

Community
Literacy
and the
Rhetoric of
Public
Engagement

Linda Flower

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3 *Images of Engagement in Composition Studies*

The teenagers, parents, neighbors, teachers, and vice principals who came to the Community Literacy Center events were sometimes perplexed when they tried to place the community-literacy publications and performance in the context of literate practices they knew and expected—the dutiful, correct, personal essay of public schooling, the hip “styling” of teen culture, or the warm fuzzy, recognition discourse of social service/youth programs. Community organizers and neighborhood activists felt a little more at home, but the second word of the CLC’s chosen name was *literacy*—and with that came an academic agenda that was as full of multiple meanings and competing stances as the notion of community had been. As the CLC began to build the working definition of community literacy, sketched in chapter 1, it had to negotiate these alternatives. To understand those choices, it helps to reflect on the academic context and the debates surrounding literacy and how it could become what I am calling a *rhetoric of engagement*.

This rhetoric—the art of making a difference through inquiry, deliberation, and literate action in the name of equality and social justice—has been a distinctive voice in American life. And not just in politics but in the more cautious enclaves of our academic and intellectual life. Within the academy, one of the widest bandwidths for this rhetoric of change has been the tradition of American philosophical pragmatism. It has broadcast the powerful voices of Ralph Waldo Emerson (on self-determination in the face of tradition, on abolition, and on moral awareness), William James (on individual consciousness and social consequences), Charles Sanders Peirce (on the communal and revisable nature of our knowledge), John Dewey (on progressive education, social reform, and democracy based on questioning, critical intelligence), W. E. B. DuBois (on the human creative powers of America’s subjugated peoples), Reinhold Niebuhr (on walking the tightrope of love and justice in

a tragic world), Richard Rorty (on accepting the contingency and instability of our knowledge), and Cornel West (on acting from a prophetic—a critical and committed—stance for love and justice).

I draw this thumbnail sketch from Cornel West's provocative history of philosophical pragmatism and its socially committed, outcome-oriented approach to deep critical thinking. In a book fittingly titled *The American Evulsion of Philosophy*, West (1989) talks about how a new focus on the forms of power, "be they rhetorical, economic, or military powers . . . has returned humanistic studies to the primal stuff of human history, that is, structured and circumscribed human agency in all its various manifestations" (p. 4). It is this daring combination that marks West's pragmatism—a vision of individuals committed to being the active moral agents in their own lives even as they work for a clear-sighted recognition of the forces without and within their own minds that deny such action. Moreover, this hard-won spot, this "author's chair" of human agency and reflective action is no longer reserved for the "elite cultural creators" of traditional humanism—the heroes, poets, and leaders. It is occupied by those whom West calls *everyday people*—the young as well as adult, student as well as teacher, and those at the bottom of hierarchies based on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

This rhetoric of social awareness and commitment to change, especially on the behalf of others, has taken root in the teaching of writing and the development of rhetoric and composition as a discipline. A rather remarkable achievement for such a publicly owned institution as freshman composition. However, this history is also a site of some disagreement over just what teachers and students should actually *do*, within the world of education, to make a meaningful difference. That discussion, which has involved most of us as teachers or students, formed a critical prologue to the rhetorical choices that shaped community literacy.

Composition Studies: A Response to Social Concerns

From its emergence in the 1960s and 1970s, rhetoric and composition studies has had a history of redefining itself in response to genuine social concerns. Even as it joined the general rush to specialized professionalism found throughout American universities, rhet/comp has been a sort of poster child for the attempt to make a difference through education. In doing so, it also gave itself a tension-filled agenda. For example, rhetoric and composition studies has long held itself accountable to the public and social significance of writing—to the outcry from schools, businesses, and social advocates when "Johnnie" couldn't write in the way they demanded.¹ At the same time, it embraced a potentially contradictory goal of developing personally empowered

writers. These individuals would have the capacity to operate in academic, professional, and civic forums by their own lights—which might differ from what the "public," hoping for career or vocational training, had intended. And then—often in tension with both of these agendas—composition saw itself as participating in a broader cultural conversation around issues of social justice in a diverse and economically divided nation. Meanwhile, these agendas were often at odds with the need to achieve the status of a respectable academic discipline. As a result, the problem of the field was not only how to study, teach, and build on rhetorical *theory* (the standard academic agenda) but also how to "do rhetoric" as the art of making a difference. How were we to achieve those broader outcomes—to have the personal, public, and social significance to which the field laid claim? The dominant paradigms of rhet/comp arrived at different ways to manage this tension.

Despite their differences, the writing-process movement and the later turn to social-process theorizing were each success stories of academic engagement—examples of a discipline motivated by a socially responsive effort to make a worldly difference within its own arena. The "process" attempt to redefine composition was a child of the 1960s. It challenged teachers to liberate students from the sterile world of five-paragraph themes and textual conventions by championing individually meaningful writing based on personal exploration and rhetorical invention. It redefined composition as inquiry and expression.

A second major shift in composition studies, associated with the idea of a "social" process, was responding in part to another political reality: a growing number of underprepared working-class and minority students were appearing in mainstream colleges—which were even less prepared for them. Compositionists began to realize that if the current-traditional paradigm of the 1950s (with its focus on correct, conventional texts) had failed these students, the process movement (with its happy neglect of the conventions that conferred social power) was in danger of failing them, too. The nurturing, freewriting, composition classroom with its focus on the individual student could no longer afford to ignore the cultural, social, and institutional expectations and processes that not only marginalized students but also made their teachers blind to and complicit in these social processes.

Meanwhile, the impulse toward liberal, ethical, and compassionate rhetorical action in both of these schools of composition thought coexisted with the need to build a theoretical framework for composition's call to practical action. Even more problematic, such a theory would also have to carve out a professional identity within the field of English studies—a field that has often held itself above practical action.

Rhetoric offered a way to support both the impulse to social action and the call to professional respectability and power. The "new rhetoric" of the 1970s revived a powerful tradition of writing as discovery and change, offering a legitimizing history to composition and a theoretical framework for research in its process.² It gave life to the notion of audience. When the field redefined itself as the study of an enlarged "social process," the contribution of rhetoric often metamorphosed into the study of "rhetorics" or discourses of different social groups. We began to reread the Sophists, to recover rhetorica in the work of early and current feminists, to analyze cultural and institutional discourses, and to examine, once again, the definition of academic discourse across the curriculum.³

This renewal of rhetorical awareness, however, was not so evident in the composition classroom. When movements of resistance begin to solidify (or ironically, turn into the dominant paradigm themselves), their complex theories turn into "teachable" conventions of discourse and the mini-genres of the composition classroom and textbook.⁴ So just as the five-paragraph theme of the 1950s gave way to the equally standardized expectations of freewriting and the personal essay, these soon gave way to the more literary conventions of critical analysis and its ideological critique of social texts. The institutionalized versions of these different educational stances reveal how some of the theoretical voices and practical arts of rhetoric—elements that I believe are central to the rhetoric of engagement—have been buried, marginalized or lost.

