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ABSTRACT

Literacy and Labor: Archives, Networks, and Histories in Working-Class Communities explores the significance of *The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP)*, a network of writing groups that existed between 1976-2007 and self-published thousands of texts focused on working-class life, immigrant experience, and educational development. The *FWWCP* emerged in London and eventually spread throughout the United Kingdom and, then, transnationally. Circulating close to one million chapbooks, this network represents years of social history, testimony, and cultural conditions described through the voices of working-class people. I begin by unpacking the historical and social conditions of the *FWWCP*'s tenure and explain how the *FWWCP* challenges conventional understandings of literacy, publics, and histories held within the field of Writing Studies to include working-class examples from alternative educational sites. As a methodological response to the field, I describe a how a team of scholars, librarians, and *FWWCP* members collaborated to build print and digital archives of the *FWWCP*. Drawing from these archives, I illustrate how the *FWWCP*—as a group and individual members— negotiated their own expansion in connection to identity politics. Through organizational documents, I trace key moments concerning how the group could maintain a working-class ethos within a changing political landscape of multiculturalism. Moving from a discussion of the national organization to a local example, I focus on one member-group, Pecket Well College, which created a new educational model run by and for adults with difficulties in reading and writing. Lastly, discusses the exigency for digital preservation along with the material constraints of such work, arguing for a new model of collaborative digital archival building. Ultimately, then, this dissertation examines self-sponsored writing, in order to show how communities expand our understanding of literacy and writing beyond traditional

educational spaces. I argue that such a focus demonstrates multiple types of literacies beyond what we study and presents how working-class communities generate and perform rhetorical acts—acts that can show us what grassroots community organizing looks like, how community-led teaching functions, and why self-generated and sustained community work matters.

**LITERACY AND LABOR: ARCHIVES, NETWORKS, AND HISTORIES IN
WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES**

By

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M.A., Northeastern University, 2012

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Composition and Cultural Rhetoric

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The work for this dissertation began long before graduate school, before I even knew what a dissertation was. My family instilled the value of hard work in me, and it is only through their work and physical labor that I have been able to pursue the degrees I have. Their laboring has enabled me to have the best educational opportunities growing up and has provided me with an ever-supportive community. My dad has worked countless hours putting his body on the line, without complaint, for our family. My mom endures challenges each day, without complaint, and constantly looks for new opportunities, for our family. My grandparents on both sides and Cha Cha rearranged their lives to help care for my sister and I as children, without complaint, for our family. This dissertation would have never happened without each piece of this unwavering love and support that you have given me. I have a sister, Amanda, who supports me, who cheers for me (despite her nickname for me), and who, with George and Aurora, are always there when I need them. I have a Mom #2, Barb, who has listened to my thoughts and worries about which path to pursue, and she and Mom #1 have made sure I take in many adventures along the way. And while our family is too big to name, so many aunts, uncles, cousins, and family friends have supported me in every way they could. My preface is a testament to the community you all have created for me.

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Beyond my family, I come from a lineage of the most supportive mentors I can imagine. In high school, Dana Powers and Lindsay Ingram helped me know the type of teacher

that I wanted to be—one that inspires students to be curious, engages students through their own interests, shows compassion, and most of all reminds students to believe in themselves. Years later, they are still people I admire and am thankful to call them friends. My life coach, Megan O’Neill, has been through each stage with me, with hugs, laughs, and wisdom. She gave me my first introduction to Composition and Rhetoric, my first start at teaching, and coached me through every moment when I needed advice. Emily Mieras and Karen Kaivola shaped the way I think and write with their guidance and support. Through each of them I saw what it meant to be excited to teach and to do research you enjoy. Chris Gallagher created space for me to pursue my interest in community engagement work through a community-partnership in Boston, and pushed my thinking to see the possibilities of writing that could *do something* in the community. Beth Britt, Kimberly Juanita Brown, and Shawna Dolansky were inspiring teachers who guided me into my PhD program. Neal Lerner gave me my first opportunity to work on a sustained research project, to see what life might be like as a scholar. This is a wonderful group, full of exceptionally fun and generous people who have challenged and motivated me. Thank you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Title Page	iii
Copyright Notice	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of Illustrative Material.....	x
Preface: Where I'm From.....	1
Chapter 1: A School Strike and the Beginnings of A Working-Class Writing Community.....	9
Chapter 2: Access, Inclusion, and Curation: Negotiating Mobility and Materiality While Building an Archive.....	51
Chapter 3: Composing A Working-Class Federation Among Separatist Desires.....	95
Chapter 4: 'Biscit' Politics: Building Working-Class Educational Spaces From the Ground Up.....	143
Chapter 5: Re-animating the <i>FWWCP</i> through a Digital Collection.....	174
Conclusion: Relevance, Exigency, and Discussions of Class Identity in (Digital) Archival Spaces.....	205
Afterward.....	215
Appendix.....	219
Works Cited.....	220
Vita.....	236

