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Issues in Community Literacy

Radically Imagining Community Programs: Reflection, Collaboration, and Organizer Toolkits

Erin Green

Abstract

This essay reflects on the challenges of facilitating a community program partnership with the Prince George's Memorial Library System. The program, "Community Justice," uses a public syllabus to introduce local teens to social justice concepts, theories, and methods. While issues of sustainability and retention are examined in this essay, much of the analysis centers on the community-engaged work of collaboration, reflection, and redesign. Additionally, this essay offers the field both an analysis of and a heuristic for teaching an under-explored community literacy utilized by activists: organizer toolkits.

Keywords: organizer toolkits, public syllabus, public library, teen activism, reflection

In the fall of 2022, I applied for a grant in my English department known as the Awards in the Public Humanities: Research & Engagement. The grant was presented by my department's Center for Literary and Comparative Studies (CLCS), a center that "showcases the research and creative activities of the department as well as helps develop new knowledge in literary and comparative studies" (*Center for Literary and Comparative Studies | Department of English*). That fall, I joined a cohort of researchers—graduate students and contingent faculty—who were asked to facilitate a public humanities project, specifically, a project that was meant to combine research and teaching to an audience beyond the university. I proposed a project, "Community Justice: Writing and Organizing for the Public," (which is shortened to "Community Justice" throughout this analysis) where I intended to use a public-facing syllabus as a heuristic to introduce public audiences to theories and practices of social justice. I planned to scaffold the syllabus with academic and public scholarship, community-engaged writing projects, collaborative workshops, and guest speakers. I intended "Community Justice" to allow participants to develop an anti-racist/social justice praxis, which I argued was critical to intervening in social justice issues within their communities.

While I had big goals for this project, as it was very ambitious, not all of my goals were accomplished. In this paper, I provide a reflective analysis of my experience—the trials and tribulations, cuz there was many—leading a public humanities project

that centers community literacy and social justice. This paper explains that while I did not meet my goals for this project, I was able to adapt and reshape them to still enact radical change. I first review public humanities and community literacy scholarship and describe how it helped conceptualize my project. Briefly, I detail how I designed and redesigned my public humanities project and then reflect on how I responded and moved beyond those obstacles. I explain how I use a public syllabus—a freely accessible document that provides a reading list, political education, and resources to the public—as a starting point for constructing my community program. I end by providing resources that could be generative for community literacy practitioners.

Community literacy work is challenging and often comes with unforeseen disruptions. There is often an unbalance between university research and actual community engagement; therefore, finding that balance makes community literacy work arduous. My public humanities project tested me in ways academia had not, but it also provided me with a wealth of knowledge and experiences—even with my program being short-term—that encourages me to continue this kind of engagement. And too, this reflection offers me a chance to refigure my strategies before my next project and offers the field of community literacy an intervention for deepening our studies in a specific community literacy practice dedicated toward enacting radical change in our communities—organizer toolkits. More explicitly explained later in this paper, organizer toolkits are writing projects composed by community organizers and activists for community members to read and use as strategies for enacting change in their communities. “Community Justice” started as a public syllabus with the intention to engage the public about social justice issues. The public syllabus ultimately includes instruction and intellectual framing on why and how to create organizer toolkits. By focusing on these underexplored literacies, we have more ways in our work as community literacy practitioners to communicate, educate, and demand radical change.

Theories of Public Humanities and Community Literacy

Many public humanities and community literacy scholars have written extensively about the community-engaged work between writing teachers, community writing courses, and community members. In *African American Literacies*, Elaine Richardson argues that “the culturally biased education that most African Americans experience trains them to sever ties with Black communities and cultural activities. It trains us to have no interest in making a commitment to the uplift of other African Americans less fortunate than ourselves” (9). Many of our traditional academic writing courses are not geared towards engaging the communities of our students. Richardson’s critique was a starting place for my community program. Additionally, I found Maisha Fisher’s work in Black community literacies to be particularly helpful. She sought to

understand how institution-building encouraged poets and writers to become educators, activists, community organizers, and leaders. Ideas, practices and values associated with literacy in these independent institutions often go unrecognized and undervalued in schools and formal institutions of teaching and learning... [These communities’] early literacy practices were

not solely carried out for the purpose of leisure and enjoyment but they were political acts that could be considered early forms of institution-building (3, 14).

