

## 7 The Community-Organizing Effort and the Community Think Tank: Local Publics Forged in Partnership with Formal Institutions

Both images featured in this chapter—the community-organizing effort and the community think tank—strive to correct the “checkered history” of relationships between “the town and gown” (Flower, “Partners” 95). The Open Doors Collaborative described in Goldblatt’s “Alinsky’s Reveille” is a single instance of community organizing that unfolded over an eighteen-month period. Invoking the discourse of Alinsky, partners “talk[ed] through conflict and negotiate[d . . . ] tensions” in order to reach consensus regarding future joint action (Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille” 289). In contrast, the community think tank described in Flower’s “Intercultural Knowledge Building” refers to a general practice demonstrated through a series of documented community problem-solving dialogues. For the community think tank, the point of deliberation is not consensus among group members but the transformed understanding of individual participants made possible through the structured process of collaborative inquiry (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 245). Despite these differences, both Open Doors and the community think tank are designed to foster the key feature missing from typical university-community relationships: mutuality—the give and take that positions all participants as both active contributors and learners. Both Open Doors and the community think tank promote mutuality by positioning university partners as problem solvers deliberating not *about*, nor *for*, but *with* community members.<sup>1</sup>

A COMMUNITY-ORGANIZING EFFORT: THE LOCAL  
PUBLIC IN GOLDBLATT'S "ALINSKY'S REVEILLE:  
A COMMUNITY-ORGANIZING MODEL FOR  
NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED LITERACY PROJECTS"

In Goldblatt's "Alinsky's Reveille," the local public is a community-organizing effort where partners transform problems into issues to act upon. A model practitioner, Goldblatt brought Alinsky's practical theory of action to bear on his own efforts in early 2002 to build connections across "the community-university divide" ("Alinsky's Reveille" 289). Along with Goldblatt, partners included five community leaders who directed adult education programs in North Philadelphia and university professor, Stephen Parks. Deciding upon a two-part strategy for improving literacy instruction, partners drafted a vision statement for the Open Doors Collaborative, a set of literacy programs supporting the goals and interests of adult learners in North Philly.

*Distinctive Features: Complexity and Pleasure*

For all of its complexity, Goldblatt commends community organizing as infinitely worthwhile—certainly because the process promises well-designed literacy projects, but also for the sheer pleasure of working together in this way.

*Complexity.* What's complex about getting together over hamburgers to "hang around and get to know the people and resources in an area" (Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille" 278)? First, community organizing requires a cultural literacy that makes memorizing the lineage of Greek gods and goddesses look like child's play. You have to keep track of people at the table—their connections to other people and projects across time. People represent their own organizations' interests as well as the needs of others, so you also have to pay attention to the constituencies they represent, the organizations they work for, and those organizations' sponsors. Furthermore, even though they agree to work as partners, people in this new configuration are not entirely clear on the group's intent. The complexity of the composing process grows exponentially when people representing different needs and interests attempt to articulate and to actualize a shared, but initially ill-defined, goal. An effective community organizer knows how to close down this problem space. Yet the community-organizing effort's timetable and

method differ from more publicized corporate and academic models. To violate this community ethic is to jeopardize the effort's success.

*Pleasure.* Engaging with others in a mutually respectful community-organizing effort is damned enjoyable, providing both an excuse for introducing friends and an opportunity for working with people you like but otherwise would not have known. A community-organizing effort also clears the space for partners in the embrace of friendship to ponder existential issues like “the effect that personal traumas have on one’s vocational choices” for which mainstream culture has little patience (Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille” 285).

*The Community-Organizing Effort in Context: Location and Legacy*

As a local public, the community-organizing effort grounds its concern for location in the legacy of Alinsky.

*Location.* Goldblatt and Parks traveled to the largely Latino neighborhoods of North Philly to hold Open Doors’s meetings—first to a local lunch counter, later and more regularly to a North Philly rowhouse, and at least once to a “[community] center near the Fifth Street hub of the Puerto Rican neighborhood” (Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille” 289). Located in North Philly neighborhoods, the meetings were “true[r]” than they would have been if held on Temple University’s campus. More attuned to the needs of the community residents who would use Open Doors initiatives (289), these meetings could enact a “theory of action devised for neighborhoods rather than for higher education” (276). Goldblatt and Parks traveled—yes, literally, but also figuratively—to gain distance from their professional roles and to meet community leaders “on their own ground” (292).

In community-organizing discourse, location also stages the challenges through which community leaders earn the credentials that get them seats at the community-organizing table. Every location is a unique interplay of complex political, economic, and social (often ethnic) pressures, so neighborhoods provide a proving ground for community leaders. The reputations of Goldblatt’s partners preceded them, Manuel having “worked in an organizing campaign for people living with the HIV in South Chicago” (“Alinsky’s Reveille” 285) and Johnny being “one of the best-known figures in the community arts and cultural organizations of Philadelphia” (286). Proficient in Span-

ish and a former high school teacher in the neighborhood, Goldblatt had social currency of his own to trade.

*Legacy.* Goldblatt draws upon Alinsky's community-organizing campaigns to think about how universities can best support literacy education in the larger community.<sup>2</sup> Alinsky took issue with "privilege and power," especially the paternalistic attitudes and exploitative practices of big business and government that prioritize profit at the cost of everyday people's dignity and quality of life (P. Murphy and Cunningham 16). A famous obstructionist, Alinsky cultivated a reputation for in-your-face confrontation, including "militant tactics, including outrageous graffiti, picketing and packing public hearings" (19). These tactics were designed to make public authorities confront their abnegation of civil contracts for quality housing, for effective schools and safe neighborhoods, and for economic developments that would protect local interests over those of large corporate entities. Alinsky-led demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and alliances were also the scourge of those responsible for managing distressed neighborhoods in trying times.

From Alinsky's legacy, Goldblatt took the principle that community groups gain power by organizing. Observing that universities have an especially urgent and long-neglected responsibility to participate as genuine partners in their communities, Goldblatt added that compositionists may facilitate the process through which partners arrive at consensus.

### *Tenor of the Discourse: Bite Tempered by Sweetness*

How do you signal your identity as a radical agitator of Alinsky's ilk? Foremost by the unflinching honesty with which you name the injustices inherent in the paradoxes of the status quo—a stance that requires incisive insight and a stinging sense of humor, the radical's bite. Alinsky's "politics are consistently blunt and confrontational" (Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille" 282), for "organizers [. . .] show courage and candor in the face of corporate threats" (280). Open Doors exercised the radical's bite by "making fun of foundations" (292). Driving the joke was the partners' desire to expose the ironies and inconsistencies in corporate and government funding practices that keep initiatives from doing as much good as they otherwise could. Goldblatt also exercised the radical's bite when accusing academic cul-

ture of mean-spirited posturing. In sum, bite signals Alinsky's deep suspicion of both top-down directives and the idea that corporate culture would ever willingly change the practices and policies that secure its privilege.