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIALS

Figure 1. <i>FWWCP</i> Member Groups 1993/1994.....	19
Figure 2. TUC acquires Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers archive deposit.....	72
Figure 3: Image of <i>FWWCP</i> archive at London Metropolitan University.....	87
Figure 4: Image of <i>FWWCP</i> texts sorted by region.....	87
Figure 5: <i>FWWCP</i> Constitution 1978.....	98
Figure 6: Biscits Poster.....	151
Figure 7: The Original Pecket Well College.....	156
Figure 8: Opening Day 1992, Pecket Well College.....	156
Figure 9: Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives Homepage.....	184
Figure 10: Digital Transgender Archive Homepage.....	185
Figure 11: Remixing Rural Texas Homepage.....	186
Figure 12: Pathways to Freedom Homepage.....	187
Figure 13: Pecket! Homepage.....	191
Figure 14: <i>FWWCP</i> Digital Collection Homepage.....	195
Figure 15: <i>FWWCP</i> Archive Search Page.....	197
Figure 16: <i>FWWCP</i> Search Page with Regional Tags.....	198
Figure 17: <i>FWWCP</i> Search Page with Thematic Tags.....	199
Figure 18: <i>FWWCP</i> Search Page for Sally Flood's <i>Paper Talk</i>	200
Figure 19: <i>FWWCP</i> Search Page with PDF of Sally Flood's <i>Paper Talk</i>	201
Figure 20: Emily Thornberry Tweet, Image from #Rochester.....	206
Figure 21: Donald J. Trump Tweet, BREXIT.....	215

Preface: Where I'm From

Class is always in some sense present: whether in our refusal to accept it, our inclination to acknowledge it or insist on it or, as in some cases, our being privileged enough not to have even noticed.

—John Kirk, *Twentieth-century Writing and the British Working Class*

“Jessie, don’t be dumb like me. Be smart, okay? You go to school and keep learning.”

My Bushia (grandmother) would always say this to me. Growing up in the predominantly Polish first-ward of Dunkirk, New York, I didn’t know the term working class. I’m not actually sure when I learned it.

All I knew was this: my Bushia was born in 1928 and grew up first speaking Polish on the family farm or “the birthplace,” as we call it, because she and her siblings were born right there at the house. When she attended the one-room school building nearby, she learned English with the mediating help of her classmates who also spoke Polish. While she enjoyed learning, Bushia never completed the equivalent of high school. Her father died when she was 16, and her mother was a Polish immigrant who was unable to speak much English. Bushia also had six younger siblings that her mother had to care for at home. So, as the oldest child, Bushia went to work at the American Locomotive Company (or ALCo) printing blueprints for the next item to be manufactured. This is where she eventually met my Dzia Dzia (grandfather) who worked there when he came home from World War II.

Bushia always seemed to have the answer when I needed it. She knew the best secrets to cooking and gardening. She could identify all different types of birds and tell you how things work. She knew *The Bible* backwards and forwards, and was a voracious reader of biblical texts and how-to manuals. When I brought home a copy of the tome *Gone with the Wind*, she stayed up day and night to finish it within mere days. She would write notes everywhere to remind

herself of new words and phrases, psalms and remedies. I can't imagine a moment where she wasn't looking for answers and writing down her findings, or exploring a way to complete any of the projects she had. Despite all these things Bushia knew, she always told me she was dumb. After all, she "didn't have proper schooling." But I never believed her. I never will.

Bushia is not the only family member to tell me they lacked intelligence or were dumb compared to most "educated" people. My Uncle Ray, the third of six children, would always joke that his generation wasn't smart enough but that my cousins and I had the brains to make up for their lack. He used to tell me, "all the smarts in this family skipped [his] generation." I never believed him either. Smarts weren't the issue; money was. So, they worked in the factories and did janitorial work. They worked these jobs, so that we (my cousins and I) could go to college. And we did because they told us to keep learning, pushed us on, and reminded, "you don't want to spend your life in the factories like us." They didn't want us to break our bodies the way they had to.