I wanted to frame my project as a collaborative process where I was working with community members to solve problems in their communities. My desire for this kind of program parallels that of Valerie Kinloch, Tanja Burkhard, and Carlotta Penn's "When School Is Not Enough: Understanding the Lives and Literacies of Black Youth." Specifically, they were interested in how Black youth used literacy to "interrogate their racialized experiences inside and outside school" and how they could "produce counternarratives to popular assumptions about Black youth from low-income urban communities" (Kinloch et al. 36). Knowing that the population of the teens attending the library branch where I facilitated my program were predominantly of color, I was invested in learning about their experiences as students of color in their schools and in their communities. Acting as co-investigators, I hoped to provide them with a space for reconciling with others about sociopolitical conditions that impacted their lives and with guidance for communicating their lived experiences, ideas, and political demands via writing. While my expertise in writing instruction, social movements, and antiracist activism certainly informed my conceptualization of the community program, my purpose was to provide space for discussion and reflection while also guiding them through a myriad of possible approaches of responding to those problems via writing.

My program focused on activists and social movements, and Black Lives Matter was just one of many social movements I planned for us to discuss during the program. Elaine Richardson and Alice Ragland have written about the power of the literacy practices of a movement like Black Lives Matter. They note that "BLM expands upon Black language traditions and creates its own semiotic system and literacy practices to signify pride, resilience, and affirmation of all Black humanity" (29). I wanted to combine both elements from "When School Is Not Enough" and Richardson and Ragland's piece where I provided the space for students to compose their experiences outside of a classroom and in the literacy practices of movements such as Black Lives Matter. As they argue, "Black literacies are based in the lived experiences of Black people" (31). Because of the historical context of racism happening in schools, whether it be linguistic racism towards different languages and literacies, or the banning of curriculum that centers people of color, students are often not given the space and opportunity to compose ideas and demands important to their lived experiences. My intentions were to create and facilitate that space for students in partnership with a community institution.

Despite this community literacy and public humanities scholarship being guiding principles for running my program, one of the major setbacks was learning to restructure it. The timeline of prepping this project consisted of approximately three months of me creating a syllabus, interacting with library workers, reflecting, redesigning my program, and collaborating with library workers on a separate, but similar, program. I expected to see 10-14 teens for an 8-week program. Between these 8 weeks, I had little to no attendance (2-3 participants). Participants did not attend for

several reasons: some of them had sports practice, other extracurricular activities, or tutoring. Some of them may have decided to attend a different library event, some of them may have not had the transportation to be able to attend, or some of them may not have wanted to attend a program at all that day after spending eight hours in school. In addition to the challenge of attendance, planning engaging activities for only one to two people proved to also be difficult. While attendance prompted this reflection, the issue that I, a community literacy practitioner, had to solve was restructuring a program.

Designing the “Community Justice” Program

Before the program started, I initially thought my first step for designing this community program was to create the public facing syllabus, but in hindsight, I wish I had spent more time deciding on the intended audience, as this dilemma became the recurring issue for sustaining the program that I had originally proposed to the Center for Literary and Comparative Studies. I originally wanted to propose a community program to the Magic City Acceptance Academy, an LGBTQ-inclusive charter school in Alabama. My program would be geared towards students, faculty, and staff who wanted to enact radical change in their local communities as queer people and allies. In horror of what’s currently happening in America with anti-transgender legislation, drag queen bans, and general queer hate crimes, I wish I would have been able to provide a queer-accepting school some resources to enact radical change in the South. As I write this, my home state of Alabama passed a law that “bans puberty blockers, hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries for minors” (Tryens-Fernandes). With this ongoing anti-queer oppression, a community program for queer Alabamians would have been helpful. In *Queer Literacies: Discourses and Discontents*, Mark McBeth theorizes that

Throughout the twentieth century, the heteronormative literacy sponsorships (Pritchard’s literacy normativities) gave rise to Queer advocacy groups and the rhetorical platforms they developed would dismantle the dominant heteronormative public voices (and the discourses that they espoused) that had prevailed over decades” (14).

