

Spring 2020

The Contemplative Concerns of Community Engagement: What I Wish I Knew about the Work of Community Writing Twenty Years Ago

Paula Mathieu
Boston College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/communityliteracy>

Recommended Citation

Mathieu, Paula. "The Contemplative Concerns of Community Engagement: What I Wish I Knew about the Work of Community Writing Twenty Years Ago." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2020. pp. 38-48. doi:10.25148/14.2.009035.

This work is brought to you for free and open access by FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Community Literacy Journal* by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcc@fiu.edu.

The Contemplative Concerns of Community Engagement: What I Wish I Knew about the Work of Community Writing Twenty Years Ago

Paula Mathieu

I could not have given this same talk twenty years ago, or ten, or even five years ago. I am finding that experience—a kinder word for age—coupled with a contemplative practice brings humility and awareness, which is as close to wisdom as I'll ever get. I know a few things now that I didn't know when I began community-engaged teaching and didn't even know to ask.

While experience will be each of your own best teachers (better than a middle-aged white woman offering advice), I hope that, through my stories, I can share a few lessons about what I now see as the contemplative call of community writing, which is at once personal, political, historical, and pedagogical. If we are going to do community-based work ethically and, mindful of past and present racial and other political wounds, we need to do our work unflinchingly and humbly. And if the “we” includes people who are seen as white, I deeply believe, we need to do this work in intentionally antiracist ways, mindful of the white supremacist systems in which we work, from which we have benefited and continue to benefit, and to ask, even if we see no clear answer: What does antiracist work look like here and now?

Point 1: Our Personal Stories Matter. In Other Words, I Carry Pain/Desires/Stories That I Don't Fully Know or Understand (and so, probably, do you).

When asked how or why I got interested in community writing, which began with starting a writing group with homeless writers in Chicago in the 1990s, I could always provide answers. These answers were each true in their own way; true but incomplete. It *is true* that Joel Alfassa's homeless gourmet column, which wrote with humor and love about food that could be prepared without waste on a hot plate in a single pot, struck me powerfully as a fresh and honest way to help privileged people get the smallest glimpse into the mad juggle that constitutes living in poverty. It *is true* that his writing and that of other vendors of *StreetWise* newspaper moved me, and I wanted to help out in whatever small way I could—starting with volunteer editing and growing my role very slowly over many months and years. It *is true* that as a graduate student in Language, Literacy and Rhetoric, I experienced this newspaper, this weekly act of community publishing and circulation, as a unique and vital act of rhetoric in our city, and I was drawn to be a part of it.

We all probably have similar stories, of feeling called by a project, being called to do the work. And I was called, and that was the story I was comfortable telling about it.

But until shockingly recently I never connected my pull to work with homeless writers, first in Chicago, then Boston, Montreal, Glasgow, and all around the world, with one March night, when I was nine years old. I was sound asleep when my brother Tom woke my sister Liz and me by opening our bedroom door, shutting it behind him, turning on our light and saying, “The house is on fire. Get dressed and get out.” My mind replays those next minutes with shocking clarity, or maybe it’s just a memory of a memory recalled thousands of times—a photocopy reproduced beyond recognition. I don’t know how accurate my memories are despite their vividness: me reaching into my closet to put on clothes, as 3:30 am in March in the south suburbs of Chicago is frigid, pulling out a green snow suit to slip on over my pajamas, sliding into a pair of Liz’s snow boots, which were too big, but strangely uncomfortable near the toe—I would later discover a collar for our dog Woody nesting in that boot as the source of the discomfort. I don’t remember Liz fleeing, but by the time I was dressed, I, the youngest of my family’s nine children, was alone in my bedroom as the house around me burned.

When I opened the door to our bedroom, smoke filled my lungs, and I descended only a few steps before retreating back to my room, where some fresh air still lingered. The voice of my father, typically calm and mild, pierced my oxygen bubble with an angry and urgent yell from downstairs: “Get down here, now.” Unable to see or breathe, I plunged into the smoke again, my hands guiding me along the stair railing, down four stairs, across a landing, down seven more stairs, onto the stone floor of our front hallway, coughing when I finally caught whiffs of precious oxygen.

We all made it out—all humans and Woody, our dog. Some lizards died, but we were lucky. Within ten minutes of my father’s call to the fire department, the house was so engulfed in flame, no one would have escaped, or at least that’s what the fire fighters later told us. Our being alive was miraculous.