The community organizer's bite is tempered by sweetness, the radical's love for "ordinary people" and a commitment to making their "lives better" (Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille" 276, 281). This sweetness was true of Alinsky who "cared a great deal about how ordinary people learn to act for their own good and the good of their neighbors" (276). It also characterizes Goldblatt's efforts to nurture a partnership that he sees could do such good. Likewise, the Open Doors Collaborative was grounded in a deep faith in everyday people and the dignity of their lives.

### *Consensus-Building Literacies*

Community organizing provides an "identity kit" for the non-interventionist agitator, writing program administrators (WPAs) who want to be part of a "collective view of education" that makes literacy instruction more relevant not only to individual college students, but also to learners at adult-education centers where the stakes are higher and literacy instruction can make a bigger difference (Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille" 293). The identity kit flags the political acumen of community-organizing discourse. It operates as a political argument, conceding that conscientious educators are right to worry about unintentionally reinforcing the power and prestige of the university but that this concern doesn't excuse inaction. Yet the identity kit is also an antidote to extremism, providing an alternative to the "radical fantas[y]" that would compel readers "to don leather jackets and give up tenure to work in storefront literacy centers" (Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille" 282). A condensed version of the kit's instructions would read something like this:

#### A Guide for the Non-Interventionist Agitator

The non-interventionist agitator adopts an activist stance that lets you draw upon your unique assets as a WPA without assuming you have all the answers. The instructions stipulate qualifications in two senses of the word. As you'd expect, the list sets the requirements for a productive non-interventionist agitator. In addition, each item also sets conditions that you must respect to preserve the integrity of the

organizing effort, making the non-interventionist agitator accountable to the ever relevant question: “who is serving whom?” (Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille” 292).

- *Connect leaders* in the community, but recognize those you bring to the table may have connections of their own to offer.
- *Be candid* about your own interest in the partnership, but position your interest in terms of the neighborhood’s needs.
- *Let those familiar* with the neighborhood *guide your assessment* of its needs, but by all means, contribute your own insights when they stand to enhance the quality of the conversation.
- *Invest time and energy* in the group’s process without having to be in charge.
- *Leverage resources* responsibly. Take a look at the resources available to you because of your position in the university. Perhaps you could sponsor “assistantships, internships, and volunteer positions to aid small nonprofit organizations with few resources of their own” (293). Or you might be able to help by offering persuasive language for a grant proposal. However you decide to leverage university resources, do so “with [. . .] a clear purpose” and “a commitment to build relationships across institutions” (293). To do otherwise is nothing more than “cynical exploitation” (293).
- *Shepherd documents* through the group’s composing process. As a writing teacher, you are familiar with the complexity of writing. And the process is bound to be complex when people with “different personal styles and organizational cultures” write together (290). So do all you can to take good notes during meetings—attending to “what people want [. . .] to work toward” (288). Texts don’t have to be long to be helpful. In fact, shaping notes into “a one-page statement of [the partners’] purpose and goals” can give the group clarity and focus (288). Use your university’s computer capabilities to facilitate the group’s composing process, for example, by setting up a listserv to distribute documents among your partners.

This identity kit is an alternative to stock roles from the standard university repertoire: researcher, expert, and committee chair.

In addition to the above identity kit for the WPA-activist, community organizing also identifies meeting literacies required of all partners:

- *Talk*: Conversation is the main vehicle through which community-organizing efforts accomplish their goals. Open Doors relied on talk to elicit the conflicts and to sustain the friendships that permitted the group to conduct its most important work.
- *Listen*: Effective partners listen to others' perspectives. In this vein, Goldblatt listened carefully for the partners' interests in order to represent them in the group's drafts he crafted and circulated.
- *Make time*: Managing time is a literate practice, and community organizing depends on the good will of partners to make time to meet despite the numerous additional pressures pressing down on them.
- *Name and respond to conflicts*: To design a literacy collaborative that will work for all involved, partners should be forthright about the needs of their own organizations and the neighborhoods they served. Conflict spurs creative solutions.
- *Read and respond to text*: By assessing the adequacy of initial drafts and making the necessary revisions, partners reach consensus. The final document was one of the most valuable outcomes of the Open Doors Collaborative, "giving concrete expressions to the problems and possible solutions [ . . . that] could apply to neighborhood literacy centers" (290).
- *Share expertise*: Partners' perspectives on the needs of their neighborhoods constitute valuable expertise. In addition, partners have experience running a range of projects and organizations, as well as securing funds from various sources—knowledge that serves their own organizations and can strengthen a joint project such as Open Doors.

Goldblatt capitalizes on the familiarity of talk, text, and time to commend the community-organizing effort to other compositionists.

*Rhetorical Invention: Transforming Problems into Issues for Action*

For the community-organizing effort, rhetorical invention is an indirect and protracted process of securing consensus, a by-product of

three processes: forming relationships, building capacity, and communicating across institutional boundaries.

*Forming Relationships.* In stark contrast to Habermas's version of the public sphere, where citizens bracketed their personal interests and differences in order to deliberate for the common good, for the community-organizing effort self-interests pose "a potent weapon in the development of co-operation and identification of the group welfare" (Alinsky qtd. in Goldblatt 282).<sup>3</sup> Forming relationships means cultivating group trust so that conflict can spur creative solutions. Often, what is in conflict is whether the plan on the table adequately responds to the needs of the various neighborhoods that the partners represent. When action is the end goal, conflict means making hard choices. For instance, at one point, Open Doors's partners decided against submitting a grant proposal, despite the group's investment in it. Though difficult and possibly quite costly, the decision bore respect for the partners' conflicting positions on how to move their work forward.

*Building Capacity.* Open Doors built capacity by asking adults from the partners' community organizations to test and to refine project ideas—a process similar to the participatory institutional design that Grabill commends in *Community Literacy Programs and the Politics of Change*. Community organizing builds capacity in two ways. First, the process builds the leadership capacity of the individual learners who critique a plan's design and offer feedback to the program directors responsible for its implementation. Second, the process ensures that a literacy project's design is aligned with participants' own needs and interests. Quite simply, literacy projects attuned to participants' needs and goals are more likely to build the capacity of learners seeking their services (Grabill, *Community* 125). For instance, Goldblatt and his partners consulted a woman named Isabel to better understand the obstacles that formal education poses for adult non-native English speakers in North Philly. They designed Open Doors to serve the interests of adult learners like her. In addition, they asked another woman named Lourdes to test the idea of the community educator, a role that introduced her to Goldblatt's students at Temple University.