Likewise in Alabama, the heteronormative literacy sponsors and discourses provided an exigence for me wanting to create a program to help queer people organize in the South. But because of the nature of public humanities work which includes administrative labor and bureaucratic necessities, I was not able to partner with the Magic City Acceptance Academy. As a Black queer Southerner, not being able to partner with the Academy and collaborate with them about queer activism is particularly disappointing as the United States continues with its onslaught of anti-trans legislation. In addition to bureaucratic necessities and administrative labor, I reflect on Travis Webster’s book, *Queerly Centered: LGBTQ Writing Center Directors Navigate the Workplace*, in which he describes the queer labor and (in)visible work queer writing center directors must perform, especially in moments of violence against queer people. Specifically, he thinks about “the ways queer writing center labor intersects

with national issues that impact people of difference” (5). Noting the *Pulse* nightclub shooting as just one example, violence against queer people prompted Webster “to inquire deeply, personally, into queer leadership in the writing center field, alongside but also far beyond the work of peer writing tutoring” (5). Additionally, Webster’s analysis of the community-oriented work that LGBTQ+ writing center directors feel compelled to do parallels my motivation for facilitating “Community Justice.”

With the current political discourse delegitimizing critical race theory, Black History, and social justice initiatives, “Community Justice” was meant to be more than just a program for students to write outside of school. Conceptualizing writing center work as more than just peer tutoring is also described in Laura Greenfield’s *Radical Writing Center Praxis*, in which she argues for writing center workers to engage their communities to enact change. With my positionality as a Black queer Southerner, I knew the labor of helping other queer Southerners would have been challenging, but worthwhile. Because I was under a time constraint though, I had to find another community quickly to partner with to facilitate my program: Prince George’s County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS).

Public Syllabi

Much of my doctoral research involves community-engaged and activist writing, Black queer literacies, critical race theory, storytelling, and abolition. Because of these research interests, I have read several public syllabi or artifacts that I would classify as public syllabi. These include Candice Benbow’s *Lemonade Syllabus*, a collection of readings and resources centering Black womanhood; the African American Intellectual Historical Society’s prison abolition syllabi; and the Social Science Research Council’s *#coronavirussyllabus*. Additionally, as a scholar studying social movements and abolition, I have reviewed several community organizer toolkits that operate as public syllabi. The goal of a public syllabus should be for anyone to be able to physically access it and for the syllabus readings to also be accessible. This usually means most of the reading should not exist behind a paywall or only be accessible via a university account. Additionally, the public syllabus should be flexible for anyone to be able to pick up, read, and comprehend. There should be no prerequisites for the public syllabus as the audience in mind is a general public audience with an interest in the subject matter. While there can be “suggested reading” as a way for viewers to be able to contextualize some of the material, it should not be totally necessary. Because of my background as a college instructor though, my public syllabus read as a syllabus for the standard college course, not for a community program beyond the academy. Normally where a course description would be located, I added a “program description” that read as follows:

Since 2020, many people have become energized by social justice initiatives to become activists and engage in community organizing. From police abolition, and reproductive justice, to climate action, and more—communities have always been at the forefront of movements seeking to enact social

change. While social media activism is a highly successful tool in spreading awareness, it is but one form of activism.

This 8-week community program—one hour weekly—invites Prince George’s County community members to learn theoretical arguments about concepts like capitalism/neoliberalism or the prison-industrial complex and learn practical strategies for community engagement: grassroots organizing, coalition building, and restorative/transformatory justice. In this program, we will explore the difference between an activist and a community organizer. Using an “asset-based” community development model, this program provides members a space for them to intervene—as experts—in an issue within their own communities, develop a praxis informed by scholarship of antiracism and enact social change through community-engaged writing and radical imagination.

To mirror the standard college course syllabus even more, I added what would normally be considered “learning outcomes,” but phrased it as “program outcomes.” Specifically, I said:

Members of the program can expect to:

- Learn the histories of different activists and social movements
- Understand different theories and arguments of antiracism and social justice
- Identify sociopolitical issues in their communities
- Engage with different activist strategies and organizer toolkits
- Develop strategies to build a coalition for their issues
- Collaborate with other community members
- Create community-engaged writing projects
- Participate in collaborative writing workshops
- Attend guest speaker lectures
- Develop an activist/organizer identity
- Intervene, via writing, in their communities to address sociopolitical issues

Framing this project as a community program that was supposed to exist outside of the university, but still using the language, frameworks, and designs that I would normally use in a college course clearly misses the point of this program existing outside the university. Even though the content of the program centers social justice activism in communities, I was still relying on the practices and tools needed to structure a college course, not a community program. I created a “program calendar” that detailed the theme for every week, the assigned reading, and a deliverable. Once I was able to establish a partnership with the PGCMLS, I realized that I needed to drastically rethink and restructure the community program that I facilitated.