My two sisters and I took refuge from the cold by sitting in the back of a police cruiser with all twenty-five pounds of Woody squirming on my lap, until our neighbors across the street, wakened by the sirens, invited my mostly undressed family in. We filled the living room of their modest ranch house, staring out their front bay window as if it were a large-screen tv of today, watching flames dance out various windows of the only home I had ever known. Flames eventually broke through the roof, arching brilliantly into the night sky, once given the fuel of ample oxygen and an attic full of clothing and family photos. By morning, our house was what firefighters described as gutted: the brick two-story façade remained, but the insides were a total loss.

When the sun rose, our family had no money, no clothes, not even toothbrushes, and it was a Saturday, in the days long before ATMs or quickly replaced credit cards. Yet somehow, things appeared. A neighbor, a dentist, brought over toothbrushes and toothpaste, enough for us to brush the sleep and panic out of our mouths. Others dropped off clothes, just enough for each of us to have something to wear until we had funds and a car to go shopping.

We toured the ruins when it was safe to do so. The second-floor bathtub, where I had bathed since I was a baby, hung precariously in what had been our kitchen, the

floor-ceiling between the two rooms erased, the tub suspended in the air by bent copper pipes. The acrid smell of burned things imprinted into my nose and memories, as grit, glass, and ash crunched under foot.

While it may seem obvious to you, something never consciously occurred to me until a few years ago when I started to explore my life via contemplative work and nonfiction writing: when I was nine years old, my family and I were temporarily homeless. Becoming homeless was one of my earliest traumas, and is one that erased many earlier foundational memories as if they had never happened. That morning as the smoke was still rising from the shell of our house, I could not remember what I had done the previous day, nor could I recall a single item—toy, clothing, book, or photo—that I had lost. They were erased in the explosion of smoke and flame, both literally and in my memory.

No one asked us kids how we were feeling. Logistics prevailed. No talk of emotions took place at all. That was typical of my family, but this silence was even more pronounced in times of crisis.

In her beautiful book *We Find Ourselves in Other People's Stories*, Amy Robillard writes openly about her traumas as a child and about her mother, who shared very little with her in the way of stories, much like my own mother and father. Through telling her own stories Robillard reflects on the vital and therapeutic function that sharing stories can have, both for ourselves and for others. She writes, "We want to learn how to think about and interpret what we have lived through, what we are living through. We want to talk about it in ways that make sense of what we know but also in ways that help others make sense of what they, too, might know" (65).

And so, through writing about this trauma, and a series of other sudden and unforeseeable losses that occurred in my life before I reached adulthood, I am coming to understand myself and the inner places of pain I still carry and, along with them, the potentially harmful stories I carry inside my head. These are stories I once never dreamed of sharing with others or sometimes even with myself, but I now see learning from them as necessary for doing ethical and meaningful work as a teacher, community writer, and citizen.

Robillard admonishes our field for its queasiness with narrative, for its tendency to cleave to argument and ignore the personal and narrative roots of the very work we do. She writes,

The work we study is rarely accidental. We do not just stumble upon a subject and decide, willy nilly, to study it. We are telling our stories slant. But we in composition and writing studies are loathe to acknowledge that we do so, largely because of our distrust of narrative; there is a reluctance to admit that we are attached to our work in ways that come before the intellectual. If it is too personal, it is too simple, or so we believe. (77)

I would extend Robillard's argument to suggest that not to explore our own personal stories and how they connect to the work we choose to do, especially when it's in community spaces, poses risks to other people and places. I think community writing should follow the Greek physician Hippocrates, who wrote: "First, do no harm."

If we don't fully know ourselves, know our tacit motives, understand our pain points, name our traumas, we risk showing up to community projects primed to react with a lack of consciousness rather than respond with our hearts, minds, and a place of stillness.

So, what were the risks to me in spending two decades working with men and women experiencing homelessness, while I was not aware of my own experience of homelessness and its possible connection to the call I felt?

First, there was the risk of overidentifying. I think back and wonder in what ways did I unconsciously assume that I could relate to those I met? That I understood them? Since any identification I felt was unconscious, I would not have also recognized the significant ways that my experiences were very different from situations of the men and women I met, many who were black or brown, some who had little schooling. I now ask myself, how many miscommunications or hurt feelings did my unconsciousness cause?

Secondly, I now wonder about my motives. In what way was my interest in helping homeless people find resources and a public voice a sublimated desire to help that nine-year-old girl talk about the nightmares she was having? Were the questions I asked writers the questions I wish someone had asked me when I was feeling scared?

