

Fall 2012

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Recommended Citation

Kuebrich, Benjamin D. "Keywords: Community Publishing." *Community Literacy Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2012, pp. 141–47, doi:10.25148/clj.7.1.009386.

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and institutional power to support the complicated work of community activism. And finally, *Writing Home*, the literacy narrative of Eli Goldblatt reviewed by Rebecca Lorimer, provides inspirational nourishment for practitioners of community literacy, whose work can always profit from a critical, descriptive look inward and backward, to the sources of their own personal paths to literacy.

Keywords: Community Publishing

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“Community publishing” sounds like a relatively quaint thing. In fact, the quaintness is built into the term “community.” As Raymond Williams noted in his *Keywords*, “community” has always been a “warmly persuasive word” that “seems never to be used unfavorably” (76). Joseph Harris, who builds on and applies William’s definition to composition classrooms, gives two warnings about the use of this “vague and suggestive” term (99-101). First, community can be any group, any discourse community, and thus floats as a relatively empty signifier. The second use of “community” distinguishes one group as insiders who have shared purpose, language, and experiences in contrast to others. While more descriptive, Harris notes how this concept of community often glosses over the internal tensions and differences we know to exist in all communities. In *Tactics of Hope*, Paula Mathieu looks for a term to describe her work outside the university, also expressing dissatisfaction with “community.” She settles for “street” because “its problems seem generative”(xiii). Most scholars and most of our students live in what they call communities, not in the streets; the street denotes a place outside the university that isn’t always warm and favorable.

Despite its shortcomings, community publishing is our keyword, and I hope my opening digression restores some of the concept’s ineffable complexities while acknowledging it as a contested phrase. As Miller, Wheeler, and White adeptly note in their keyword on reciprocity, we as a discipline have “resigned ourselves to the term ‘community’ to refer to para-university communities,” not yet able to find a term that accurately represents the partnerships, tensions, connections, and differences of groups that we work with (176). Even while we develop the vocabulary to more accurately describe the practice, community publishing is thriving.

The release of the collection *Circulating Communities: The Tactics and Strategies of Community Publishing* earlier this year, edited by Paula Mathieu, Steve Parks, and Tiffany Rousculp, marks the high point in a stream of scholarship on community publishing. Its eleven essays, each describing different community publishing projects, demonstrate the creativity of community publishers. *Circulating Communities* builds on the momentum of other recent and influential texts, including Parks’ *Gravyland* (2010), *The Republic of Letters* (2009), Linda Flower’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* (2008), Eli Goldblatt’s *Because We Live Here* (2007), and Mathieu’s *Tactics of Hope* (2005). The inclusion of community publishing scholarship and community-based writing in a number of recent collections provides yet more evidence of the field’s growing interest in community publishing, such as *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook*, which includes ten pieces written “from the community.”

While there is much diversity in community publishing, its shared characteristics normally consist of the following:

1. The writers are among groups that traditionally do not have access to publication, either because of material constraints or because of the social construction of standards for cultural and political expression. The introduction to *Circulating Communities* describes how community publications move “underrepresented voices” to print, including “people of color, women, working-class radicals, gay and lesbian groups, and homeless advocates, among others” (1-6).

2. Writing is done *by* the community, as Mathieu et al describe; this is in contrast to other forms of community literacy that write about, with, or for the community (15). Nick Pollard and Pat Smart describe writing from the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in the UK as “emphatically culture from the bottom up” and that the goal is “making workers’ voices heard and making them count—on our own terms” (21, 31). Descriptions of community publishing often emphasize the agency of community residents. When university collaborators are involved, the goal is to provide resources from the university and/or facilitate some of the publishing process, not to define the purpose, content, audience, or tone of publications. Communities should have full and final editorial control.

3. The writing is normally confined to a geographic locality. Pollard and Smart describe how the term “community publisher” reflects the localness of topics, authors, and distribution (21-25). The publications may take on topics of national and international significance, but often view them with an eye toward local implications. While online self-publishing is an easy way to go public with writing, community publishing remains largely print-based or born in print and then digitized as a secondary means of publishing. Community publishers are often in “resource poor” communities where the digital divide prevails and the power of being in print can build community and cultural value (Mathieu et al 2).

4. Community publications write for social change and for the promotion of diverse language use and culture. Mathieu et al describe how community publications often “confront power dynamics and political systems” (3). They also describe a variety of community publishing projects that “blur the lines between political and literary writing” and “change the terms of who can and should be considered a writer” (3-6). These publications advocate for underrepresented viewpoints and their publication demonstrates that everyone is an intellectual/philosopher/writer. Thus, social change happens on multiple levels through community publishing.