Speaking Up, Against, With, or For

The fundamental question to ask about one's composition paradigm is, what is it actually teaching students to do? The expressivist paradigm, for instance, was a rhetoric of personal exploration and empowerment. It transformed students into "writers"—giving them the safe houses and the tools with which to *speak up*—to discover and express themselves, their personal and cultural identities. The social paradigm in composition, on the other hand, drew its rhetoric from literary and cultural studies, which had already developed a highly elaborated practice of deconstructive reading and ideological critique. It offered students a formidable set of literate practices that allowed them to *speak against something*—against the media and ideology, against their own assumptions and inclinations as well as against institutions, oppression, and power. It conferred the certainty of critical consciousness and the authority to resist the status quo. Together the expressive and critical approaches to composition heightened our awareness of the "others" in our society—the people silenced and marginalized by race, culture, gender, class, or poverty.

But what these paradigms—that so strongly influence teaching and scholarship—do not do well is teach how to *speak with* others across the chasms of difference. Although they prompt us to worry about (and repeatedly critique ourselves for) thinking we can speak "for" the powerless, they have little to tell writers about how they might achieve the difficult role of partners in inquiry with those "others." I imagine our students entering the culturally diverse public forums that materialize in dorm rooms, fraternity meetings, or professional courses and later in policy-drafting sessions at the office and decisions at the PTA. And I see rhetors standing up in a sort of splendid isolation, prepared to tell their stories, to assert their feelings, or to critique assumptions and recognize and resist patterns of power. But *speaking up* in self-disclosure or critique does not support the difficult art of dialogue. Where do we learn how to *speak with* others? How could we develop an intercultural rhetoric that supports dialogue, deliberation, and collaborative action across differences?

Our current paradigms also prepare us well to *speak against* forces that diminish and oppress, to deconstruct, critique, and resist. They let us stand without compromise, outside and above. But they often fail us when we face the much more difficult practice of *speaking for something*—in ways that actually make a difference. How do we prepare ourselves to go beyond the safety of critique into the vulnerable stance of reflective, revisable commitment—to speak *for* values or actions even as we acknowledge them to be our current best hypotheses? How do we teach the rhetorical art of ongoing inquiry versus position taking (even when that position is inspired by a liberatory ideology)? And how do we develop the willingness, the acumen, and the literate technique to go beyond questioning the status quo and step toward praxis, toward deliberative and (always) experimental action based on goals and values we are able to articulate (and prepared to revise)?

Last Voices, Marginalized Practices

In the 1970s, Ken Macrorie taught us that we were "uptaught"—wrapping our students and ourselves in the cotton wool of convention-bound theme writing (1970). I came of age, academically speaking, in that heady atmosphere of change. Writing my dissertation on Charles Dickens had been a genuinely happy interlude, but despite the lure of playing the academic game, I was aware of a nagging pointlessness in the project of publication and in the requirement I felt to create that voice of witty, sophisticated (and middle-aged male) authority, because it was such a voice that often justified a "new reading" of a canonical text.

For me, reading Richard Young and Bill Coles opened a new door on the student as a thinking subject (Young, Becker, Pike, 1970; W. E. Coles, 1978).

Research was liberation into meaningful work. Writing to publish suddenly had the immediacy and significance of sharing discoveries. Teaching mattered as a way to empower students with a new sense of their options as writers and thinkers. Yet, in this early enthusiasm, I vividly remember the CCC Conference conversation with Sonda Perl when I suddenly realized that my beloved but rather specifically rhetorical and cognitive notion of the writing process was not at all what many other people had in mind by the magical word “process.”

As the process movement settled into its classroom paradigm, writing became identified with a personal, expressive activity—not a reader-directed rhetorical action. And the process, as Arthur N. Applebee points out, became synonymous with what might be called the “student process,” a set of obligatory classroom activities from freewriting to peer review and rewriting (1986). The writer (envisioned as a student) was to be guided through a valued but standardized classroom activity without reference (as Applebee argued) to its effectiveness for a particular task. This domesticated notion of “the writing process” lost contact with the idea of strategic choice I found so central to a more cognitively based rhetoric and to educational research.

Both Aristotle and the Sophists, the early shapers of this rhetorical paradigm, had understood invention (the generative work of writing) as an intensely heuristic act. Strategies had a central but heuristic or probabilistic value: they had to be used as tools. Unlike the student in a “process” classroom, the rhetor was envisioned as a much more self-conscious and strategic agent, making choices, monitoring not only her own thinking but also its outcomes in the resulting text (did it reach her goals or criteria?) and in the response of real and imagined readers. Aristotle’s probabilistic “art” of persuasion and cognitive psychology’s portrait of expert, strategic problem-solving came to have less and less place in this image of *the* writing process. So if rhetoric initially figured boldly in research, scholarship, and theorizing of the field, the notion of rhetorical action was reduced to a faint strand in the canonized process paradigm.

The social-process movement was in one sense a reawakening of rhetorical consciousness. Its great accomplishment was to bring a commitment to social justice and a heightened consciousness of oppressive powers into composition. One initial impetus to embrace such theorizing was, of course, the continuing struggle to acquire professional authority within literature departments. Doing critical theory conferred status to compositionists, as did doing historical rhetorical scholarship (North, 1987). But as that paradigm began to shape academic practice and crystallize into the classroom genre of cultural critique, it became apparent that the field was losing its hold on some

essential elements of rhetoric. Its teaching practice took composition back to the theory-guided analysis of and response to valued texts but its new set of theoretical lenses focused on the play of social power and on the conventions of academic discourse that would let a writer into its prestigious literate clubs. Committed to change but preoccupied with uncovering, naming, analyzing, and rehearsing the presence of oppressive ideological, cultural, social, and institutional forces, this paradigm lost (or denied the significance of) the dilemmas and decisions of the individual writer/rhetor.⁵ And it lost its hold on the vision of Cornel West’s prophetic pragmatism—the possibility of individual agency working *within* powerful constraints and the possibility of ethical literate action within nonacademic, public forums.