My dad is Bushia's youngest child. At 17, he started working in a local print shop. In the 36 years since then, he's always worked in a print shop occupied by copiers and Heidelberg presses, machines with buttons and levers at every level, machines large enough you have to step on them and get your hands dirty. As a kid, my dad would take me into the paper room at work, where a rainbow emerged along the walls with reams of paper separated into color-coded categories. He'd let me pick out sheets of paper to write and draw on. I remember coveting those colorful sheets of paper, feeling I was so special to get them. I remember the pristine color-coding and precision of the paper room juxtaposed with the loud churning of the print machines that loomed over me in the next room—where the black and gray of the machines blended into the dimness of the factory flooring and the windowless walls.

I also remember that my dad's hands were always "dirty." No matter how much he washed them, black ink seeped into the crevices of his palms and fingers, showing each line along his calloused hands. Black ink circled the sides of his nails and outlined each crease. Sometimes, people would ask about his hands, why they were so "dirty." And, until then, I would forget that having ink-stained hands made my dad unique. Sometimes, when we were on vacation, we would look to see if his hands got "cleaner," noting the faded lines and patches. We never vacationed long enough for us to see the full effect though.

My family has always instilled the value of hard work in me – but working didn't bring luxury or even comfort at some times. My parents met in high school and they married at 19. But when mom was pregnant with me, she fell down a flight of stairs and broke her pelvis. At 26, the same age I began this dissertation, the doctors told her she'd never walk again. The medical debt piled up, and I went to live with Bushia and Dzia Dzia, while my sister went to our other grandparents, so mom could attempt to gain mobility and learn about life in a wheelchair. My dad needed to supplement the print shop employment with additional jobs at other print shops, WalMart, or doing all the "fix it" tasks he could around the town, working 75+ hours a week. But I never saw the negative side of that because we were always surrounded by our community of friends and family. I didn't know then that he was supporting our family of four on less money per year than I make as a graduate student. I didn't know that the reason we never had those "cool" channels like Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network was because we couldn't afford it, unless my grandma and grandpa from Florida were visiting for the summer. I didn't know that going out to dinner was typical for other families, because we never did.

Each of these moments defined my family and the community of my youth, a community that understood economic hardship but also identified through these moments of laboring. The

community was filled with support because so many people lived just like us and shared similar values of work, community, and education. Many fathers and mothers worked at Niagara Mohawk moving coal from the freight trains, or packaging jelly and peanut butter at Carriage House. Others worked making ink at CPS or dog food at Purina. But many were also laid off, like my Dzia Dzia, when ALCo and the Altech steel plants closed. These were the same people you'd see at the Polish clubs in each part of town and share a laugh, or a beer. They were the people who, despite having little of their own, continued to give: baking dozens of coffeecakes at Easter to share, handcrafting items for the school and club festivities, volunteering their time shoveling and snow blowing lawns for anyone who might not be able. It was this community ethos that I grew up with: knowing that anyone was welcome for dinner, without question or concern, whether it was planned or spur of the moment. In these moments, work wasn't the focus because community support was. This sense of identification with each other on a human level, combined with the understanding that work was a necessity not a choice, impacted and continues to influence how I see myself in spaces that I live and work.

These stories illustrate intimate moments of community building that filled each part of my childhood and represent the values and experiences that I bring to my own work. The bonding that I shared with my friends and family centered on gathering around a table to share meals with each other, using the resources you had to make ends meet but also offering up whatever skills or means you could to collaborate and engage with others. For some, perhaps our class might be apparent in each of these situations, but I didn't realize it for a long time. I didn't know growing up that we were working-class. But these moments were pretty typical for us. They represent the ever-present nature of class that British cultural studies scholar John Kirk explains in his book *Twentieth-century Writing and the British Working Class*. Kirk argues that,

on a daily basis, we embody class through both the choices we make and those we do not make: “Class, more generally, is implicated in all manner of lived experience: shopping, going on holiday, playing and watching sport; class is what we eat and the way we eat it, where we live, how we work, or not, how we love, how we die” (1). In this way, Kirk notes that class manifests not in a singular and easily definable way but rather “in a plural sense—as *identities*” constantly changing through economic structures and cultural understandings of ourselves in relation to others (28). My own lived experiences have shown me that my class, combined with my Polish ethnicity, and my understanding of disability affect the things I know as typical. It impacts the way I interact with people around me and the way I understand myself.