*Communicating Across Institutional Boundaries.* Communicating across institutional boundaries means putting the university in its place



and keeping it there—but making sure it is a player, all the while. Goldblatt and his colleague entered the Open Doors Collaborative as leaders eager to engage with others in the community without having to call the shots. Communicating across institutional boundaries enacts “a new model” for neighborhood-based literacy projects, “one that comes from neighborhoods and draws on the university without being controlled by its demands” (“Alinsky’s Reveille” 284). The promise of communicating across borders is the power of institutional leverage: the ability to do more together than alone.

### *Implications*

1. *Gatekeeping isn’t the only discourse available to social workers. Community organizing redeems the discourse of the public worker by orienting it toward social justice.*

Unlike Quayville’s gatekeepers whom Cushman documented perpetuating social injustices by degrading those who sought social services, the public servants in Goldblatt’s study were already committed to social justice. Although Open Doors’s community leaders oversaw the very kinds of literacy centers and community groups whose leadership Cushman critiques in *The Struggle and the Tools*, never does Goldblatt question their ability to translate their “undying good humor” and “fierce commitment to social justice” into meaningful social action (“Alinsky’s Reveille” 286). Instead, Goldblatt’s respect for his community partners resonates with Joseph Harris’s insight “that non-profits [. . .] help maintain some of the last remaining public spaces in our culture that are not directly sponsored by government or corporations” (16).

Goldblatt shows that not all social workers rely on the reductive schemas that plague gatekeeping encounters. Institutional constraints like those that confined Quayville’s public workers also put pressure on community leaders in North Philly. Yet even before Goldblatt caught up with them, Manuel had made time to talk to Johnny about a liberatory vision for literacy education. Committed to building leadership capacity, they overtly rejected the idea of residents as needy recipients of human services. Rather than critiquing community leaders’ motivations or efficacy, Goldblatt took his cues from them. In fact, their standards set the bar for his engagement.<sup>4</sup>

Goldblatt reminds educators to be humble and judicious in their assessments of the social workers whom they meet while forging uni-

versity-community connections. In fact, we get the sense that what makes this deeper level of community organizing so enjoyable is the chance to experience first hand the synergy that phrases such as *distributed expertise*, *multiple intelligences*, and *community intellectualism* attempt to capture. In relation to Open Doors, *distributed expertise* captures nicely the different types of knowledge and kinds of practices that the partners brought to the table—all of it necessary, none of it sufficient (cf. Engeström *Interactive Expertise*). In educational contexts, *multiple intelligences* is Howard Gardner's phrase for the full spectrum of human competences; in relation to Open Doors, the phrase is a fitting description of the humor, compassion, understanding, and analysis that energized the group. In relation to Open Doors, *community intellectualism* underscores hooks and West's point that some of the most dynamic, thoughtful, informed, and interesting people of our day have made the welfare of their neighborhoods the focus of their lifework.

*2. Local public discourse gives rise to various kinds of conflicts. While conflict may destabilize a group's equilibrium, not all types of conflict are destructive, and under the right leadership some prompt discovery and change.*

Personality conflicts can destabilize a local public in destructive ways. You'll recall from chapter 5 that Heller in *Until We are Strong Together* depicts conflict as something to be absorbed—diminished or minimized. In contrast, for a community-organizing effort, conflict is a resource that partners negotiate to reach a consensus that is responsive to the diverse interests they represent. Likewise, conflict-driven consensus was central to Open Doors's collaborative process, work that led “to stronger final projects than anything that any of the partners could have devised in our offices alone” (Goldblatt, “Alinsky's Reveille” 284).

*3. As a local public, a community-organizing effort has merit in its own right—not on the basis of the group's longevity or the funding it secures to implement its plans—but because it provides an opportunity for people to work together toward a shared purpose.*

Open Doors does not offer a model for sustaining local public life. The partnership “broke up” after meeting for a year and a half (Goldblatt, “Alinsky's Reveille” 290). Within that time, it was not able to fund its

two-part strategy for literacy education. Yet, measuring the success of Open Doors on the basis of its ability to secure funding is a lot like measuring a community resident's agency on whether she enrolled in college as a consequence of her admissions interview or secured an apartment as a result of the specific decisions she made completing a housing application—a judgment Cushman counters in *The Struggle and the Tools*. Assessing local publics like Open Doors calls for a more nuanced understanding of the rhetoric of public work.

Valuing local publics as potential sites of “actually existing democracy” is a good first step. As a local public, a community-organizing effort has merit because it engages people across institutions in a democratic process of discovery and change. Most relevant is not how long the partnership lasts or the resources it secures—though partners may certainly welcome longevity and funding. For instance, Goldblatt regards Open Doors “not as a failure but a long-term investment in helping neighborhood leaders identify problems related to literacy and work toward local solutions [. . .]” (“Alinsky’s Reveille” 291). To accept this argument is to put democratic values before short-term accountability, people and process before products and results (284).

Scholarship in the area of institutional writing assessment can push our appraisal of Open Doors still further by posing additional questions:

- What did the members of the group *learn* that affected their future practice, including Goldblatt’s teaching?
- Who *benefited* and how? (cf. Faber 58)

Such questions don’t devalue the democratic potential of a local public, but they do prompt us to identify who benefits from the collaborative and in what ways. These are evaluative questions similar to those that Charles Bazerman poses in a hypertext using activity theory to consider “the vexed problem” of assessing writing (428). Comparing Open Doors to institutional writing assessment suggests the following starting points:

- The Open Doors partners were expert learners engaged in the activity of writing. As such, it makes sense that they would disband when they had finished learning what it was that brought

them together—in this case, a vision for a literacy initiative that would serve their diverse interests.

- Because of the multiple community organizations involved, the Open Doors Collaborative was the nexus of multiple institutional interests, making assessment in some ways even more complicated than it is in university settings where fewer institutions may stake a claim in assessment results.
- Funding is one among many legitimate measures of community-university effectiveness. Like high-stakes testing, it looms large given the current political landscape, but funding is more accurately understood as one among many ways that a partnership circulates resources.

In keeping with Bazerman's argument about writing assessment, Goldblatt shows that writing makes activity "visible" so it can be "counted" (Bazerman 428). By channeling so much of his energy toward writing, Goldblatt demonstrates the evidentiary function that writing plays when creating a community-university partnership. He also demonstrates how a rhetor in residence can help a group both to read a complex rhetorical situation and to manage often complicated power dynamics. This view of assessment does not eliminate the need for outcomes or resolve the difficulty of respecting process while producing effective results. But it does challenge us, as rhetoricians, to hone our abilities to track how texts and practices do in fact circulate and to talk convincingly about processes of circulation with other stakeholders—including funding officers.