PGCMLS has a program called Teen Action Group (TAG) that is “a monthly meeting that focuses on community-based programs and service-learning opportunities” (*Teen Action Group (TAG) - Prince George’s County Memorial Library System*). As I was designing the program before it started, I made plans to visit one of their meetings to advertise the community justice writing program. In addition to strategizing registration, I inquired with the PGCMLS area manager on how to run a

community program for teens, as it would be different than running a college classroom. She recommended I focus on providing an experiential learning experience. This included icebreakers, hands-on activities, and interactive learning. As a composition teacher and writing program administrator, I had always seen the value in a scaffolded curriculum, and the community program I had designed relied on scaffolded reading and writing projects. Because community literacy practitioners must be adaptable, I chose to redesign the structure of my program to accommodate my participants' various lives. Instead of scaffolding the community program, I redesigned the program to be a different topic and different writing activity each week. I decided to "lesson plan" one week in advance so that I could account for what was successful and unsuccessful. By deciding not to scaffold the community program, I was able to ensure that each week participants could learn something and contribute without having to have been at previous meetings. Another element I had to employ when transforming the program's academic-oriented syllabus to a public-facing syllabus was the exclusion of assigned readings. Because I wanted to emulate the flexibility of public syllabi where anyone could teach it and anyone could show up, having an assigned reading before the program would be more of a hindrance. Additionally, I didn't want to replicate the same educational environment that they had just left at their high schools.

Reciprocity and Redesign

My redesign process occurred after I had already created the public syllabus and was running "Community Justice." As I was working on redesigning my program from its original syllabus, I was able to get in contact with an additional library worker who specialized in Teen Services. This library specialist had previously coordinated a Social Justice Summer Camp and asked if I would like to get involved. I met with him and a cohort of other library workers to prepare for the summer camp. While I was still running my own community program in the spring, I was simultaneously writing the curriculum for the library's eventual summer camp. It was during these meetings that I was able to see that there was one key element that was missing from my community program: collaboration. PGCMLS's Social Justice Summer Camp "helps teens ages 13 to 17 learn not only about advocacy but also how to conduct research and learn the fundamentals of public speaking and other skills to improve the quality of their communities" (Ford). The camp's coordinator enlisted library workers, and me, to create a camp curriculum of modules pertaining to the camp's mission. Modules for the camp include Research, Ethics, Problem Solving, History of Social Justice, and Social Entrepreneurship & Enterprise. I chose to create the Activists and Advocates module because it was a similar topic to the community program that I was already facilitating through my CLCS grant. For my module, I needed to compose an overview of the unit, provide one hour worth of activities, materials for the facilitator, and resources. I helped with designing their Social Justice Summer Camp. After "Community Justice" ended in March, I continued helping design PGCMLS's Social Justice Summer Camp and even led two sessions in the summer. Helping with this camp was

beneficial for me because I was able to take what I learned from these library workers who had already facilitated a community program in a non-college setting. They were the experts in this situation, and I greatly relied on their expertise.

This collaboration with community members and experts outside of academia allowed me to experience another concept prominent in community literacy scholarship: reciprocity. As Jennifer Bay argues in her article on research justice: “academics, as experienced researchers, have a unique perspective and skill: research. Research is an essential part of many writing projects, and as scholars, we have a commitment to our own research, which sometimes conflicts with community projects or partnerships” (10). Even as I collaborated with the library workers and their community program and recognized their expertise and supported how they defined our relationship, this process did not always align with my own research and what I hoped to gain from working with them. Because of the capitalistic nature of academia necessitating a publication as a way to represent my labor and value, community literacy researchers can be placed in a difficult position in wanting the purpose of our work to primarily be serving the communities in which we’re collaborating while also collecting data and experiences to support our research. Bay describes the nuances of reciprocity when doing community-engaged work. She states that “overcoming the power dynamics between the university and community may limit the ability for true reciprocity to occur” (11). The power dynamics for the Summer Camp were clearly defined: I was a volunteer helping the library facilitate their program. While establishing this relationship, the library workers also offered their assistance with any of my research. While it might be easy for community literacy researchers to see the outcome of a partnership to be reciprocity, Bay offers an approach that turns “away from the idea of reciprocity as an ultimate goal and toward the idea of research justice to show how sometimes we must rethink our methods and our outcomes to respond in humane ways to those we work with in the community” (11). Reflecting on my time with the PGCMLS, I think about how our goal of working together was not reciprocity, but ultimately was to provide a community program for teens to learn about social justice. Reciprocity was just one method for creating the program. By exchanging our levels of expertise, we were able to create a summer camp, gain an extra set of hands in conceptualizing the modules and logistics of the camp, and have a conversation for a research symposium at my university about the camp. I had hoped to co-author this article with PGCMLS about our work together, but bureaucratic red tape prevented us from doing so. As community literacy researchers continue to do community-engaged work, we should adopt Bay’s approach of research justice, specifically turning away from reciprocity as the end goal and toward reciprocity as a method to enact radical change.