5. Community is made or enriched in the process of publication. Describing a local campaign built in response to an incident of homophobic vandalism, A. V. Luce asks scholars to focus not only on the product and outward effect of community publication but also the effect of community formation through the process of writing and publishing (202). Community publishing, then, represents not static, ready-made groups of people with a message to promote, but instead, as scholars like Michael Warner remind us, communities and publics that are made through texts, not prior to them.

Many recent and historical community publications have followed the above criteria. In writing a history of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, Pollard and Smart note that while the FWWCP began in 1976, “working-class writing and community publishing has probably existed in some form or other since the invention of the printing press” (22). The first section of *Republic of Letters*—a book-length treatment of the history, theories, and writing from the FWWCC—notes the rise in political agency during the 1960s when working-class groups determined that formal political structures did not represent them, so they “began to represent themselves” (11). Other texts in composition also mark the rise in political, community-based writing during this period, including Jacqueline Rhodes’ *Radical Feminism, Writing, and Critical Agency: From Manifesto to Modem*, which tracks feminist political and community-based writing from the late 1960s to the present. These historical examples provide us with an ideal form of community publishing, where groups who traditionally lack resources and access self organize to publish on their own, developing communities and movements that work for social justice.

A number of important texts in composition link this period of political agency and self-sponsored community publishing with contemporary practices. For starters, the NCTE’s Students Right to Their Own Language Resolution provoked progressive composition scholars to act in line with a more capacious understanding of the social and cultural power of language variation, expanding the field’s definition of effective writing. Adding more ethnographic data to language acquisition and literacy standards, Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways With Words* assesses the divide between home and school language in two nearby, racially segregated communities. Finally, Anne Gere’s “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurricular of Composition” analyzes community publishing from composition’s disciplinary perspective, describing self-sponsored writing groups that are “constructed by desire,” some of which published and held community readings for activist ends (80). In Gere’s early piece of scholarship on community publishing, she argues that self-sponsored, community writing has something to teach composition, but she makes no argument for scholars in composition to engage in or facilitate the practice.

So what happens when universities engage in community publishing work? If our concept of community is defined as para-university, and as those without access to publication, what role do universities have in sponsoring and supporting community publishing? The tensions and traditional divisions of community partnership are a necessary starting point for much of the scholarship in community publishing and community literacy. This is true especially of *Unsustainable: Reframing Short-Lived Community Writing Work*, a forthcoming collection co-edited by Laurie JC Cella and Jessica Restaino. The collection works to refigure how we think of value in community partnership and to reconsider the community/university binary that constrains our work, but this starts with an acknowledgement that most of the essays in the collection “identify a structural, deal-breaking incongruity, one that renders university/community collaboration incompatible” (359).

In a dialogue on community publishing, Nick Pollard and Steve Parks identify some of these specific discontinuities. In contrast to the self-sponsored community publishing done by the FWWCP, Parks wonders if “that purity can be replicated

within a university/community partnership” (58). Pollard argues that the lack of grass-roots involvement, the professional standards of university-sponsored publications, and the use of outside grants could demotivate writers and constrain possibilities for truly representative publications (60-64). He fears that university funded, collaborative publications will ultimately be “written for, not with the community” (64).

Similarly, Mathieu’s critique of traditional service learning practices in *Tactics of Hope* argues that “the more we try to institutionalize the relationships between universities and neighboring streets and communities, the farther we stray from a rhetorically responsive engagement that seeks timely partnerships” (xiv). Instead, Mathieu seeks tactical, rhetorical orientations toward community work to replace strategic orientations based on university goals and timelines. Since community publishing locates its agency and rhetorical production in the community, these initiatives seem primed for the rhetorically responsive, tactical orientations that Mathieu suggests. Still, the distinction between tactical and strategic orientations presents a challenge for community publishing in composition and rhetoric since university partnership necessarily dilutes the process by adding external values and expectations. With student learning objectives and the necessity to publish or perish, university partners have an especially fine line to walk between the requirements of the academic world and the commitment to community-defined publication goals and editorial processes.

Within this context, even well-planned and well-meaning partnerships can end up burning community members. The community engagement “horror story,” in fact, has become something of its own genre. Near the end of Mathieu’s *Tactics of Hope*, she summarizes a story from a woman named “Jane” who is a formerly homeless veteran and outreach worker for a community group (122). Jane partnered with a large non-profit and two local universities to create a book about the experiences of the local homeless population, planning to use proceeds from the book to fund small grants for life and work items needed by the homeless community. What began as an ambitious and creative partnership ended with a university professor taking over the project, publishing a book with himself as the editor, exploiting the community for their stories, and taking total control of editorial decisions. Money from the book went back to the large non-profit, not to the local homeless community. Pollard warned that community-university partnerships would end in books being written for instead of by the community, but this example of partnership-gone-wrong is clearly neither. It is a story about how the extremes of a university-centered approach can damage local communities, leaving them to feel powerless against the resources and standing of the ivory tower. Luckily, there is now plenty of scholarship available to learn from the successes and failures of projects in community publishing, and many community publishers have created seemingly sustainable partnerships. See Mathieu’s *Tactics of Hope* for ten suggestions from Jane on working with community partners (124-125).