4. *Local publics pose options—not prescriptions—for democratic practice.*

Democracy is never a done deal, nor are local publics necessarily democratic entities. Local publics are like formal publics in this regard. As Iris Young observed: "Democracy is not an all-or-nothing affair, but a matter of degree; societies can vary in both the extent and the intensity of their commitment to democratic practice" (*Inclusion* 5).<sup>5</sup> But there's more to democracy than its ephemeral nature. There are also alternative ways to enact it, and images of local public life call attention to some of these options. The community-organizing effort commends two options for enacting democratic practices: "working from the bottom up" and using three processes (building capacity, forming

relationships, and communicating across institutional boundaries) to forge consensus (Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille” 280, 284). But even such a commitment poses further alternatives. Consider, for instance, the commitment to work from the bottom up. For the community-organizing effort, working from the bottom up means forging partnerships with community leaders who know intimately the needs of neighborhood residents whose interests they represent. In the next image, this principle poses another option: to drawing everyday people (not only community leaders representing their interests) into joint inquiry with other partners in the community.

THE COMMUNITY THINK TANK: THE LOCAL PUBLIC SPHERE  
IN FLOWER’S “INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE BUILDING:  
THE LITERATE ACTION OF A COMMUNITY THINK TANK”

In Flower’s “Intercultural Knowledge Building,” the local public is the community think tank that brings together a diverse mix of people to deliberate pressing social issues so that—having returned to their own spheres of influence—they may create options that are responsive to the life experiences and social circumstances of others. From 1999 to 2001, approximately fifty people participated in one or another of the think tank’s roundtable sessions, typically held at the Community House, home of the CLC. The community think tank offers an inquiry-based, deliberative process that participants use to frame open questions as a community, to elicit multiple perspectives, and to put those perspectives into generative dialogue and text.

*Distinctive Features: Diversity, Conflict, and Tools*

The community think tank is diverse and conflicted—demanding features for both the activist rhetorician designing a think tank and the people participating in its sessions. The think tank brings together for a single afternoon a diverse group of people who may be making one another’s acquaintance for the first time. Consequently, rather than capitalizing on the pleasure that partners derive from working together over time, the think tank invests in tools that let a diverse group of people work together as “an intercultural body of problem solvers” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 244).

*Diversity.* Diversity refers not only to ethnic and economic differences among the fifteen to twenty-five people participating in a given think-tank roundtable session, but also to the diversity of people's roles and to the diversity of domains they represent. In contrast to an elite think tank whose policy analysts' credentials are their degrees from Harvard or Yale and their former experiences at the White House or Brookings Institution (Stone 2), the community think tank creates new knowledge by tapping the diverse experiences that participants have had with the problem at hand—whether as “urban employees and community workers [. . . or] business managers, social agency staff [or] policy makers” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 240). The think tank suggests everyone's perspective is valuable, that “the contribution of the inner city youth worker [. . . is] as critical as the perspective of a CEO” (245). In the crucible of collaborative inquiry, diversity has the rhetorical power to elicit, elaborate, qualify, complicate, and complement other ways of knowing the problem—and, in the process, to contribute to a more realistically complex understanding of the shared problem, as well as to an expanded set of options for wise, responsive action.

*Conflict.* Conflict is “buil[t] into the very structure” of the community think tank's design (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 250). First, the issues of race, class, and economics that it raises are controversial and conflicted ones. For instance, a think tank on urban employment issues brought “open recognition of systemic racial, social and economic problems into the practical discussion of management and performance” (250). In addition, the community think tank “enfranchises” alternative interpretations of the problem at hand, recognizing that while problem representations are “interconnected” they are not readily reconciled (248). Even the discourse expectations people bring to the experience are in conflict. It's not just the “conflict and tension” between competing discourses (Gee 8). In addition, these discourses carry histories of “mutual incomprehensibility” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 250) and “suspicion of motives” (251). The think tank's response—asking everyone to suspend familiar discourses and stock responses to construct an alternative discourse for intercultural inquiry—pushes people from their comfort zones even as it dispels some competition among their default discourses. In that the community think tank “reorganizes normal patterns of communication and au-

thority,” it also poses an unknown that’s likely to make some people initially uncomfortable—another source of potential conflict (245).

*Tools.* Conflict has the potential to “derail[. . .] learning, degrad[e] performance, and thwart[. . .] communication” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 254). This ever-present threat makes the community think tank’s third distinctive feature a necessity: its tools. Without tools that participants use to build an alternative discourse for collaborating together, the odds are stacked against the community think tank engaging people in civil dialogue, let alone in the demanding process of constructing “more workable policies and operational action plans” (240). As interventions, tools shape its practice of inquiry. The community think tank’s most powerful tool is performance. For example, at the beginning of story-behind-the-story sessions reported in “Intercultural Knowledge Building,” college students read the scripts they had composed from critical incident interviews, described below. Likewise, a union president played the role of the bewildered new hire, and a human resource manager dramatically enacted the buddy system gone awry. Performances such as these harness the power of dramatization to focus attention on a real problem. Additionally, tools include the documents that arrive in participants’ mailboxes prior to a think-tank session, the problem-solving strategies that the table leaders describe and model, and the table tents and crib sheets that nudge participants to assume the roles of collaborative problem solvers. Tools let a diverse group of people “spend[. . .] its energy imagining genuine, workable options” (254) rather than swapping rehearsed stories or falling into the “discourse of complaint and blame” (250).

### *The Community Think Tank in Context: Location and Legacy*

As a local public, the community think tank is located in the history of its methods and Flower’s social cognitive theory of literate action.

*Location.* Location matters to the community think tank in that it addresses a wide range of decidedly urban issues. In addition, its design can be adapted and exported to a range of contexts.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Flower has treated the politics of location in relation to “community languages, such as black English vernacular” (“Partners” 97); “multiple forms of expertise” (Peck, Flower and Higgins 210), and “relationships of power and distrust” (“Talking Across Difference” 39). In

“Intercultural Knowledge Building,” the location that matters most is the location of the think tank’s method within the institutional history of the CLC. Over the course of this history, the community think tank’s central practice was developed, namely the community problem-solving dialogue.<sup>7</sup> As Flower explains, from the CLC’s “distinctive mix of street-wise and research-based literate action” emerged its central method: “a strategy for structured, intercultural dialogue” (“Intercultural Knowledge” 245). Flower and her think-tank team then turned the community problem-solving dialogue “to a new purpose, bringing business, policy, and neighborhood ‘experts’ together into a more sustained and interactive dialogue on timely urban problems” (245).

*Legacy.* To make a case for intercultural inquiry as an intellectually demanding and decidedly social act of public engagement, the community think tank brings together three intellectual traditions: Deweyan pragmatism, the rhetorical tradition of public deliberation, and social cognitive rhetoric. Together, these traditions inform intercultural inquiry as a public practice.