Laurie JC Cella and Jessica Restaino’s introduction to their book, *Unsustainable: Re-imagining Community Literacy, Public Writing, Service-Learning, and the University*, provides generative thoughts on how I saw my community program being sustained after the completion of my public humanities project. One suggestion Cella and Restaino offer is to see that “both long- and short-term projects have value,” therefore, we “need to deepen our understanding of successful projects, and include

the semester-long project in the spectrum of successful community literacy projects” (2). While my project ran from January to May of 2023, I too want to acknowledge the flexibility of sustainability in short-term programs when we approach sustainability based on the needs of the community. I may not be able to continue to run my former community program with the same resources, but there are ways for me to continue to sustain the ideals and principles of my program with that community: volunteering to create modules for the Social Justice Camp, helping recruit teens, highlighting PGCMLS’s social justice work, and creating resources for them to use in their own programming.

Organizer Toolkits

If my program had better attendance, I would have ended it with a collaboratively curated community organizer and activist toolkit. Many community organizers have published digital toolkits for engaging and organizing their communities around specific social movements. Organizer toolkits are promising sites for community literacy analysis as they are written by community members for community members prompting action for social and radical change. For example, Critical Resistance is an organization working towards community-based approaches to dismantling the prison-industrial complex, specifically addressing issues of police brutality, mass incarceration, and interpersonal violence. One of their organizer toolkits is *Our Communities, Our Solutions: An Organizer’s Toolkit for Developing Campaigns to Abolish Policing* and

In this toolkit, you will find **tools for talking about policing from a [prison-industrial complex] abolitionist perspective**—including *definitions of policing* and *abolition*, along with key terms often referred to or needed in this moment, and **sample talking points** on defunding police. You will also find tools aimed at helping more communities **strengthen our organizing to meet this moment** and carry our movement beyond, specifically in the demands [they] work to win or challenge and the **campaign planning and development** we need to do in order to move more deliberately and collectively toward liberation. [They] have also included recommended **political education materials and resources** for further study, as well as **examples of past statements on policing**, a tactic [their] chapters have used throughout the years in building resistance to policing (emphasis in original, Critical Resistance 4).

Not only are these toolkits showcasing the kind of community literacies and community-engaged writing associated with radical change work, but they are also underexplored artifacts that can advance both community literacy scholarship and community literacy work. Fisher states that “Literacy and knowledge were the key tenets of revolutionary action. One had to be well-read in literature, and history but most importantly one had to be willing to organize and take action” (86). My inclusion of organizer toolkits parallels her argument. While these toolkits are underexplored sites for community literacy scholars, the toolkits’ most important purpose is to be

a resource to enact radical change in communities. Therefore, to study these toolkits without any intention of using them to dismantle the very oppressive systems affecting our communities would be deliberately dismissing the intended purpose of these community documents. I argue for using these toolkits as they were intended and not just as “writing assignments” because these toolkits can truly transform our students’ communities and even our communities. These toolkits are resources for resisting police violence, incarceration, poverty, interpersonal violence, criminalization, and more. Because these toolkits, for many, address sociopolitical issues of life or death, we should not take them for granted as just writing assignments for our community-engaged classrooms, but as tools that have the potential to enact radical change.

Teachers of community-engaged and public writing courses can mirror the very literacy practices employed by community organizers, activists, and educators working toward change in their communities. Many of the organizations publishing toolkits are radical agents of change, supporting political visions of abolition, anti-capitalism, antiracism, anti-imperialism, socialism, communism, anarchism, and feminism. Organizations like Advancement Project, Community Justice Exchange, Creative Interventions, Critical Resistance, Dream Defenders, Interrupting Criminalization, MPD150, Transform Harm, Vision Change Win, and Beyond Criminal Courts are community-oriented organizations and movements publishing these toolkits for community members to use in their own communities. A particular toolkit that community-engaged writing instructors might find useful for their students to read and use in their campus communities is Advancement Project’s *We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police-Free Schools*. Instructors can use this toolkit as reading materials for their courses before asking them to create their own.