This aspiration to engagement lays down a challenge: How can teachers and students learn not only to speak *up* and *against* but also learn to speak *with* others (by which I mean across differences) and *for* something as a necessary part of literate education? If rhetoric and composition is to achieve the personal, public, and social significance to which the field lays claim, it must recover the practice of “doing” rhetoric in its wider civic and ethical sense. There are many ways to interpretation this goal, but the dominant paradigms of composition studies do not always point us in that direction.

Engagement Based on Intercultural Inquiry and Literate Action

The Community Literacy Center’s experiment in a rhetoric of engagement was in part a response to the burst of research and theory in composition. For me, it also shaped (more accurately, insisted on) the questions my own research should pose. Conversation between research and practice takes many forms, but they have a way of crystallizing themselves in memory around decisions and discovery points. I can date an important turn in my own research priorities from a very material moment. I was at the National Reading Conference (NRC) in Tucson, Arizona, with Wayne C. Peck, who was at the time director of Pittsburgh’s Community House, but whom I knew primarily as an intriguingly nontraditional PhD candidate in rhetoric with a Harvard University Master’s of Divinity and a commitment to the urban neighborhood around his church and community center. We took one of those dawn walks that cold desert air inspires, and he began to lay out his vision of transforming the Community House from a traditional provider of summer camps, midnight basketball, and meeting places to a center for community learning—based on writing. And he did not mean after-school tutoring driven by the limited literacies of the neighborhood schools but the kind of powerful rhetoric of self-definition and socially effective action we were offering to Carnegie Mellon undergraduates. I was becoming aware,

as many of us are, that even if the freshman at our elite institutions clearly benefit from our writing instruction, they have the cultural capital to succeed with or without it. That wasn't true of the young people Wayne Peck knew. And if I believed that the results of the writing research we were doing could really make a difference—as I did—then the place to do that would be where it might matter most. Somehow I came in from that walk persuaded to shift my research agenda from the education of freshman and professional writers to the literate empowerment of Community House teenagers and neighbors.

I should perhaps note I was not a “natural” for this job. If Mrs. Joyce Baskins was the African Queen, I was Dorothy from Kansas, more comfortable with horses than hip-hop and inclined to talk research when others wanted to “chill.” But my PhD student colleagues Elenore Long and Lorraine Higgins, the undergraduate students who soon joined us, and I were generously guided into inquiry by our Community House colleagues, especially Wayne Peck and Joyce Baskins, and by the urban community we were welcomed into. What we were trying to learn as academics and everyday people was the art of *speaking for something*. Not out of intellectual certainty or political advocacy but by standing with others in the act of inquiry, framing open questions, seeking rival hypotheses, and at the same time trying to articulate what we understood, what we valued, and what we were working for. If that sounds rather optimistically broad and unspecified, it was, but over time, it became clear that speaking with others and speaking for something were at the heart of community literacy.

Speaking with Others

Taking rhetorical action concerned with others begins by learning to listen to and speak with them, especially with those “Others” whose voices are often silenced or marginalized. But simply enfranchising an alternative or a hybrid discourse is rarely enough. As we saw in the research with urban teenagers (as well as college freshmen), the understanding, insights, reasons, and rationales of Others are often hidden to us. When we encounter difference, we assume deficits. Or we assume that our elite discourse, academic literacy, or mainstream language is the gold standard for representing complex meaning. Moreover, genuine dialogue will not simply follow from our goodwill or effort at empathy; talking across differences of race, class, culture, and discourse depends on an active and often strategic search for understanding.

In community literacy, this becomes a commitment to honor the interpretive agency of Others, in an active search for situated knowledge and multiple ways of representing that knowledge across diverse discourses. We described this as the *strong rival hypothesis stance*—a rhetorical strategy

for actively seeking out meanings (rival interpretations and alternative understandings) and for acknowledging Others as thinkers, problem solvers, and constructive, interpretive agents in their own lives (Flower, Long, & Higgins, 2000, p. 47).

Speaking for Something

The paradox of community literacy is that committed argument and bold assertion are inseparable from inquiry, that is, from an activated response to what you do *not* know. The rhetorical strategies that became the hallmark of community-literacy projects dramatize a deliberate search for new ways of seeing—for eliciting the story-behind-the-story, drawing out rival interpretations, and exploring multiple options and outcomes. Community literacy's rival hypothesis stance, grounded in John Dewey's “experimental way of knowing” and Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism, locates that “something” we would speak for in the midst of an ongoing inquiry with others (Dewey, 1929/1988; West, 1989).

This act of speaking for something, in contrast to the discourse of advocacy or critique, is deliberately grounded in the *construction of negotiated meaning*—in an attempt to respond to rival voices, representations, values, goals, and interpretations. A meaning that emerges is our best current hypothesis and most responsible response in an inquiry that is exploratory, critical, self-conscious, and ongoing. However, this attempt to forge a revisable negotiated meaning is also a commitment to go public—to construct thoughtful explicit arguments for something. Such arguments must be bold enough to name problems, clear enough that they dare to be wrong, and wise enough that they can transform, not just polarize.⁶ Speaking in this way takes us into the traditional realm of rhetoric.

Engagement through a Rhetoric of Personal and Public Performance

Out of the history I just sketched, an alternative image of engagement began taking shape that combined analysis with both action and dialogue *with* the Others whom social theory would represent. It is grounded in a *rhetoric of personal and public performance* in which writing is not only theorized as a social act; it is an action to be taken. As engagement moves beyond description and analysis (alone), researchers, teachers, and students have had to figure out how to take literate action outside the familiar turf of academic discourse. The features of this emerging rhetoric or model of engagement reflect its diverse fields of action.

The attempt to combine analysis with action is vividly demonstrated, for example, in Paulo Freire's call to *praxis* as action/reflection in politically

charged literacy work and in the projects of critical educators such as Ira Shor. It appears in Kurt Spellmeyer's redefinition of the humanistic learning as *involvement* in live, lived issues. It enters discussions of *action research*, *feminist research*, and *critical research* (Stringer, 1996; Kirsch, Maor, Massey, Nickoson-Massey, & Sheridan-Rabideau, 2003; Sullivan & Porter, 1997). It infuses studies of situated pedagogy, which envision teaching as a response to students' personal and social concerns (McCormiskey & Ryan, 2003); it calls for bridges between community language practices and academic discourse (Bailester, 1993; Moss, 2003). It has entered professional and technical communication as a notion of *critical practice* that aspires to go beyond describing social and material structures of domination "in order to intervene in those relations and initiate change" (Herndl, 2004, pp. 3, 7). Theories of critical practice, Carl Herndl says, work "to describe how change and resistance are possible in ideologically saturated institutions. . . . [or] to describe ways [such a theory] might direct research (pp. 6, 7; italics added). Yet, as my italics suggest, building theories of performance often gets academics closer to, though not always actually engaged in a rhetoric of performance outside the world of the classroom or scholarly community.