*Deweyan pragmatism.* Many of the decisions that everyday people make on a daily basis—including the conditions that frame these decisions and the consequences that follow from them—are sites of legitimate public concern. In terms of the community think tank’s workforce-workplace-worklife issues, this goes for the human resource manager who implements an on-the-job training program, a new hire choosing whether to ask for help or go it alone, co-workers on the floor responding to the new hire, and the policy makers legislating regional welfare-to-work requirements. According to Dewey, such decision points are sites of knowing where one puts one’s best or favored hypotheses about how the world works to the test of experience, “a process of undergoing” (Dewey, “Need” 25). These “undergoings” provide data that people then use to refine their understandings of situations. Orienting themselves in the midst of problems, people use their “critical intelligence” to expand their opportunities by better gauging the conditions and consequences of their choices (*Characters* 378–431). The ability to engage problems in the world and to use data to refine one’s understandings of those



problems—that’s what Dewey called “an experimental way of being” (“Quest” 132).<sup>8</sup>

*Public deliberation.* The think tank enters the debate over public deliberation around the question: “who is at the table and what discourse is sitting at the head?” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 251). To answer this question, Habermas harkened back to Enlightenment-era Europe and invoked a model of disinterested rational argument. In the “coffee houses, the salons and the cafes of middle class society,” educated, propertied men debated issues of “common interest” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 252). As Donald Abelson and Evert Lindquist describe, the contemporary prestige think tank operates largely according to this model, as evidenced by its selective invitation list, its prestige discourse (argument) and the singular voice that authorizes its publications. There are, however, problems with this model. The citizens deliberating in Habermas’s public sphere were not so disinterested after all, for the “common interest” of a sheltered, homogeneous elite “excludes the concerns of women, the working class, and disenfranchised minorities” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 252). And, as discussed in chapter 3, the model doesn’t reflect how “democracy actually works” (Flower “Intercultural Knowledge” 252).

In contrast, the community think tank offers an “alternative model of public discourse” concerned not with “theorizing an ideal” but letting the discourse of local vernacular publics “do[. . .] its work” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 252). To participate in the “untidy communicative practices” of everyday public life (Hauser, *Vernacular* 55), there’s no requirement that participants should bracket their differences. “There are instead people with diverse interests—and emotions and commitments—who are drawn together around an issue” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 252). Thus, it is the rhetorical exigency of a shared problem that draws stakeholders together as a public. Borrowing Hauser’s lens to locate a public for a workplace problem, Flower writes: “Melissa [a new hire], the manager who hires her, the co-workers who support and suffer her actions, and the legislator who mandates the work-to-welfare program are *all drawn together into a public*” (252, emphasis added).

The community think tank operates within a counter tradition of public discourse, one that dates back to fifth century sophists who knew argumentation wasn't the only rhetorical game in town. Sophistic rhetoric, like the pragmatism governing the community think tank's design, "seek[s] the basis for wise judgments and prudent actions" over internally consistent arguments, explanatory accounts, or novel insights (Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge" 280). Thus, claims and evidence are two in a wide "array of knowledge-making moves," including narrative, cultural value judgments, and personal priorities that "puts knowledge building in the hands of ordinary people" (271). Efforts to evaluate the think tank would look for ways that the knowledge it produces actually changes everyday practice, or when it—in Engeström's words—"transform[s . . . ] social structures from below" (qtd. in Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge" 271).<sup>9</sup>

Given Pittsburgh's "intercultural context, with its deep-rooted cultural conflicts and history of social injustice" (Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge" 271), Flower finds Engeström's criterion for transformational knowledge compelling, but also "rather vague" (271). To account for change in everyday practice and for the contribution that intercultural inquiry makes to this process, Flower turns to social cognitive rhetoric.

*Social cognitive rhetoric.* For Flower, change in everyday practice is evidence of a social cognitive phenomenon, at once intellectually demanding and socially situated. People change their practices as a result of having "restructured" their "understanding" of the related problem (Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge" 243). People build mental representations of a problem, and these flexible, mutable multi-modal mental networks can direct people's decision making and actions (cf. Flower, *Construction* 36–84). Mental representations are participants' working theories of a problem—dynamic accounts of not only what causes the problem and the conditions that create it, but also who the players are and how to respond to it (cf. Flower, *Construction* 260–62). The community think tank creates significant public knowledge when it informs—even transforms—the working theories that participants use to represent shared cultural problems as options for action.

*Tenor of the Discourse: Prophetic—Principled and Inventive*

West's prophetic pragmatism orients the community think tank in its distinctive register. Prophetic pragmatism calls readers "to identify the causes of injustice and social misery and organize morally activated collaborative action against them" (Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge" 257). In West, Flower finds expression of a distinctive temperament: the problem-posing stance and democratic faith that characterizes the black freedom struggle.<sup>10</sup> For Flower, the question is, *what are the actual discursive moves that enact such temper, such faith?* She contends people enact such democratic faith when they strike the strong rival-hypothesis stance.

Remember that imaginary recording device that tapped the hidden transcripts of Quayville's gatekeeping encounters in chapter 6? Its value was its capacity to record conflicting perspectives, whereby upholding the democratic (if often unrealized) potential of gatekeeping encounters to negotiate alternative perspectives. A similar device would be helpful here, one also attuned to competing—even conflicting—perspectives. But this device wouldn't be attuned to dueling dualities. In fact, the community think tank is designed to circumvent the tendencies of default discourses to pick a fight, to trump the opposition, or—for that matter—to smooth over genuine differences. Rather, the device would record two levels of knowledge building. It would record the *external sounds* of social engagement among think-tank participants—the audible turn taking that tape recorders actually did record. (There was one at each table.) It would also record the *internal sounds* of knowledge construction inside and across the minds of the individual think-tank participants. This internal meaning making "matters most" to intercultural inquiry, for this is "the understanding [. . . participants] left with or retained the next morning" and would recall and quite possibly act upon in the future (Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge" 265). Internal knowledge construction is a lively—even noisy—process, for the "voices" operating in individuals' networks of meaning are not tidily bounded but rather overlap, inform, and restructure one another in acts of negotiation (263–65).

*Design and Inquiry-Driven Literacies*

To construct new knowledge, the community think tank depends upon both *design literacies* that sequence and scaffold the roundtable sessions and *inquiry-driven literacies* that participants use to enact

their provisional identities as “an intercultural body of problem solvers” (244).