This toolkit seeks to “Offer a deep dive and analysis of the history and legacy of school policing” so students will gain the knowledge about school policing (Alliance for Educational Justice 2). The toolkit also seeks to “Equip communities with tools to access school police data and budgets, and understand the oversight and governance structures (if any) of school police infrastructure(s) in [their] districts and cities” (2). Students could very well take the reading outside of their class and use it alongside their peers to organize their communities to get cops off campus. Instructors should certainly be a part of this campaign since college campuses are our communities as well.

The benefit of a public syllabus like “Community Justice,” is that it was not intended to be exclusive to a classroom. Public syllabi are constructed for community members and since many are free to access, a public syllabus offers the public instructions on specific activist literacy practices. Many organizer toolkits contain instructions for how to transform our communities through numerous methods, but many do not have instructions on how to create the organizer toolkit itself. A genre like public syllabi provides the political education necessary for constructing an organizer toolkit. Creating and distributing organizer toolkits is just one strategy of enacting radical change. To highlight these underexplored literacies, I provide guidelines for how I would have facilitated this writing project in my community program. These guidelines can be adopted by community literacy practitioners wanting to run their

own writing-centered program or by composition instructors teaching community-engaged writing courses. Teaching community members and students how to craft these documents, which are meant for radical change, is an invaluable way for our field to stress community literacies as emergent strategies.

While there is no right or wrong way to construct an organizer toolkit, or how to teach others how to construct one, the steps I provide in this section are a good starting point. To compose an organizer toolkit, writers should pick an issue currently affecting their community. For example, during my community program, I learned that substance abuse and gun violence were prominent issues in my teen's communities. Since most toolkits are co-authored, I recommend collaboration rather than individually authored toolkits. I also recommend collaboration because community organizing is inherently collaborative work. Concerning the contents of the toolkit, I recommend starting with a brief definition of organizing, identification and description of the community's issue, explanation of the solution(s) to the issue, strategies (i.e., campaign tools, political education resources, statements to legislatures, fundraising ideas, workshop materials, data collection, coalition building practices, public records requests, demonstrations and protests, risk assessment, restorative practices, transformative justice, etc.), and ways for people to get in contact with the composers or more involved in the movement. Because composing an organizer toolkit is so research and writing intensive, I do not recommend assigning this as a "final writing project" 2-3 weeks before the end of the semester. In fact, I would make the organizer toolkit the sole project for the course and break the toolkit into separate writing tasks throughout the semester. This scaffolded approach allows students to work on the organizer toolkit throughout the semester and can be divided into five separate writing projects: definition of organizing; community issue; community solution(s); organizing strategies; and dissemination.

The Urban Institute defines community organizing as "a method for building power, particularly for people and communities who have traditionally been excluded from decisionmaking [...] it involves community organizers working to build grassroots leadership to create and advocate for policy solutions and changes to systems that produce inequities" (Urban Institute). Students could conduct traditional academic research to familiarize themselves with community organizing as a concept and practice, or instructors could assign readings and lecture on them, but a more practical way would be inviting community organizers themselves to come speak about their work. Inviting organizers to speak about their work, both legitimizes their roles as experts and allows students, or community members, to acquire real engagement with people in their community already in the process of enacting radical change. Students should choose academic, social, or political issues that are important to their communities and that they are interested in solving. Examples of issues affecting college students could be Advancement Project's toolkit on getting cops out of schools—or in our case off campus. Students creating a cop-free campus toolkit might decide that one solution is defunding campus police and reallocating those funds to student-centered services. This solution could be completed through a multitude of organizing strategies. Part of the toolkit could include students doing

data collection on campus police to determine how much the police are funded, the training necessary for the police, and even instances of police violence on campus. Another strategy could be students offering materials to compose statements to the university administration and even the city legislature. Students could offer strategies for student groups or organizations wanting to do effective campus demonstrations. Think of this as “the dos and don’ts of protesting on campus.” Last, students could offer strategies on how students could gravitate toward restorative and transformative justice approaches to deal with harm instead of involving campus police. Students still learn the fundamentals of rhetoric-based writing by paying close attention to audience, purpose, exigence, and style; however, with the organizer toolkits, they have a chance to engage in the same community literacy practices as community organizers and activists with the hopes of securing some form of social or political change in their communities. The same goes for members of a community program that centers writing and organizing. When “Community Justice” did have attendance, a common issue my teen participants brought up was gun violence. I could very well imagine the participants collaboratively constructing an organizer toolkit about how to address gun violence in Prince George’s County high schools. We would have gone through the same steps I described above with the intention for this document to be put to real use and for it to be distributed to their communities.