In community literacy and service-learning, teachers, researchers, and students show up most directly as performers. As Thomas Deans shows, they take action in different ways, writing *about*, *for*, and *with* the community (2000). Service-learning, Deans argues, makes good on Richard Rorty's forceful call for academics to move from the "spectatorial left" into the "pragmatic, participatory Left" of John Dewey, acting not out of "Truth" but out of "social hope" (2007, p. 11). Using what Paula Mathieu (2005) would call "tactics of hope," Eli Goldblatt (2005) and Stephen Parks (1999) describe community/university activist collaborations. Activists like Diana George live the work they write about (2002); some, like Michelle Simmons working on local environmental issues, build a record of deep and sustained contribution (Grabill and Simmons, 1998). Articles in new journals (*Reflections* and *Community Literacy*) describe students and teachers moving into prisons and professional settings as well as schools and public-housing projects.

This rhetoric of performance not only takes engagement out of the study and into the street, it invites a wider public into the story. The audience of community literacy not only holds its own interpretations, it often has the power to talk back to ours. Rhetoric can become *literally* dialogic. The significance of performance and production, always at the heart of classical rhetoric, has reappeared in a new wave of revisionist history. These scholars have reexamined both Aristotelian and Sophistic rhetoric, revealing the social relevance of performative concepts, such as *praxis* (which combines theory

and action) and *phronesis* (which substitutes practical wisdom and contingent judgment for a search for Truth) (cf. Farrell, 1991; Jarratt, 1991b; Poulakos, 1983). And these scholars have helped shape a critical rhetoric that supports deliberative democracy and challenges the oppressive elements of the liberal humanist tradition (cf. Atwill, 1998; McKerrow, 1989; McGee, 1990). In the new field of rhetoric and composition, rhetoric has become understood as an *art of discovery* and *change*, focused on knowledge-making and persuasive social action rather than textual analysis (Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970).⁷ In this version of engagement, the process of *discovery* calls the writer/rhetor to analyze a rhetorical situation, to name the problem (the stasis or point on which disagreement turns), and finally, through the process of invention, to create interpretations and arguments capable of persuading not only imagined others but the rhetor as analyst. This practice of discovery takes us onto familiar academic ground.

Adding the goal of *change*, however, can dramatically expand this process into a public action with an ethical responsibility. Traditionally, this calls the rhetor not only to understand her audience but also to project and respond to its response and to track and reflect on the outcomes of her actions. The reader, a rhetor, and the public would call into being must now walk into the writer's process as live actors in a dialogic drama. Yet, lest we think performance simply means reviving the nineteenth-century tradition of public speaking, the community-literacy rhetor must, like the cultural critic, also respond to the enormous forces of ideology, power, and money that create and maintain social problems. What if the problem is not only an ill-considered school suspension or city curfew policy but also the systemic marginalization of some of us, which benefits others of us? What if we and our increasingly exclusive educational institutions, our service systems, our very ways of talking about Others are also part of the problem? The question then becomes, what form should *local*/literate action take within the context of historically, culturally, and socially embedded problems?

It is not surprising then that Aristotle defined such rhetoric as an *art*—as a thoughtfully strategic performance that depends on heuristics or high-probability moves, not conventions or rules. To be strategic, the rhetor must be self-conscious and articulate about her own thinking and choices and able to recognize and respond to outcomes of her action. That is, the writer as rhetor needs a working theory of performance.

The argument I make here (which calls for a *working theory* of how to speak with others and *for* something) parallels the arguments Janet Atwill (1998), Thomas P. Miller (2003), and others make for reclaiming the civic tradition in education, for developing what Aristotle called *phronesis* or "practical

wisdom." Comparing it to theoretical knowledge, Miller describes the ideal of practical wisdom as "a model for political agency in situations where what needs to be done cannot be known, but must be acted upon"—an ideal that both draws on and criticizes shared beliefs by making differences "a resource for imagining alternatives" (p. 74). Combining commitment and critical cognition, this "intellectual virtue" supports a "holistic understanding of moral action in the uncertain realm of human affairs" (p. 77).

Performative Rhetoric in Practice

Academic projects motivated by a performative sense of rhetoric face important choices. One choice concerns discourse: does one theorize, study, or teach *about* performance, or does one engage more directly in some form of theory-guided rhetorical practice? Another choice concerns audience: how far does one move from the academy (from addressing classmates in assignments or colleagues in scholarly publications) toward a wider, more inclusive public (from community clients or agencies to public dialogue)? The renewed discussion of public intellectuals in composition tends to imagine the public in terms of media exposure, seeing a larger, even national audience as its target. However, it is interesting that the projects most actively engaged in performative rhetoric have often set their sights on building not larger but more *inclusive local* publics. That is, they have attempted to create community-based dialogues in a city, neighborhood, or institution that extend across the borders of race, class, status, power, and discourse. These choices extend a rhetoric of socially engaged performance into a rhetoric of *public* performance.

The CLC's community literacy belongs to the set of influential projects sketched below that cluster around forms of performative rhetoric that aspire to public practice. Committed to marginalized communities, they tend to imagine their audience not as the reader of a given text but as a public in which ideas circulate and where circulation, dialogue, and deliberation can lead, even if indirectly, to individual and social action. The kind of public they envision (and help form) is one in which people speak *with* others, *for* values and ideas. However, each of these projects brings a distinctive theoretical framework and set of rhetorical tools to this task. Looking briefly at these tools, outcomes, and publics suggests some alternative versions of what a rhetoric of performance could mean: that is, in Dewey's sense, what it could do.⁸

Ellen Cushman walks into the bureaucratic world of social service agencies, not only as a researcher but also as an ally of women trying to navigate its oppressive discourse. She uses the tools of critical-discourse analysis to

explore their language strategies. By comparing their public discourse with the "hidden" transcripts of talk that happens "off stage," she shows how these marginalized women actively negotiate the barriers thrown up by institutional gatekeepers, documenting both their agency and the rhetorical tools of struggle (1998, p. 68). Cushman's localized practice of "rhetorical activism" leads her to write with and for these women for very specific ends, from getting benefits to getting an apartment (1996, p. 12). Her scholarly writing urges us to revive the tradition of the public intellectual (1998).