*Design Literacies.* Design literacies craft and orchestrate the processes, events, and documents required to construct a community think tank and to document the knowledge it creates. For the sake of comparison with the knowledge activist’s identity kit, I use the second person:

- *Research the problem:* Do the groundwork for participants’ deliberation by conducting critical incident interviews with those who have first-hand knowledge of the problem at hand. Use these interviews to augment the conventional literature review of academic analysis. Listen for and uncover “competing representations of the problem” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 254). Based on this analysis of “live issues” and “locally grounded data” (255), craft a prototypical problem scenario and a set of decision points to serve as discussion starters for upcoming roundtable sessions.
- *Design materials to scaffold inquiry.* Craft a briefing book to feature the problem scenario and decision points discovered earlier, including “strong ‘rival readings’ of its problematic events” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 255). Use white space, lines, columns, and bullets as visual cues to invite participants’ written responses and to guide their interpretations, comparisons, and discussion. Design additional materials to scaffold inquiry during roundtable sessions, including “a crib sheet on dialogue strategies” and the script for the table leader to read to introduce rival-hypothesis thinking and the goals of intercultural inquiry (259).
- *Sequence intercultural inquiry:* Orchestrate a series of sessions that invite “a diverse body of people” to engage with one another at different points in the inquiry process. After coordinating critical incident interviews, plan, prepare, and hold Story Behind the Story sessions to hear how these different stakeholders interpret “‘what is happening’ in the scenario,” followed by Decision Point sessions that “shift the focus to choices, decisions, and action” (255). Finally, support participants to hold their own *Local Action Think Tanks* back in their home organi-

zations as the union president did when he held an inquiry into “the organization’s flawed promotion process” (279).

- *Document knowledge building*: Use notes and tape recorders to keep track of participants’ insights during Story Behind the Story sessions; then formalize that knowledge in a document called *Findings*. Design the document to remind participants of what they discussed—so that “it clarifies, consolidates, and invites reflection” (266). As you design this text, also keep another group of readers in mind: participants’ “colleagues, Local Action sites, Internet readers” (266). An inventive “mix of narrative, argument, evidence, testimony, and practical plans” provides a culturally appropriate way to talk to such readers about the issue at hand while inviting readers to negotiate and integrate rival perspectives from the text for themselves (255). Finally, circulate the *Findings* to other readers and organizations.

At their best, design literacies spur individuals to rethink how they understand a problem and coordinate this process for an entire group. Design literacies also pull other readers into the process of negotiated meaning making by dramatizing “critical features” of the problem at hand, “conditions under which [an option] might work out—or unravel[, . . .] possible outcomes and predictable problems” (272).

*Participants’ Inquiry-driven Literacies*. The strong rival-hypothesis stance is a complex and demanding intellectual practice that requires participants to be able to elicit the local knowledge that participants use to interpret the problem at hand, to use difference to expand understanding, and to explore options for action.<sup>11</sup> These rhetorical capacities create the alternative discourse that the community think tank uses to produce its knowledge. Specific strategies for developing these capacities include:

- *Critical Incidents*. Capitalizing on narrative as a resource for interpreting complex problems, these paradigmatic problem scenarios elicit carefully contextualized accounts of how people actually experience phenomena such as workforce development and urban health care. Participants’ richly situated interpretations of these incidents allow for a dynamic interchange.

Composed in text, critical incidents translate lived experiences into tangible resources for sustained joint inquiry.

- *Story Behind the Story*. The story-behind-the-story strategy supports narrative-based problem analysis by asking participants to narrate the “movies of the mind” they may call upon to interpret a complex situation. The strategy reveals a logic invaluable to deliberative inquiry: the hidden logic of often unspoken motives, values, and assumptions that people use to interpret complex situations. Once articulated and shared, hidden logic permits other stakeholders to grasp the interpretative power of cultural knowledge other than their own (Flower, “Talking Across Difference” 40).
- *Rivaling*. Rivaling asks participants to imagine alternative interpretations of a question, conflict, or problem. Rivaling seeks not some quick around-the-table inventory of positions, but rather a range of responses to an issue and the reasons behind them. Rivaling often takes the form of talking back to characters to imagine alternative arguments. In putting difference into dialogue, rivaling does not suggest that one appraisal would ultimately prevail over the others but rather that participants, as decision makers, need to develop working theories of the problem that are robust enough to acknowledge these rival concerns. Rivaling also asks participants to seek out differences and gaps in their interpretation and experience in order to critically assess and expand their own knowledge of a problem. It means acknowledging counter claims that qualify and or set conditions on one’s favored interpretation.
- *Options and Outcomes*. The community think tank provides scaffolding that helps participants generate specific options that emerge from their carefully situated analysis. To draw people into this deliberative process and to focus Decision Point sessions on choices and their consequences, the think tank teaches the options-and-outcomes strategy. First, this strategy asks participants to generate multiple “real” options—a move designed to counter the common tendency in decision-making to consider only one option and then decide “yes” or “no.” Then, because the responses to complex problems often involve trade-offs (that is, there isn’t one “good” option), the strategy asks participants to project and to compare possible outcomes, weighing val-

ues and the probability of an outcome (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 259). This strategy lets decision makers hear what their decisions might mean in the lives of people affected by them. The test of the decision that a manager or teacher makes rests in its consequences—yet employees or students are often far more able to project accurately those consequences than those in power (260–61).

Interventions like these do not imply that the people who use them are somehow cognitively or culturally deficient. Rather, such scaffolding honors the demanding work of transforming lived experience into new knowledge that serves the aims of problem analysis, collaboration, and argument. These strategies are tools of rhetorical invention, but in the context of intercultural deliberation, they help participants figure out not just what to say but to invent with others the very discourse in which to say it.

*Rhetorical Invention: The Construction of Negotiated Meaning*

The heartbeat of the community think tank’s rhetorical activity is the constructive process of negotiation through which the rhetor transforms conventional practices (such as a training program for new hires) into inventive and purposeful literate action. Here, *negotiation* and *conflict* are theoretical terms whose features have been named, identified, and made operational for the purpose of rhetorical analysis and theory building (cf. Flower, *Construction* 55). Negotiating conflict is the rhetorical work demanded of rhetors who deliberate over interpretations of a shared problem. According to negotiation theory, *conflicts* shape meaning making in the form of “multiple ‘voices’ or forms of knowledge” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 243). These voices include “the *live* voices” of those at the think tank roundtable and also “the *internal* voices of personal intention, knowledge and emotion, and the *internalized* dictates of convention, language, and ideology” (243). Conflicting voices, for instance, shaped how the African American union president represented the problem of on-the-job training that he deliberated with the human resource manager and policy analyst at his table (243). The conflicts that matter—those that have the potential to shape problem representations—are the ones that people actually attend to as “live options” (243).

Of course, there's no guarantee that the restructured understandings will change the daily choices people make. But as an observation-based account of literate action, negotiation theory offers a plausible explanation of how socially situated individuals make difficult decisions in the face of multiple, internalized, competing public voices. Flower's theory of negotiated meaning posits that participants restructure their understandings when they actively engage competing voices and forms of knowledge. Negotiation lets people build more robust representations of the problem and consequently draw on these revised, enhanced understandings should similar situations arise for them in the future. Through such acts of negotiated meaning making, people challenge the limiting effects of what Pierre Bourdieu has called "habitus"—the socially conditioned attitudes and behaviors that otherwise circumscribe so much of our daily lives (53).