Most organizer toolkits are distributed digitally by organizations. Since my students did not have their own organizations, I would have recommended they host their documents in a place with open access (e.g., Google Drive or a website). They could distribute it digitally through social media, neighborhood listservs, and other organizations that they’re members of. They could also hold their own meetings in their schools or at public places like public libraries to discuss their toolkits. In a community-engaged writing course, students have numerous ways to disseminate their organizer toolkits. With the cop-free campus example, students could promote their toolkits with the campus newspaper(s), campus radio, student group meetings, student government association meetings and events. Students can also spread it via word of mouth and through printed copies of the toolkit. QR codes linking to the toolkit posted in various locations on campus are also effective. The instructor of the community-engaged writing course should also be involved in the toolkit’s distribution. Various ways for the instructor to distribute include posting it on the departmental websites, sending it to faculty members, advocating for it at faculty senate or department/university-wide committees, and promoting it at events in our own communities. Again, the purpose of the toolkit—even in a college course—is not to simply write about these strategies and tools for organizing. The purpose is to use this writing to achieve direct action that helps dismantle some form of oppression and transform communities into more equitable places.

Conclusion

Even though I didn’t get a chance to teach my participants how to compose organizer toolkits, I’m happy I had the chance to facilitate “Community Justice” because it

provided me with the opportunity to work with other experts in community-engaged work outside of the academy. Partnering with PGCMLS was a life-changing experience for me as a community literacy researcher as it helped develop my role as a scholar-teacher-activist. I felt like I saw tangible results by doing social justice work in communities outside of the academy. Had it not been for my willingness to adapt and restructure, I would not have gotten to experience helping with the Social Justice Summer Camp. On the very last day of the Social Justice Summer Camp, I got to see all of the teens pitch social justice initiatives and ideas to a group of stakeholders. These stakeholders were members of the students' communities who worked in non-profits, non-governmental organizations, legal centers, and education. They were all genuinely interested in hearing what issues were impacting the teens' communities and what they thought should be done about it. After teens submitted their pitches to the stakeholders, they were provided feedback and resources for the next steps for continuing their social justice work. The summation of the work that these teens had done included identifying problems in their own communities, learning about advocacy organizations and organizers in their local communities, and learning about the various methods activists and organizers use to enact change. Seeing the work that these teens had done and how connected it was to their local communities was an enriching experience for me because a lot of social justice efforts—even in community writing classrooms—in academia can seem so distant from the communities in which they're engaging.

The more I reflect on "Community Justice" the more I realize that the Social Justice Summer Camp was exactly what I was striving to provide: a space for teens to be able to learn about important concepts and methods of social justice movements and to guide teens through a written projects where they are experts in their communities advocating for specific changes. I hope to try again one day with a community program because I know the organizer toolkits, and other literacies from organizers and activists, are sites and practices worth not only studying, but teaching others and utilizing so that radical change can be made in our communities. Additionally, I look forward to using this public syllabus during my own community-engaged college writing courses, and most definitely using the cops-off-campus toolkit to introduce the genre. As the field of community literacy progresses, we must continue to not only study the language and literacy practices of activists and organizers, but also adopt these practices to transform our communities. And as community program facilitators, we must continue to rethink what our goals are for community programs. Establishing goals beyond reciprocity can move community literacy practitioners toward more emergent strategies for enacting radical change. Last, as we continue to amplify the language and literacy practices of activists and organizers—like public syllabi and organizer toolkits—we, community literacy researchers-teachers, must not leave the activism and community organizing solely to non-academic community members. For many of us, these are our communities as well, so we should see ourselves as a part of social movements bringing forth social justice initiatives in collaboration with the public. We owe our time and labor to the communities we study,

write about, engage with, and even call home by working alongside the activists and organizers who have been committed to enacting radical change.

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