Jeffrey Grabill works the other end of the street, bringing the tools of institutional analysis (Sullivan & Porter, 1997) to bear on literacy programs in three United Way agencies. His goal is not "to act in the interest of individuals against the oppressive power of institutions" (a "largely impossible" agenda, he believes) but to find ways "within institutions to design programs which benefit everyone" especially those most in need (2001, p. 58). His research exposes the heavy-handed paternalism of literacy programs that impose their own notions of what adults need to learn and documents an alternative model of "collaborative design and empowerment" in which those labeled "most in need" have "significant decision-making power" (p. 58). Like Cushman, Grabill's more recent work has seized the possibilities of media and technology to design new participatory structures (Cushman, 2006; Simmons & Grabill, 2007).

Three other versions of rhetorical performance most like the CLC move people even more directly into the practice of strategic inquiry, deliberative engagement, reflective decision making, and public action. Although they use different theoretical frameworks to get there, each calls its members to socially engaged performance. Eli Goldblatt draws on the framework of community organizing (and Saul Alinsky's widely influential *Rules for Radicals*) when he describes the work of the New City Writing Institute at Temple University in Philadelphia (2005). Begun in 1998, it has created a wide network of collaboration with Philadelphia schools and community organizations. One might imagine this to be a typical, if unusually vigorous, university-initiated outreach program creating institutional bridges over which students and university expertise can pass. However, the "organizing" process Goldblatt describes turns this pattern upside down. Engaging in what he calls "knowledge activism," an academic partner begins by building relationships and developing the local knowledge of the community that allows him to "listen intelligently." In a Freirean search for mutual benefit, this noninterventionist form of activism does not enter a collaboration to control it but to offer the academic's experience and the academic and institutional resources of the university to help reach the goals set by the community. One good example is

the institute's own small press, which allows diverse groups (from Chinatown residents to Mexican farmworkers to the local culture of disability) to reach a wider public with their stories, artwork, and arguments.

David Coogan looks at performance in terms of outcomes. Drawing on the premises of a materialist rhetoric, he interprets the writing of public officials, community groups, and service-learning students alike as a motivated symbolic action intended to produce worldly change. And like Dewey, he is interested in what that change amounts to. For example, his study of the dysfunctional policy discussions within the Chicago Transit Authority (which produced literal train wrecks) uses the tools of materialistic rhetoric to reveal the *ideographs* or loaded public concepts on which competing parties built their arguments. Such concepts turn up in public debate like ideological icebergs, which (the speakers presume) can be used without explanation "to do work explaining, justifying, and or guiding policy in specific situations" (Michael McGee, qtd in Coogan, 2006b, p. 670).

Using this framework to guide participation in live local issues, Coogan's activism takes the form of rhetorical scholarship. He shows how a community campaign to engage low-income parents with their public school failed, in part, because the well-intentioned community group and its university brochure writers had not done their rhetorical homework. They built their arguments around the seemingly persuasive ideograph of <local control>, a notion that turned out to have a troubled history in that neighborhood and that was associated for residents with a discredited agenda. Coogan argues that the path to public action needs to start in inquiry, if we hope not only to intervene in public discourse but also to change institutional practices. More specifically, if we want to produce viable, community arguments, we need to be in the field and library exploring the public vocabulary, placing arguments in a social and historical context, and identifying the competing ideographs, dominant narratives, and the ways people and issues have been characterized—doing rhetorical research with its eye on outcomes. Like Goldblatt's knowledge activism, such engagement enlists our field's analytical skills to *discover* the arguments that already exist in the communities we wish to serve, *analyze* the effectiveness of those arguments, collaboratively *produce* viable alternatives with community partners, and *assess* the impact of our interventions (Coogan, 2006b, p. 668). This version of a performative rhetoric turns critical analysis into literate action in a live public arena where it is judged by its public outcomes.

The community/university partnership that Glynda Hull and Michael A. James call DUSTY (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth) is a striking example of academic activism that not only takes the public step but

also draws its participants into public rhetorical performance as well (2007). Leading up to this venture, Hull had been a powerful voice in educational research, working with colleagues such as Mike Rose (1989), Mark Jury (1997), Katherine Schultz (2001), and James Gee and Colin Lankshear (1996), to build a critical portrait of how literacy is actually learned, used, and valued in out-of-school settings by workers in high-performance manufacturing plants, in vocational training jobs, or in economically devastated communities. Hull's critical assessment of the popular policy discourse around workplace literacy replaced the familiar complaint about workers who "lack basic skills" with closely observed accounts that located workplace problems in social and economic conditions, not literacy deficits (1993). The critical ethnographic studies that followed then flipped the script, revealing how marginalized workers often used the literate tools (demanded by management) to resist management demands, assert agency and identity, and even alter policy.

DUSTY grows out of this social and economic interpretation of literacy work, locating itself in a community center amidst the urban poverty of West Oakland, California, adjacent to its affluent university partner in Berkeley. It takes its spatial, historical, and social location seriously, inviting faculty, students, and residents in the project of "reconstituting images of place and self" (Hull & James, 2007, p. 256). However, like the CLC, the community/university relationship it builds foregrounds the expertise of the West Oakland residents, not the university. The distinctive feature of DUSTY is the multimedia, multimodal composing that goes on in its basement studio and pushes "school-based definitions of *literacy* to include the visual and performative" (p. 270). But the distinctive power of DUSTY as a rhetorical agent of change is that its

curriculum encourages participants to construct stories that position themselves as agents, as young people and adults able to articulate and act upon their own "wishes, desires, beliefs, and expectancies" (Bruner, 1994, p. 41) and as global and community members able to remake their worlds (Freire, 1970). (p. 259)

The children, teenagers, and young adults (who often return to create a series of stories) use "spoken word performances, written narratives, photo collections, storyboards, musical compositions, animations, or digital stories" to create what Hull and James conceptualize as "identity texts"—representations of "agentive and socially responsible identities" (pp. 259–60).