From non-profits, universities, and community’s self organizing, homeless populations and advocates are publishing street papers, scholars and citizens are facilitating writing groups and publishing work from local prisons, and residents are re-presenting their history and culture. The diversity and unique purpose of each

publication cannot be addressed here, but curious readers can research successful projects in their area: the *Journal of Ordinary Thought* and *Streetwise* in Chicago, *Real Change* in Seattle, Write Around Portland, the *Homeward Street Journal* in Sacramento, the Salt Lake City Community Writing Center and their yearly *sine era* collection, the Colorado Community Literacy Center and their regular publication of women’s prison writing in *Speak Out!*, *New City Community Press* and the Open Borders Project in Philadelphia, the *Gifford Street Community Press* in Syracuse, Write On! in Durham, the Arkansas Delta Oral History Project, the Neighborhood Story Project in New Orleans, the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in the UK, and 826 National in most major US cities. There are surely many more examples that I am forgetting or do not know of. If you are looking for practical advice on starting a writing group in your community, see the “tip sheet” at the end of Parks’ and Pollard’s “The Extra-Curricular of Composition: A Dialogue on Community Publishing.”

Despite a surge of community publishing and scholarship in the area, there is still work to be done assessing the effects of community publishing on local populations, altering the definitions of academic success to value the long haul of community-based work, and experimenting with digital spaces of community publication.

After descriptions of their community engagement work in “Community Literacy,” Peck, Higgins, and Flower write, “the question we must continue to ask is, does it make a difference?” The lists of scholarship and community practices above tells us that, despite some pitfalls, community publishing is working toward social change in communities, redefining our culture’s idea of the writer, and adding complexity and nuance to debates concerning underprivileged populations. There are plenty of reasons to believe we are doing good work, but more thorough assessment is needed. As Deans, Roswell, and Wurr note in the introduction to *Writing and Community Engagement*, “most of the published studies on community writing take the form of critical reflections on practice,” while few studies use empirical research or other data-supported methods to assess the long and short term effects on local communities (8-10). We need to know how the ideas in these publications circulate, how community writers are affected by the process of publication, and whether texts aimed at social justice can actually transform social conflicts--a wide ranging list of outcomes that won’t be easy to determine.

In addressing the discontinuity between university and community goals, calls for revising the criteria by which we distinguish academic success—for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates—have been getting louder. In the final pages of Goldblatt’s *Because We Live Here*, he laments the “brutal politics of tenure and employment in contemporary higher education,” asking for scholars in the field to slowly build in value for community engagement work. Similarly, in the conclusion to *Unsustainable*, co-editor Jessica Restaino asks, “How might scholarship be more broadly defined to encompass a collaboratively-written community publication? [...] What opportunities do we have to think about our teaching along alternate timelines, beyond the singular semester?” (370-71). Scholars should not have to wait until they have tenure to build in a few hours each week for community-engaged work,

and students in community engaged courses need creative assessment criteria that respond to the unique purposes of each project.

Finally, questions remain about the future of publishing technologies and community publishing. In A.V. Luce's description of the "Faces of Pride" campaign, a blog helps to facilitate a community publishing project. In response to a local art gallery selling a poster saying, "Generation 'Q': Young - Proud - Queer," a vandal scrawled "There is no such thing as a proud queer!" on the storefront window in permanent marker (202). As news of the incident quickly spread, the Associate Director of the campus LGBTQ resource center made a blog to display images of local advocates holding signs like "proud queer" and "proud ally." These photographs were soon printed and displayed behind the vandalized window, creating a powerful juxtaposition between hatred and pride. Online publishing obviously facilitated the publication of these images and voices, which were published locally while also reaching a broader audience online. Examples like the Open Borders Project (see Lyons) further demonstrate the possibilities of community building and empowerment through digital storytelling. While current socio-economic conditions make digital publishing impossible in some communities, the landscape is rapidly shifting and community publishers are creatively thinking about how technology can facilitate community building and community action.

Extrapolating from Pollard and Smart's description of the FWWCP, community publishing can perhaps be described as *the means of making writing and publishing available to all, and making it count on the community's own terms* (31-33). Of course, each part of this description presents a challenge: How do university partners best create conditions under which community residents write on their own terms? What counts as "making it count"? That is, how do community publishers know when they've made a positive difference? What constitutes writing and publishing in our shifting digital landscape? The great thing about community publishing is that answers to these questions rarely come from journal articles; they come instead through collective action, experiment, and commitment to making a more just and inclusive society.

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