Of all the local publics reviewed in this book, the community think tank takes the most explicit approach to rhetorical invention. Through the table leaders' scripts and the crib sheets on the tables, and the strategies table leaders explicitly teach, the think tank offers adaptive heuristics to help participants tread unfamiliar intercultural waters.

### *Implications*

1. *The Open Doors collaborative and the community think tank represent different appraisals about the best that the field of rhetoric and composition has to offer community partnerships and how to translate that potential into action.*

Goldblatt and Flower agree that mutual and respectful relationships build healthy and sustaining community-university partnerships. In commending the identity of the knowledge activist (Goldblatt) and the intercultural dialogue designer (Flower) to rhet/comp scholars, both commend principled and responsive social identities for fostering such partnerships. Both also demonstrate commitments that outlast the lifespan of a given project.

However, Goldblatt and Flower assess differently the most valuable good that rhet/comp has to offer community partners. For the knowledge activist, the most valuable commodity is the WPA's knowledge of the writing process—a "logic [. . .] resonant [. . .] with [Alinsky's] principles of community organizing" (Goldblatt, "Alinsky's Reveille" 284). The knowledge activist is an expert writer and facilitator of the writing process; thus, he or she also knows how to gauge the group-writing



process—when to back off a plan to pursue funding, for instance, in order to cultivate the group’s cohesion.

The community think tank designer’s expertise is also methodological and requires a good share of writing. But rather than producing a jointly authored text for a small team, the designer prioritizes engaging a larger group of participants in the process of intercultural inquiry and documenting the knowledge they build for these and future readers. For the community think tank designer, the most valuable good that a practicing rhetorician contributes to a community-university partnership is her knowledge of collaborative inquiry, the “ability to elicit and document the intercultural knowledge building of this diverse group” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 245). Just as the knowledge activist’s stance requires choices and trade-offs, so, too, do these design literacies (248), but the goal for the latter is to put difference into generative dialogue, rather than to preserve working friendships in order to reach consensus.

*2. These same judgments (what rhet/comp has to offer community partnerships and how to enact this offer) affect whether we deliberate most with established community leaders or community residents themselves. In a discipline that values writing and deliberating with the community, forums that engage community residents themselves constitute valuable sites of democratic practice.*

For Open Doors, partners’ credentials as leaders earn them a seat at the community-organizing table. Credentials refer not to a paper transcript or diploma but to demonstrable leadership skills and know-how that people like Manuel and Johnny have tested and refined over the years by implementing “effective approaches to actual problems” under pressure in distressed communities (Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille” 289).

In contrast, it’s everyday people more like Lourdes and Isabel (the ESL learners who tested Open Doors’s project design) whom the community think tank invites to the table as experts.<sup>12</sup> Yes, the community think tank included business people, academics, policy analysts, and community leaders at its sessions. But to build relevant new knowledge on workforce-development issues, the experts that the think tank needed most were “people who had ‘been there,’ on welfare, on the street, or [. . .] ‘churning’ from one low-paid job to another” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 250).<sup>13</sup>

The choice between deliberating with established community leaders or ordinary community residents is a significant one. Too often, civic deliberation doesn't involve those whom the deliberation most directly concerns, especially when that constituency is young (Fleming "Subjects") or poor, underemployed, and female (Higgins and Brush). In his study of a campaign to revitalize Cabrini Green in downtown Chicago, David Fleming found public discussions characterized residents of the urban housing project according to predictable *topoi* emphasizing "social disorder": pregnant or truant youth, unfit parents, alcoholic adults ("Subjects" 227). It's not that residents of Cabrini Green weren't aware of these representations or that they fell entirely victim to them, but that the discourses in which residents represented themselves were "marginal in the overall discussion" (238). Furthermore, these representations cast residence as "consumers of government services" rather than "as citizens in a political sense, individuals empowered to participate fully in the collective self-determination of their city" (238). As Iris Young and Gerard Hauser warn, in a democracy, forums in which diverse mixes of everyday people deliberate over shared social problems are as necessary as they are problem ridden. The community think tank is a counterexample of the trend Fleming observes. As activist rhetoricians, we do well to help design and structure forums where everyday citizens deliberate with one another over pressing social issues.

*3. Creating a local public depends on the way institutions (community centers, public schools, universities, city offices) are drawn into the process of public making, offering needed space, money, people, and validation. However, sponsorship can also change the sponsor.*

Organic images of local publics—the garden and womb—stress sponsors who provide material resources to create welcoming spaces for participants. The community think tank extends this idea of sponsorship by providing a forum and a sequence of events that upset people's expectations and draw them into a new kind of discourse. It also provides evidence that sponsorship can change the sponsor.

When graduate students at CMU's school of public policy enlisted the community think tank model to hold a conference on imminent changes in welfare policy, their project replaced the traditional meeting of black and white civic leaders with a ballroom full of people—including a large contingent of women on welfare—who were engaged

in direct deliberation on better options with researchers, policy makers, government officials, and social workers (cf. Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 252–53). It produced a substantive report and—contrary to a dean’s preconception of “community” events—a substantive discussion (cf. Higgins, Long, and Flower 19).

The community think tank offers deliberative intercultural inquiry as a performative rhetoric that needs to be structured and modeled if we, as activist rhetoricians, hope to create viable alternatives to the more prevalent interest-group discourse and false consensus.

*4. A local public doesn’t have to reconcile conflict—to absorb difference—to constitute a viable forum. In fact, when a local public encodes difference in the texts it circulates, the dynamism among conflicting perspectives can pull new readers into the problem space and get them to negotiate conflicting voices for themselves, possibly extending their understanding of the problem at hand.*

The community think tank sets out to elicit and to document difference—and to challenge participants to manage and to accommodate differences for themselves. Furthermore, the think tank’s *Findings* compile conflicting perspectives, following a decision point and several options with blocks of text capturing the rival commentary of an employee, a federal policy analyst, a human resource manager, and an educator. Although these pages of working theory don’t conform to the conventions of rationalist argument, the knowledge presented here has a “complexity and coherence” of its own as a contingent plan for action (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 268).