I think it's safe to say that it is not a good idea to unconsciously work out your own personal issues in the guise of helping someone else.

The risk when working unconsciously is that it is easy to react based on past habits, fears, and expectations, instead of responding mindfully to the person or situation in front of me. An example of how this unconsciousness can play out in community projects: I have noticed a recurring pattern at some street papers and other small nonprofits, especially in board settings that bring together people with very different histories, some of them quite traumatic and painful and others often quite privileged, possibly all with unexamined reasons for being there. When money becomes scarce and a difficult decision needs to be taken, I have witnessed—and even taken part in—a cycle where people tend to react based on their own deeply entrenched patterns, whether it is to blame, lash out, withdraw, or self-blame, which is my go-to response. Typically, someone is scapegoated as the source of all current problems, and temporarily, the group believes that ousting this person will solve the problems. . . until it doesn't. And then the cycle of dysfunction repeats.

A third cost of being unaware how my story informed my work is that perhaps I missed opportunities for deeper connection. What more might have happened by being a bit more awake and open to sharing my different but not altogether dissimilar experience of dislocation? I met women who had children around age nine, seeking permanent housing and living in shelters. For three years, I ran a weekly writing group in Massachusetts for children living in a homeless shelter. If I had been more mindfully aware of my experience as something that shaped me, could I have responded differently or more fully with those children than I did? With awareness, in what ways might my experience have helped me be more empathetic and more open to listening than I was?

These are the questions I wish I had asked myself at the time—and are the kinds of questions I now try to ask myself: “Why do I feel drawn to this project, these people? How has my life been similar to that of the people I am working with? And most significantly, how has my life, and the history of my family, been different than the histories of those I am working with? How have my privileges shaped me, my assumptions, my desires, my way of seeing the world? What am I not seeing or able to understand? How can I do a better job without making my awareness someone else’s job?”

Point Two: Our Personal Stories Are Embedded in a History that is Structured by White Supremacy and Racism.

And while I have long intellectually known this truth, I continue to realize that I have not yet lived up to what it means to be a person who acts in intentionally anti-racist ways.

So why did I never see myself as homeless, which we clearly were? Certainly, my family’s whiteness and relative affluence account for most of that answer.

Being white meant that the investigation into the fire’s cause was cursory, the house itself was assumed to be the culprit, faulty wiring, while both my parents and all my teenage siblings smoked cigarettes, which was as likely a cause for the fire as anything else. Because we had ample home insurance, this loss was going to be a setback, a year of dislocation, uncertainty, and eventually rebuilding the ruined house. We were going to bounce back, not because of anything my family did, but because we were white and solidly middle classed. With a few phone calls, money became available. Exceptions were made. Neighbors who were traveling for a month heard about our troubles and offered us their house until we found an apartment. I experienced the reality that white privilege might not prevent one from experiencing tragedy, but it does mitigate the damage significantly.

And here I make a plea to those of you in the audience who identify as white: the work of antiracism is all our work and it’s messy and unsettling. We should not feel settled, because as Lama Rod Owens writes, “every institution, every organization, every culture, every community, every belief system, every frame of mind we currently have. . . . organizes itself and operates with the social order imposed by the rank of white-centered racialization” (xiii). In other words, we are soaking in it, it being white privilege and racism.

The first part of the work for white people is to start to see it, recognize it, name it, name the times we cash in on privilege or don’t see the racial script we are acting out. I will share an example, one that is painful for me to admit.

When working at *StreetWise*, preparing for Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour, a theatrical tour narrated by writers who had been or were homeless, a rumor started going around among the writers’ group. Someone said that I might be stealing money, using cash raised to fund our theater project to buy myself a computer. And hadn’t I been walking around with a laptop lately? When someone repeated this rumor to me, I felt hurt. After all, hadn’t I been transparent with all the budgets, showing all the actors

and crew how every penny had been spent? And technically wasn't it impossible for me to steal money, as I had the authority to raise money but not to spend it within the nonprofit?

I allowed myself to feel betrayed, to feel unfairly treated. Luckily, one member of the writing group who had long experience with political organizing and working across racial lines, sat me down and told me some things I needed to hear. He said, and I'm paraphrasing:

I'm going to criticize you, because I love you, because criticism is founded in love. So you think your three years of work means anything in the face of hundreds of years of racism and screwing over the poor in this country? You think your good intentions cancel out history? Do you know how many times black people, poor people, have been lied to, cheated, by people who look just like you and your family? If you allow yourself to feel hurt right now, if you walk away from this work, you will be perfectly playing your part in the racist script. So, they don't trust you. So what? Why should they trust you? Show up and do your work anyhow.