The first public outcome of DUSTY's principled and strategic design is its creation of a local community of "authors" and mentors through the collaborative construction of these stories. Public screenings in a neighborhood theater

expand the circle, not only drawing a crowd but also creating a distinctive new "public"—a body called into being by the circulation of a new set of ideas. In contrast to the din of drugs-crime-and-welfare images of West Oakland residents that circulate on local billboards and media, the DUSTY screenings engage residents in a desperately needed discussion of the actions, options, talents, and future of their youth.

Like the CLC, DUSTY wants to define change in both individual and social terms. Its theoretical commitment to helping youth create agentive selves is complemented by a longitudinal inquiry into if and how that happens. Case studies (with data collected by mentors and faculty) are showing how writers use this literacy work to articulate and reflect on pivotal movements in their lives and how they develop the ability to reposition themselves as agents as they reposition images and texts from other contexts into their own stories for their own purposes (Hull & Katz, 2006).

The Community Literacy Center adds yet another version of performance to this mix by integrating a settlement-house tradition of local activism with the stance of prophetic pragmatism and the tools of cognitive rhetoric and problem solving. It imagines community literacy as rhetoric of individual and collaborative performance designed to support intercultural inquiry and more inclusive public problem-solving dialogues.

Working Theories of Engagement

I have used these thumbnail sketches to suggest that one can engage in a strategic process of discovery and change with different ends-in-view and different theoretical tools in hand. A theory-based rhetoric of performance has many faces. However, we will not understand how theory actually works if we overlook the critical process that translates it into action. Socially engaged critical theories, by their very nature as theories, strive to elaborate abstract, systematic, logically coherent images of action. By the nature of the discourse, such images are logically rather than empirically based, rarely tested, and many times unworkable in practice. The great challenge that faces a rhetoric of performance is moving from "describing what is possible" to building actionable plans, that is, to translating a good *in-principle* theory to a *working* theory.

By *working theory*, I mean something rather different from what Stephen North called the practical "lore" of composition teaching (1987). As a *working* theory, it *works*: that is, it is operational (a tool kit of conditions and strategies); it is situated (adapted to its particular time, place, and people); and it is always under revision (responding to the test of outcomes). At the same time, as a *working theory*, it strives to *articulate* its own goals, values, and assump-

tions. In doing so, it opens them to reflection, to the test of outcomes, and revision. A working theory provides the bridge that Dewey's philosophical and West's prophetic pragmatist needs to move from theory-guided analysis to theory-guided action. What a working theory lacks in logical coherence and self-consistency, it gains in its sensitivity to context and contingency. It helps one navigate the inconsistent complexity of real institutions, communities, and people. It is odd then that even those academic accounts focused on engagement tend to presume that presenting one's in-principle theory of action on its own is adequate—or accurate.

Understanding the unsung role of working theories is one of the leitmotifs of this book. I argue that the challenging process of constructing and revising a working theory is at the heart of *doing* (rather than just describing) the rhetoric of performance. In the final section of this chapter, I examine one aspect of this process, extended over time, in which the working theory of community literacy responded to practical experience and new research, to competing claims and critiques, and most important to the reflective effort of negotiating these voices and reimagining a more adequate, responsive stance. The experience of the CLC illustrates how the bridge between research/theory and performance allows traffic in both directions. The practice of community literacy changed in various ways over the period I describe, while its developing image of collaborative intercultural inquiry had in turn a profound effect not only on the composition research each of us chose to do but also on the emerging theoretical shape of cognitive rhetoric.

Building a Working Theory of Personal and Public Performance

In the emerging field of rhetoric and composition in the 1970s, cognitive rhetoric grew up in an atmosphere of sibling closeness and competition, first with the dominant expressivist/process and then with the academic discourse/social process paradigms, from which it diverged in some important ways. It took shape as one of the "new rhetorics" that drew on classical traditions of rhetoric in order to replace the formalistic and/or literary discourse of composition with a more robust image of writing as a heuristic thinking process. Influenced by Richard Young, its object was both discovery and change—inquiry as well as persuasion (Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970). This impulse found a natural partner in the research agenda of cognitive psychology and its interest in (and tools for) investigating thinking as a heuristic problem-solving process. Problem solving and cognitive rhetoric, then, shifted the focus from texts and tropes back to classical rhetoric's concern with performance, by asking, How do rhetors (as thinkers) carry out the heuristic art of discovery and change? It wedded this research agenda to the

practice of teaching by describing differences in how expert and novice writers—as thinkers and problem-solvers—actually went about working through a variety of academic and professional tasks.

But there was a problem with problem solving. In 1981, J. R. Hayes and I published a theoretical account of writing as problem solving elaborated with an explanatory/exploratory model of key cognitive processes involved in composing (Flower and Hayes). In the early 1980s, the agendas of psychological and educational research and composition in general and of problem solving and our work in particular had a significant limitation, which could be summed up in a sentence: they did not account for—and had not learned how to study—the enormous significance that social and cultural forces have on writing, learning, and thinking. Some compositionists, such as, James A. Berlin, found the entire paradigm of problem solving antithetical to socially engaged teaching.⁹ They framed their concerns as a polarizing social cognitive debate in order to advocate a more vigorous agenda of social and cultural engagement in composition (a point on which community literacy would only agree). A second assumption (on which we would part company) was that social engagement called for a discourse of social theorizing, deconstruction, and critique.

The source of contention in this debate was rarely with the actual findings or claims of the problem-solving process research but with its empirical, cognitive, and individually focused perspective. The critiques that polarized cognitive and social processes in composition studies¹⁰ championed an alternative paradigm in which the “social turn” was equated with the study of cultural patterns and language and with the discourse of theorizing and critique, a discourse borrowed from the critical cultural theory in ascendancy in literary studies and English departments. As the paradigm took shape, social engagement became identified with the problems of teaching basic writers, who had flooded universities in the wake of overdue open admissions. This paradigm reinterpreted the needs of marginalized students as ignorance of or exclusion from the discourse conventions and communities of the academy. The social alternative became synonymous for many with the study of the conventions of discourse. Patricia Bizzell’s criticism of my work with Hayes puts it well: “Hence, although Flower and Hayes acknowledge the existence of discourse conventions, they fail to see conventions’ generative power” (1982, p. 229).

But one could respond that the real problem here was not a theoretical “recognition” of social forces but a need to understand just how those forces actually affected writing and how education and writers should respond. We needed a better *working theory* to guide research, teaching, and performance.

