacies, I suggest *Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric* (est. 2000), *Community Literacy Journal* (est. 2006), the Coalition for Community Writing, the Cultural Rhetorics Consortium, *constellations: a cultural rhetorics publishing space* (est. 2018–2019), *enculturation* (est. 1996), and the Working and Writing for Change series from Parlor Press. These spaces provide an abundance of research, support, and information for writing teachers. I also offer the following questions that might help teachers think about how to engage with/in communities and cultures in writing classes:

- How can we amplify and support the labor local community organizers and activists are producing and how can we build partnerships that are equitable and sustainable?
- How are we using writing curriculum as a means for community-based research and practice? And what does it look like to truly center diversity and inclusivity in writing programs and classrooms through course outcomes, goals, and assessments?
- In what ways are we promoting writing that takes place in and across various communities (e.g., prison writing, street newspapers) and actively listening and working toward social

change through pedagogies in the writing classroom?

- How are we emphasizing multiple modes and mediums for composing, including digital and oral practices, as opportunities for meaning-making and knowledge construction and circulation? How are we privileging other forms of communication beyond the alphabetic text?
- What identities and cultures are being silenced in rhetoric and composition and writing classrooms? In what ways are we listening to and amplifying histories and stories of marginalized communities?
- In what ways are we resisting dominant Western traditions, norms, and practices given the constraints they have on language and writing? And how are we embracing and making more visible non-Western histories and knowledges to students?