At that moment, my friend helped me glimpse my white privileged self in full white-fragility mode, a decade before Robin DiAngelo circulated that term. By stepping outside and seeing myself, I could laugh in recognition, in seeing my own folly. I found myself grateful that he showed me that I thought, unconsciously again, that I was an exception. I tacitly believed myself to be one of those good white people, someone outside of history, outside of racism. He helped me see the unconscious—and inaccurate—beliefs I was carrying. He helped me see that not being trusted was the shadow cast by my privilege.

How seldom had I been asked to reckon with my white privilege? How almost-never did that privilege limit me or cost me anything? And the one time it does, my first response is to feel outrage and pull away. I now see that moment as a blessing—a moment of truly seeing my racial blindness as a call to be better and try harder.

But antiracist work is an ongoing call. Trying to see what has been invisible to me and make myself accountable is ongoing and full of mistakes. Privilege and rigged systems are easy to not see when you are the benefactor. As Ibram Kendi writes in *How to Be an Antiracist*, "Denial is the heartbeat of racism, beating across ideologies, races, and nations. It is beating within us. Many of us who strongly call out Trump's racist ideas will strongly deny our own" (9). He goes on to write: "A racist is someone who is supporting a racist policy by their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea. An antiracist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy by their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (22-23). What struck me about that statement is how easy it is for me to fall into the racism of inaction, by allowing racist policies to persist around me, by keeping my head down, keep working with blinders on.

In terms of seeking to do antiracist community work, my goal over the past decade has been to decenter myself, my white body, whenever possible, from the community-based writing projects I have been involved with. For example, when some-

one from Boston's Healthcare for the Homeless contacted me to help start a writing group there, I visited, I listened. I found that the person who invited me, Yves, a staff nurse who was a queer Haitian-American man, was very interested in the writing project but needed support. He invited me to run the writing group. Instead, I asked him what support he would need to run it. He said he needed writing prompts, writing supplies, someone to type things up, photocopies, help with layout and printing. I decided that this particular project might run better if my body weren't front and center. I supplied him the writing tools and prompts. I funded a graduate student who could type and help circulate the work. Yves, the staff member who was known and trusted, became the editor of that publication for two years, until he went on to a doctoral program, using this project as the basis of his application. Let me be clear: I would have loved to have run that writing group. I could have done, I think, a decent job. I could have earned a scholarly publication or two from it. My home institution would have valued that work. But foregoing putting myself into a central position was the decision that felt most ethical to me—and it was a benefit I could afford to pass up. I had tenure.

But, that doesn't mean there weren't costs. I was not, and still am not, a Full Professor. Yet. It might take me longer, but I will get there in my own way.

When I was elected to the International Network of Street Papers Board of Directors, I was the first representative from North America in the organization's history. I worked hard in the role and helped shepherd along some important projects, like an online news service shared among the one hundred member papers and translation services to allow content to cross countries and languages. When my term was up for re-election, I decided that being a white, anglophone, academic from the United States was not the most effective biography for the North American representative, especially when wanting to form coalition with representatives from the global South, specifically in this case with board members from Argentina and Namibia. I talked with Serge, a gay, francophone editor of the street paper in Montreal about the possibility of him running for the board. I knew that he could envision things differently than I could, from his less-hegemonic position, and I also knew that other members would view his leadership and ideas differently than they would mine. I chose not to run for re-election to the board, even though I loved the work.

Realizing that my effectiveness might be limited based on my body came through powerfully to me this past summer when I took a workshop on the topic of racial trauma. There, I learned from members of my university's counseling center that because of what body I inhabit, I might represent a trigger to students or community members who have suffered racial micro- or macro-aggressions perpetrated by white women. That workshop helped me more deeply comprehend Asao Inoue's message in his 2019 CCCC's Chair's Address. He said:

[I]t is. . . unfair that you perpetuate racism and White language supremacy not just through your words and actions, but through your body in a place like this or in your classrooms, despite your better intentions. Let me repeat that to compassionately urge you to sit in some discomfort: White people can perpetuate White supremacy by being present. You can perpetu-

ate White language supremacy through the presence of your bodies in places like this.