The role of conflict in community life is often misunderstood. For instance, Patricia Roberts-Miller argues that theories informing compositionists’ understandings of discourse communities prioritize *agreement-expression* over *disagreement-deliberation*, leading educators to interpret conflict and dissension as bad because they threaten a cohort’s unity and cohesion. This misunderstanding comes at a high cost: “To the extent that a theory (or pedagogy) assumes that a good community has minimal conflict it is almost certain to founder on the problems of inclusion and difference” (545). For the think tank, community is symbolic, forged in the act of deliberation and among an inherently diverse group of people. Moreover, conflict—in tandem with the necessary scaffolding—transforms understanding and changes everyday practices. Local publics like the community think tank test the

field's emerging theories about conflict, deliberative local publics, and the texts they circulate. Unlike Open Doors's vision statement, the think tank's *Findings* is not a decision document or policy statement. Rather, it asks people who are decision makers both in their own lives and on the job to take their experience with collaborative inquiry and the options proposed in the *Findings* back into arenas where they have choices to make. Ultimately, rather than offering a solution, the think tank and the findings it produces pose the question, *How can you create options in your own spheres of influence that are responsive to the life experiences and social circumstances of others?*

5. *Local knowledge is a resource with a market value that some entrepreneurial local publics mine to sustain themselves.*

The community think tank further capitalizes on local knowledge, arguing that the ability of intercultural inquiry to elicit and to document local knowledge makes it “a significant, but significantly underused tool for addressing the really pressing problems” (Flower, “Intercultural Knowledge” 245). Flower used this argument to secure the think tank's initial funding. Flower's success in securing monetary support is one example of local knowledge's market value; the youth organizations featured in *ArtShow* is another (Flower and Heath). The organizations portrayed in *ArtShow* market teens' dramatic productions to “juvenile detention centers, parent support groups, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, schools, and the city's convention planning center” to purchase as programs for their clientele (Flower and Heath 48).<sup>14</sup> Sure, other expert consultants offer programs covering similar content—on the dangers of drug use or other “hot topics” at a given time. *ArtShow*'s competitive advantage, however, is the teenaged actors' and producers' local knowledge—in this case, situated rhetorical knowledge for crafting technical information in accurate and compelling ways and for leading teen-based discussions on this information. Underwriting “the energy, imagination and knowledge of local youth” makes sense, write Flower and Heath (48). “[S]uch pay amounts to a community organization investment, for the fees go back into the nonprofit organization to enable them to sustain their work over several years without being donor dependent” (Flower and Heath 49).<sup>15</sup>

6. *Future theory-building efforts in community-literacy studies will need to articulate the rhetorics of sustainability that currently circulate quite tacitly within the literature. In the process, such rhetorics will set competing commitments to outcomes, institutional relationships, and social action in relation to one another.*

Competing images of local public life pose a quandary for activist rhetoricians who want to contribute to the future of local democracy. One familiar frame would cast the problem in terms of *sustainability*. Yet even framing the topic this way privileges an institutional interpretation of the activity when, in fact, a whole set of nested alternatives are available. Consider, for instance, some of the alternatives featured in this book: Do community-university partners do best to prioritize an ever-growing network of *relationships* in the faith that they will mobilize in response to exigencies that arise in the future? Is it these relationships that we should be trying to nurture (cf. Goldblatt “Alinsky’s Reveille”; Mathieu *Tactics*)? Or should we, instead, focus on circulating broader, more inclusive attitudes toward literacies—what literacy means and how it is practiced? Is it this *conversation* about literacy on which we should set our sights (cf. Comstock)? Or should partners focus on pooling rhetorical expertise to support community-based agencies that, in turn, sponsor local publics? That is, is the problem of sustainability primarily an *institutional* concern for material resources, institutional interests, and social capital (cf. Cushman, “Sustainability”; Grabill *Community Literacy*)? If this is the case, we would do well to prioritize processes of research, methods, and outcomes. Or is the top priority *rhetorical engagement* on pressing social issues? If this is the case, what kinds of rhetorical interventions are up to the challenge of helping everyday people bridge the cultural differences that otherwise threaten to keep us apart (Faber; Flower “Knowledge Building”; Flower and Heath)?

This is not the first time members of the field have ventured into the complicated terrain of competing options that must be negotiated. For instance, doing so resembles negotiating the competing goals for empowerment—focused on “political, rhetorical, and intercultural outcomes”—that are central to *Latinola Discourses: On Language, Identity and Literacy Education*. In the *tertulia* concluding the collection of essays, Flower warns, “[I]t rarely helps to think we can focus on just one [form of power], and the other forms of power will tag along” (131). Likewise, chapter 9 in this volume examines strong con-

flicts and contradictions among classroom practices associated with public writing. In sum, effective writing partnerships are rarely a matter of ecumenical melding of available options for writing *in, for, or with* the community as suggested in Joseph Harris's review of *Writing Partnerships*. Rather, goals for local public life reflect distinct working theories. So even when we attempt to honor a rich set of values and priorities, the different conceptions of local public life and what it is good for can not be readily reconciled.

There is another wrinkle. The material realities of local publics place us in terrain that we aren't necessarily accustomed to traversing as educators. That is, whether or not I wrestle with problems of textbook prices, tuition, student retention, state legislation, or overhead costs, students will likely show up in my sufficiently equipped classroom each September with books in tow. Because of a whole host of arrangements that transpire without much involvement on my part, it can feel as though *classrooms happen*. The same can not be said of the local publics featured in this chapter. For all their symbolic and rhetorical richness, these local publics also depend upon material conditions that activist rhetoricians help supply.

Furthermore, the decision to privilege a given goal for local public life—say, rhetorical engagement—often depends on having met institutional and relational goals which entails either attending to these goals behind the theory-building scene or having others within the writing partnership willing and equipped to nurture relationships, to secure funding streams, and to forge institutional partnerships. (It is this capacity for parallel processing, I believe, that made Wayne Peck, Linda Flower, Lorraine Higgins, and Joyce Baskins such a powerhouse in the late 1980s when they established the CLC.)

These nests of competing goals are evident in how Goldblatt and Flower approach the task of theory building. What Goldblatt foregrounds, Flower treats as background information. That is, while "Alinsky's Reveille" documents community leaders' efforts to organize themselves before carefully and deliberately pursuing options for funding, "Intercultural Knowledge Building" makes quick mention of Flower's move to secure financial support by responding to the concerns a funding officer raised about the workforce development issues facing Pittsburgh. As director of CMU's Center for University Outreach, Flower was responsible for securing funding for the Center's initiatives; however, the intellectual, rhetorical work it took to align the

necessary resources stays in the background. Instead, Flower builds theory from the activity that happened next when “diversity [. . .] s[at] down at the table” to deliberate over a shared problem (“Intercultural Knowledge” 239).

And yet, it is clear from “Intercultural Knowledge Building” that this rhetoric of engagement, the activity of building intercultural knowledge, and the theoretical value of intercultural inquiry could not exist without the enabling community relations Goldblatt elaborates. In sum, the meaning and significance of Goldblatt’s community-organizing effort are ultimately inseparable from the kinds of outcomes the effort generates and its contribution to the academic discourse he works to affect.

But ultimately, for all the responsibility we have to this teleological challenge, it is, ultimately, not ours alone to solve. Instead, taking wise action will depend upon the intelligences and expertise distributed among community intellectuals, as well.