Bizzell’s paper offered her own strong answer to these questions. Asking, “What do we need to know about writing?” she takes issue with the generative role of goal setting (1982, p. 213). Hayes and I had described this as a process of recalling familiar (conventional) plans *and* strategically building, testing, and consolidating ideas and inferences to build new task-specific ones; observing that novice writers did much less of this strategic, problem-solving work as they composed than experienced writers did.¹¹ Bizzell replies, “I think these students’ difficulties with goal-setting are better understood in terms of their unfamiliarity with the academic discourse community [and limited awareness] that there is such a thing as a discourse community with conventions to be mastered.” The teaching implications follow: “To help poor writers, then, we need to explain that their writing takes place in a community, and to explain what the community’s conventions are” (1982, p. 230).

Bizzell’s hypothesis was based on interesting arguments going on at the time in sociolinguistics about the theoretical *existence* of discourse communities.¹² But did it follow that once we began to take the shaping, generative force of social context into account, that discourse conventions would be the only or even the best account of “what we needed to know”? Didn’t we need a more adequate, accurate, and testable description of what real writers, especially marginalized ones, actually did or needed to do? As Kurt Spellmeyer would say eleven years later, arguing for a more personally and rhetorically engaged pedagogy:

It is not, as Bizzell maintains, simply ignorance of “conventions” that makes finding something to say a problem for writers, but the inability to discover and exploit revealing contradictions between “ours” and “theirs.” By itself a knowledge of “conventions,” a knowledge of what has been written in the past and of how it has been written, will not even allow student-writers to repeat the achievements of others—let alone accomplish something further—since these achievements were occasioned, after all, by some real-world need, some palpable contradiction, which made them meaningful and worth undertaking in the first place. Without such contradiction, knowledge can have neither a meaning nor a use. (1993, p. 185)

In the midst of this debate over what composition should be about, community literacy was trying to shape a model of literate social engagement built in part on the strategic and problem-focused stance of rhetoric and its alternative approach to social realities. Disappointed with the discourse of academic critique, we felt that a community-based, intercultural rhetoric could not assume the authority of *speaking against* if it has not first learned

how to *speak with the Others* it would represent. Moreover, a civic dialogue would demand not only the analytical moves of argument and critical analysis but also the savvy insight into what it takes to *speak with* in a persuasive sense, that is, to actually move readers, to change minds. If you want to do that, "it is not enough," as Gloria Anzaldúa concludes, "to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions" (1987, p. 100). The rhetoric of making a difference demanded more than critique from academics or conventionally acceptable prose from students; it required an audience-attuned rhetoric, capable of turning critical reflection and personal exploration into rhetorical action.

Recall the aspiring rapper of chapter 1. For Mark Howard, posing, exploring, and dramatizing problems—from the perspective of the ignored, voiceless, or silenced actors—was at the heart of his literate action. To do this, he and Shay La Burke needed what Joe Harris (1997) might call a social and textual *dialogic space* to reflect on the multiple realities and experiences that got named the "suspension" problem. They needed to turn what Alinsky would call merely a "bad situation" into a critical assessment, for example, "The point of this story—nobody pays attention/To a student 'cause they're young." But their problem analysis also had a robust rhetorical purpose. Mark's rap and Shay La's commentary were attempts to bring to light hidden realities (a child shouldering burdens from home, teachers' assumptions, students' quick leap to "attitude"). And they were trying to bring to the table new possibilities that could deal with the underlying problems so inadequately "solved" by suspension. What is most interesting is that Mark's rhetoric takes a critical counterpublic stance—it shows how this local disruption is a thread in a larger fabric of administrative authority. He attempts to speak *with* that authority not by assimilating himself fully to its conventions but by turning rap into an authorized public voice.

Meanwhile, back in the world of research, problem solving saw itself as a fundamentally rhetorical paradigm trying to respond to the critique of competing theories and the grounding experience of the CLC. The problem of problem solving became how to more adequately observe and interpret the play of social forces. And given a goal to understand and teach literate performance, the compelling subject of research had to be the writer—rather than texts, society, history, or theory. What we needed was a more fully envisioned account of thinking, feeling social subjects *doing writing* as a part of their social-cultural contexts and *responding* (in ways we have yet to adequately understand) to those contexts. By context, we meant not only the forces of social ideology, convention, and power but also the demands of individual values and goals, conflicts, and contradictions. Community

literacy called us to understand the inseparable individual *and* social nature of literate action.¹³

Rethinking Writing as a Social Cognitive Activity

Attempting to understand writing as an organic social cognitive activity, our research began to focus not on discourse conventions and community norms but on writing as a form of literate *practice*.¹⁴ Of course, any theory of writing is at best only an intellectual map of a still-uncharted territory—reasonable, no doubt, in its general outlines, well specified in various places as far as old borders but inevitably a mixture of grounded hypotheses, interesting speculation, and sheerest fantasy, no doubt, in others. Turning such theories into tested explanatory accounts often depends on persistently and closely observing a segment of human action that contains more than your theory dreamed of—an action that exists as some form of independent data that can talk back in its own resistant terms to your evolving hypotheses.¹⁵ For ten years, my work as codirector of the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at the University of California—Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon (1985–1995) allowed my colleagues and me to study adults, students, mentors, and teenagers writing in both academic and community contexts (creating parallel studies in some cases, such as, the Learning-to-Rival project). This combination of community and university contexts shaped cognitive rhetoric as a social cognitive theory of writing. More to my point here, it helped us develop a *working theory* of community literacy that could support socially engaged, collaborative rhetorical action, on the one hand, and the developing metacognitive, problem-solving awareness of individual writers, on the other.

Out of this research came three insights that had special relevance for a working theory of intercultural inquiry, helping us to see an increasing number of literate differences as choices not deficits, to uncover hidden logics, and to recognize rhetorical agency in others.

The Role of Task Representation

Isn't it a lot to assume that *students*, including "basic" writers, can actually perform as *writers*? In a study based on a typical Reading-to-Write assignment, many freshmen seemed unable to do the kind of synthesis and purposeful writing that the college expected—that is, until we examined the transcripts of one section that did think-aloud protocols while writing the paper in their dorm rooms (Flower, Stein, Ackerman, Kantz, McCormick, & Peck, 1990). Focusing our research on literate actions rather than texts alone allowed us to turn student writers into partners in that inquiry and into interpreters of

their own thinking.¹⁶ For many students, the failure to create the expected “college-level” synthesis occurred even before they began to write, in the process that cognitive studies calls “task representation.” In interpreting this “standard” assignment, these students were giving themselves inaccurate, unworkable, or inappropriate sets of instructions about what was expected, how to do it, and why. And they didn’t agree with each other, much less the teacher. Was this merely an ignorance of academic conventions?