This truth is what Inoue calls “the elephant in the room.” And rather than avoid it, I ask myself this question: what does it mean to keep company with that elephant? What work is that elephant calling me to do?

Point Three: Contemplative Work Offers a Way to Be Present and Work with Each Other and Our Stories

This brings me to my final part of my talk today. Sitting with my own discomfort, both personal and structural (structures of race, class, religion, sexuality, gender, ability status, and more), encourage me to commit to contemplative work, to seek to grow as a person and a teacher. Since 2012, a variety of contemplative practices have been increasingly defining my pedagogy and scholarship.

The questions that contemplative work offers to community writing are myriad: What work can we do to bring our best—most present, least reactive—selves to community projects? What personal and political work must we do to be present and work in community with others? How can we learn from moments when we react, act badly, or mess up? How can we learn to see ourselves and others with great compassion and equanimity?

Invite me to revisit this article in twenty years, and, I hope, I will be able to give clearer answers to these questions. In the meantime, I remain a novice, an asker of questions, someone who turns to people wiser and more experienced in my contemplative journey.

One facet of contemplative work that draws me is its variety. For some people, contemplation can take the form of art, deep meditation, movement, chanting, or many other body practices. While I do have a nascent but growing practice of sitting (I can't tell if I'm actually meditating), a simple awareness practice has been my biggest go-to, along with writing.

One of my first teachers of contemplative work was John Makransky, a scholar of Buddhism at Boston College. In paraphrasing his teaching, he describes thoughts as mental images that hide most of reality—what we are, what the world is, what our full potential is. Mindfulness can help us become increasingly aware of what we don't see, what has been hiding in reality, and build our capacity to grow our awareness beyond our present perceptions. My favorite definition of mindfulness is a very simple one, from John Kabat Zinn: paying attention, nonjudgmentally, to the present moment, as if your life depended upon it.

For me, one goal of contemplative practice is to become less attached to my conception of reality. As Makransky says, “We're entranced in a spell that we don't even realize we are caught up into. One way out is to recognize our thoughts as thoughts—they are not the full reality. To recognize, to our surprise, how we have mistaken our reified labels of a person, thing, event as that person, thing, event.”

And this can happen by paying attention, in each moment, by not relying on your assumptions, fears, or beliefs about a person, thing, or event. Just be fully pres-

ent. Be curious. Awareness can help us realize that other people are more than our projections of them. This realization can support more empathy and compassion. And by paying attention to the stories we tell ourselves, and the stories we leave tacit or hidden somewhere in our minds, we can make friends with the elephant in all our rooms, and ask that elephant what it has to teach us.

Contemplative work can and should be antiracist work. I was first drawn to the Summer Session of the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education in 2016, because its focus was on connecting contemplative work with Black Lives Matter. I spent five days with wise and wonderful people: I practiced reading Frederick Douglass contemplatively, and I learned from faculty of color who both excelled in their scholarly fields and modeled engaged contemplative practices: incorporating meditation and the teaching of law; combining qualitative research methods with visual art and dance.

But most importantly, that ACMHE Summer Institute modeled how a professional organization could mindfully respond to a moment of unintentional racism: when a speaker, attending remotely, used master-slave metaphors to discuss the mind and body. After the session ended, the conference organizers stopped everything, put the agenda on hold, convened all one hundred participants into one room together. They described what had happened and why they felt they couldn't continue with the agenda as planned. They held space for those who felt harmed by the speaker's words, and allowed as much time as necessary for listening and mindful discussions. It was complex, painful, and slow. The group took advisement about how best to reply to the speaker. Then the conference resumed, as scheduled. That hour, to me, exemplified how contemplative work can help facilitate learning and working in communities: noticing, pausing, gathering, holding space, listening, and planning with compassion for all involved.

That summer institute is where I met Stefanie Briggs, a teacher/scholar whose work deeply engages teaching empathy (Briggs), bringing movement to contemplative work, and building contemplative communities with community-college students of color. Together, we co-facilitated a two-hour Mindful Community Engagement workshop at the last CCW that incorporated movement, writing, quiet reflection, and dance. I am so grateful to have the chance to work with her and learn from her, which I hope continues at future CCW events and elsewhere.

In my own scholarship, and in my classes, I often adapt a practice that Byron Katie simply calls "The Work." It is a process of writing out in order to process the incessant stream of stories our mind tells.

