KEYWORDS IN WRITING STUDIES

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asks us to "consider the other multiple ways that habits of citizenship are encouraged through literacy learning" (Wan 2011, 45). People belong to various groups, societies, geographies, economies, and governments. They participate in numerous ways. And they imagine civic virtue in many forms. The challenge for the writing studies scholar and for the writing instructor, as Wan explains, is to clearly define *citizenship* in terms of belonging, participation, and virtue, and then to investigate how **literacy**, writing, digital acumen, and rhetorical skill all constitute the "citizen."

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CIVIC/PUBLIC

Steve Parks

Current meanings of *civic* and *public* within writing studies trace their emergence as keywords to the post-World War II period, when the United States was formulating a Cold War strategy premised upon the belief of a consistent threat by the Soviet Union to democratic values. Within this context, the National Council of Teachers of English, when framing its civic mission in the late 1950s, stressed the strong relationship between writing, literature, and democracy, positioning **English** as central to the Cold War struggle as either math or science (NCTE 1958).

This mission was put under pressure as Civil Rights, Brown Rights, and LBGT movements began to press upon the meaning of *democracy*. As Nancy Fraser (1990) argues, the struggle to alter conceptions of "the public" are contingent on formerly private behaviors being transformed into public concerns. In writing studies, the activism of African-American and Latino teachers pushed for a definition of *public* in which their identities and speaking/writing patterns would be considered a valuable part of the norm (Blackmon, Kirklighter, and Parks 2011; Davis 1994). Using their collective subject positions, they articulated a new civic mission for writing studies, one based upon the ideal that the individual languages of students needed to be recognized and valued as public **discourses**.

In like manner, according to Blackmon, Kirklighter, and Parks (2011), scholars such as Geneva Smitherman (1977) and Carlotta Cardenas Dwyer (2011) began to make arguments about the historical exclusion (and oppression) of certain group identities within our field, demonstrating how language policies and textbook practices acted in tandem with larger, oppressive social forces. It is out of this context that CCCC initiated such policies as the Students' Right To Their Own Language and the National Language policy (Conference on College Composition and Communication 1974, 1988)

Nonetheless, as Edward Corbett (1969) argued, for instance, there was for some a sense that a rhetorical education could be called upon

to better prepare students for their roles in civic life—the progressive and confrontational rhetoric of the 1960s representing to Corbett an inability to develop productive dialogue on important political issues. The claim that the study of rhetoric produces **citizens** able to speak virtuously on civic issues goes back to the **work** of Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle (and later, of course, Quintilian). Despite their epistemological differences, each imagined they were teaching individuals to be public citizens, engaged in democratic processes across different elements of society—the courts, the assembly, and public ceremonies. Scholars such as Berlin (1987), however, argued that the resulting "civic" pedagogy was too static, dominated by a sense of normalcy that was not reflective of a heterogeneous teacher and student population, let alone the actual diversity of non-classroom space nationally. In response, some have sought to help students understand rhetoric as an intervention into a contingent moment with an ethical bias toward democratic debate. Such a rhetorical education can provide students with "the skills needed to create and sustain a public, as against a private, reality" (Lanham 1993, 189). With this renewed sense of democratic debate as formative of a socially created truth, "rhetoric" thus becomes essential in creating a dialogue between public and civic space.

While many of the early debates over civic/public space were focused on expanding professional and pedagogical responsibilities within the classroom, more recently writing studies has taken to "the streets" (Mathieu 2005), encouraging students to actively participate in the public sphere to enhance their understanding of "civic" practices. Thus, while a longstanding tension between *public* (representing the larger social and political context) and *civic* (standing for cultural and legal institutions/practices) has remained fairly constant, there has been a massive shift in how that tension is being worked out. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s there was a working assumption that the federal government was the "appeal" of last resort, from approximately 1980 to the present a neoliberal sense of public space has taken over. Here the individual volunteer stands in as the model citizen, with a sense that volunteering coupled with nongovernment-sponsored programming is the best way to achieve equity in the public sphere.

Writing studies is still grappling with how to respond to these "new" definitions of public and civic space, with this shift from a civic space dominated by requests for federal intervention to one dominated by volunteerism. Bruce Herzberg (1994), for instance, has argued that students bring this volunteerist ethos into classroom/**community** work, suggesting that specific strategies have to be developed to undercut it.

Other scholars, such as Nancy Welch (2009), have argued that there is a need to return students to earlier versions of public/civic engagement, citing the history of labor unions and other collective movements for social justice as a means to demonstrate other possible definitions and ways to engage in civic action/debate. John Ackerman (2010) problematizes the entire enterprise of such publicly engaged work, noting that to leave the classroom means intentionally subsuming the progressive politics of civic engagement within the fast-capitalism policies of the United States as a geo-political power.

It should be noted, though, that an engagement with the categories of civic/public does not necessarily imply a critique of neoliberalism or a call to work within social justice movements. Focusing on the ability of such work to provide **personal** affirmation of an individual's voice, David Coogan works toward the formation of a "middle space" that can rhetorically enable "publics," which can allow communities "to address their own social problems" (Coogan 2006, 159). In a similar fashion, Linda Flower (2008) has argued that there is a need to model forms of civic debate based upon intercultural dialogues, conversations that are structured around different rhetorical strategies and that call upon individuals to situate themselves within the argument of their interlocutor. Training in these strategies is designed to produce temporary new "civic" spaces where formerly excluded individuals can gain **agency**—an agency specifically framed to avoid altering existing social policy. The goal is to model a new form of civic dialogue, not necessarily to use that space for specific changes in civic policies.

Michael Warner (2002) likewise complicates the meanings of these keywords, urging us to understand *publics* as poetic creations in which discourse must endlessly circulate, and to imagine the creation of a "non-political counter public" where members can talk openly about their marginalized experience. Similarly, he portrays such communities as existing along an extended timeline. Cushman (2011) demonstrates the difficulty of forming such an extended public—particularly one in a counter-public position—through her examination of Cherokee writing/literacy practices. In fact, a focus on **literacy** within writing studies has been a consistent space in which counter-public community language practices have been examined for their relationship to the dominant public (see Gilyard 1997; Goldblatt 2007; Heath 1983; Parks 2010; Royster 2000).

Finally, recent developments in writing studies continue to complicate the meanings of *civic* and *public* in our professional discourse. The emphasis on global English, for instance, has led to the insight that any

public **identity** for a "writer" must be understood to occur within a global context (Canagarajah 2002), while ESL scholarship maintains that a person's public identity should be understood to represent a continuum of geographies, ethnicities, and language patterns. Geography, itself, has also been questioned as a basis for delimiting a "public." **Technical communication** has asked the field to consider how the ability of software to process data creates an ability to create local publics based upon a variety of criteria (Diehl et al. 2008). Moreover, with the emergence of social media, meanings of *public* have expanded to include non-geographical online and social media publics (Banks 2011; Grabill 2007), publics that offer both activist and non-activist possibilities. As scholars and teachers, then, we must continually assess which understanding of these key terms cannot only be generative of our research, but enable the education of our students as well.

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