It turned out that after key options (such as a dutiful summary or avoiding conflict among authorities) were compared and students were asked to revise, most could actually *do* the harder task in a revision. Differences had not been due to deficits but to interpretations of the task.¹⁷ The knowledge that made the biggest difference in performance was metaknowledge—the awareness of instructors and students that the task writers do is the one they represent to themselves. Moreover, our internal representations of a rhetorical situation (or of one another’s intentions) constitute a large, detailed, and complex canvas—that we often fail to share with one another.

At the CLC, it was clear that urban public schools systematically suppressed opportunities for rhetorical awareness in favor of summary and convention. Outspoken teens like Mark were often labeled troublemakers. Others like Tina, who resented the “childish” assignments and simply resisted them, were evaluated as poor writers (but who proved to be astute at projecting a reader’s response and adapting to a rhetorical situation in their CLC texts) (Johnson, 1992). For many, the real eye-opener was in the middle of the Community Conversation when they suddenly came to understand their work as rhetorical action. The CLC let them see school writing as a distinctive language game, even as they created a new counterrepresentation of what writing could mean and do.

The Presence of Hidden Logics

The fog of misconception gets even thicker when the writers who miss the mark are basic writers, urban teenagers, returning students, urban residents, or low-wage workers, because we are even more likely to assume the problem is a deficit within their knowledge of content or conventions. But when we inquire into the “logic” of such writers and speakers, we often see that people do things (which we find unexpected or inappropriate) for reasons we never glimpse, guided by an internal, informal rationale. Without denying the enormous shaping force that material conditions, ideology, and discourse have on underprepared or inner-city writers, research that fails to seek out the logic of their performance—as they see it—robs people of even more of their sometimes-fragile opening for agency.

For example, in the Learning to Rival project, Elenore Long, Lorraine Higgins, and I asked student writers to take the demanding rival hypothesis stance to an issue, that is, to treat a discussion about minority students and education as an *open question* by seeking *rival interpretations* and *diverse perspectives* in their writing.¹⁸ We chose a group of minority freshmen (and later urban teens) for the explicit purpose of investigating their process, not as people with problems but as active learners. We wished to track them finding their way in a new and demanding intellectual task, which in this case was writing about a controversial issue from an inquiry-based, rival hypothesis stance. We got more than we bargained for: The textual analysis suggested that some students didn’t get it or clung to their old thesis-and-support moves. But the data from collaborative-planning sessions, taped self-interviews, and group discussions told a different story of these students as active agents, trying to deal in meaningful ways with demanding readings on the charged topic of minority students in predominantly white universities. The data showed students who in fact demonstrated the inquiry-based *rivaling* stance in their thinking and planning. But in place of the inquiry structure they were asked to use, their papers only showed the text conventions of a standard argument. Why? Was this a case of *couldn’t* or *wouldn’t*? Their teachers only saw the mismatch between the papers and the assigned conventions of inquiry. But insight from the planning transcripts into the logic of these learners saw students acting on rhetorical goals that for them superseded the assignment.

For instance, many of these minority student writers were choosing to use this paper for their own deeply felt purposes (a choice some writing instructors dream about). Some were working through problematic issues of identity. Others were taking the authority of “authors” to speak to the white academics whose articles had built up a composite portrait of black students as people at high risk of failing, as low in personal agency, and as unlikely to beat the odds. These students felt called to challenge those experts to consider the impact their claims had on the object of their analysis—on real students like themselves who read these published articles. A number of students whose texts didn’t demonstrate the requested conventions were nevertheless demonstrating what humanistic instruction aspires to—the presence of rhetorical agency.

The next summer a closely parallel study with urban teens at the Community House showed these writers to be even more assertive appropriators of this strategic knowledge. They, too, learned to use the rivaling stance but with a logic or rationale and set of intentions that at times intentionally dismissed the academic expectations of teachers and mentors as rhetorically

ineffective. In short, this research said, if you failed to seek a writer's hidden logic, you were likely to misdiagnose problems that were there and most certainly to undervalue the writer's performance and capability.

The Process of Negotiated Meaning-Making

Rethinking writing as a social cognitive activity took us deeper into the way the social and cognitive dimensions of meaning-making interact. As writers enter a rhetorical situation—whether it is a college assignment, a collaborative inquiry, a new discourse, an intercultural dialogue, or the contested ground of speaking for social justice—they entertain a host of “voices” both metaphorical and material that offer the writer language, ideas, and meaning. Writers may feel surrounded by the insistent voices of *multiple* discourse communities and their conventions. If our research gives serious attention to these powerful shaping voices *and* to the interpretive agency of the writer *responding* to them, we see that everyday writers (not just the teachers, intellectuals, and theorists) are actively engaged in constructing negotiated meanings. More specifically,

- First, the activity of writing includes not just hands on the keyboard but acts of self-fashioning and institutional disobedience, of immersion in the conversation of a discourse, response to peers, resisting and appropriating conventions, as well as constructing new meaning. And this activity is a site of unremitting contradiction, contestation, and conflict.
- Secondly, writers will at times rise to an active engagement with these conflicts. And when we have access to these conflicts, these moments of engagement reveal something of the array of potential “voices” or forces actually working to shape writing. Such voices range from discourse conventions to ideological and social demands to interpersonal response to interpretive and rhetorical strategies to personal goals and ideas.
- Finally, out of this engagement with multiple, alternative, and even conflicting voices comes the opportunity to construct a negotiated meaning. By that I mean, the opportunity to acknowledge rather than avoid difference, to embrace its contradictions, and to construct a meaning that is provisional but responsive—a current best effort at a negotiated understanding.

This research-based image of the writer is an intensely rhetorical one. It imagines a meaning-maker working within a contested territory, willing (at least at times) to embrace rather than repress different voices, and move

toward a negotiated or responsive meaning.¹⁹ It became a persuasive image of what a rhetoric of intercultural inquiry could be—a space for embracing difference in acts of collaborative meaning-making.²⁰ The two-way street between the university and community and between research and social action helped shape both a social cognitive theory of writing and a working theory of personal and public performance within a local intercultural public.

The next chapters sketch the practice of community literacy as a series of experiments in *speaking with* others on culturally charged issues and *speaking for* commitments and actions in community, public, and academic forums. The process starts with a close look at the role of educators and college students in this community/university collaboration.