Katie writes:

You can't stop the story inside your head, however hard you try. It's not possible. But when you put the story on paper and write it just the way the mind is telling it, with all your suffering and frustration and rage and sadness, then you can take a look at what is swirling around inside you. You can see it brought into the material world, in physical form. And finally through The Work, you can begin to understand it. (Katie 2002, 16)

The Work includes four questions about any story our minds tell—Is it true? Can you absolutely know it to be true? How do you react when you think this thought? Who would you be without this thought? One engages these questions in writing, and then seeks to turn the thought around, to invert it, tell it slant.

I use Katie's questioning process in my own life and in my teaching, especially in a course I teach called Mindful Storytelling. I ask students each week to pick a story about themselves, someone else, or the world that they feel causes them pain and tell that story and possibly revise it. The purpose of the weekly writerly practice is to see our beliefs and thoughts as tentative and revisable, and that as writers, we can take control of the stories of our lives and change them in ways that are more compassionate to ourselves and others (Mathieu).

So, through contemplative work, I come full circle, back to story. As a writer I'm currently writing a project of creative nonfiction essays to explore my life stories, to excavate what I call the "indoor voices" that I have been tacitly carrying, and to understand myself and my family a bit more deeply and more compassionately.

Stories, the told and the untold, are central to my work. As Amy Robillard says, "Life is more than argument. Life is story" (77). Robillard makes a persuasive call to make story a more central part of our field:

In order to become a field that values the work of story, we not only have to change our collective minds about story, we have to repudiate the version of ourselves that does not value the work of story . . . we would need to repudiate earlier versions of ourselves that previously chose to devalue the work of story. . . That is a tall order in a field that has for so long staked its identity in argument and academic writing (85).

Robillard's valuing of stories helps me own a vision of myself as a teacher and scholar who writes fewer arguments and tells more mindful stories, seeking to heal herself and the world. I invite you to think about your stories, your indoor voices, the elephants quietly tramping around in your thoughts and in your interactions.

My biography still haunts every interest and aspect of my community work, but I try to proceed with mindfulness, compassion toward others, and a gentle sense of humor toward myself: my decision to train as a hospice worker and spend time talking to people in the final days of their lives certainly has roots in the sudden and early losses of both my parents and two sisters, and the fact that my family never was the kind to have conversations about the issues that mattered most. Listening to and being present with someone else's mother or father or sister allowed me to experience deep conversation while being present with someone who craves human connection.

My work in helping form a network of rhetoric and writing professionals in the Boston area has its roots in my experience as a first-generation college student, unsure of the tacit rules of undergraduate life, let alone graduate school or the academy. Trying to make a more welcoming community for others is inevitably trying to make a welcoming space where I feel I fit in.

Acknowledgment

I am deeply grateful to all the members of the Coalition of Community Writing. Your innovative, grounded work challenges and inspires me, as does your joy and creativity in doing life-changing work. Thank you all.

Works Cited

- Briggs, Stephanie. "Developing Empathy as Practice." TEDx Bergen Community College. 19 March 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBxivwUuzQM> Accessed 30 Jan. 2020.
- Inoue, Asao. "How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, Or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy?" Conference on College Composition and Communication, Chairs Address. Pittsburgh, PA. March, 2019.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Mindfulness for Beginners*. Sounds True, 2012.
- Katie, Byron. *Loving What Is: Four Questions that Can Change Your Life*. Three Rivers Press. 2002.
- Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Antiracist*. One World, 2019.
- Makransky, John. "Discussion with Contemplative Pedagogy Cohort." Personal Discussion. Boston College, Center for Teaching Excellence. November, 2016.
- Robillard, Amy. *We Find Ourselves in Other People's Stories: On Narrative Collapse and a Lifetime Search for Stories*. Routledge, 2019.
- Williams, Rev. angel Kyodo, Lama Rod Owens with Jasmine Syedullah, PhD. *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*. Berkeley, CA. 2016.

Author Bio

Paula Mathieu is a writer and teacher. She works at Boston College where she is Associate Professor of English and Director of First-Year Writing. She teaches courses in writing as social action, first-year writing, mindful storytelling, creative nonfiction, and rhetoric. She wrote *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* and co-edited three essay collections, including *Circulating Communities: The Tactics and Strategies of Community Publishing* co-edited with Tiffany Rousculp and Steve Parks. With Diana George, she writes about rhetorical powers of the dissident press. She also writes between writing and contemplative practice and [creative nonfiction about her family](#).