Although working-class as a term and identity mean different things for everyone, it gives me an entry point for why I care about the projects discussed in this dissertation, about working-class narratives and communities who speak up against their marginalization. Researching the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP)*, a network of writing and publishing groups across the United Kingdom, has afforded me the chance to see how my personal identity can also be a part of the academy. This project is about valuing and archiving the work, the history, and the testimony of writers and publishers who have been bricklayers and miners, factory workers and chimney sweepers, seamstresses and activists—about those who put their body on the line each day to be able to survive. About those who are often framed as “dumb” or “uneducated” by themselves or others because they have been conditioned to believe that a working-class life is a lesser, and under-educated, life. It asks the field to value these voices and problematize deficit narratives in order to see the valuable ways that worker-writers use literacy in meaningful ways, engage in rhetorical acts that can produce social change, and embody multiple forms of expertise. To be clear, I’m not framing the

necessity for people to do physical labor as a means to pity or patronize anyone; conversely, it's not a sole reason to praise or idolize. Rather, as these stories illustrate, laboring can instill varied senses—of pride, shame, hope, despair— in working-class communities and forms the focus of how they articulate their identity in the spaces around them. In this way, they challenge traditional forms of education (often that they had little participation in) and evince how working-class writers can provide nuanced understandings of literacy, community organizing, and education. Their work demonstrates how class identity, indeed, intersects with every aspect of our lives whether it is conscious or unconscious.

While I am the mouthpiece here writing about my interpretations, the work of this dissertation is only possible only through the collaborative efforts of people involved in the *FWWCP*. To be sure, it is only through their collective laboring, continuous generosity, and their desire to testify about their experiences, as well as invite me into their organization, that this project even began. And I must recognize the immense challenge of describing community groups and reclaiming histories with outputs that are clearly part of an academic enterprise (an article, a dissertation, a book). But I hope to honor their work and have attempted to represent their involvement through their own words and through extensive partnership work that we have shared in interviews, archival creations, focus groups, writing festivals, writing groups, and casual outings at the pubs or among each other's houses. We have shared ideas over tea after international flights; we have shared them amongst family and friends, within writing groups in churches and advice centers, the Quakers Center and in houses, and with a proper English pint. We have conversed over email and phone, Facetime and Skype, Whatsapp and Facebook; these conversations have happened in homes and flats, along tube lines in London, to train stations in West Yorkshire, and car rides in Huddersfield. There is no way to describe this partnership with

the *FWWCP* now as anything but friendships. It has become an intimate network that has traversed geographic spaces and discursive identities.

When I look at these people, I know we share some of the same experiences from home, and I know that our time together and lessons learned are more significant than the products generated, more than the laboring of our bodies. Through these friendships, I have quickly come to understand the role of community across cultures and spaces. I have consistently learned and re-learned the power of writing and education that is generated amongst each other, encouraged and enacted outside of traditional learning spaces, and representative of our daily lives and identities as people, as citizens, and as meaning-makers. And through these friendships, I have also learned that the deficit narratives I heard my Bushia tell me about her education are felt across people and generations, across nations and languages. But whereas my Bushia didn't have a community to tell her otherwise, the *FWWCP* generated their own support system to do this.

As I type now, I know that the laboring I do—can I even call it that, I wonder? — is different from the life of the farm and work in the factories like the steel mill, locomotive manufacturer, food production plant, and the print and ink shops ingrained with my family's history. The discursive spaces that I read and write about now differ from the physical spaces where I grew up and the discourses from home. But without these memories or these understandings about education and work, about labor and the value of inquiry, about costs of living and the affordances of a community, this dissertation would not exist. And it would not have given me a position to identify with the community writers and publishers across England. This work emerges from moments where even though I didn't understand that I was working class, I knew about the experiences of my family—about the motivations and struggles and about the possibilities they imagined.

I enter this discussion with a humbling knowledge of the bodies that have labored for me to have this opportunity and so many others, and the people that endure both the visible ink-stains, like my father, and the invisible markings of laboring for themselves and for others. Everything that has led me to “be smart” as Bushia told me and to succeed in my “proper” education is because of them. They taught me hard work, regardless of reward. They taught me the value of inquiry that transcends traditional learning sites and formal instruction. And they taught me the value of being part of a community, undefined by a class category but always connected through our experiences.

Chapter 1: A School Strike and the Beginnings of A Working-Class Writing Community

“I am just a boy
 with a lot of dreams
 but what’s the point
 I won’t get nowhere
 I’m just ordinary
 Nothing special just
 ...ordinary
 got no chance in this
 world unless you’re
 ...clever
 which I’m not.”
 – anonymous student, *Stepney Words*

“My mind is as grey
 As the surrounding streets
 And the drizzle repeats itself
 In my brain
 Too quiet, the factory stands
 With empty machines
 And crates
 Waiting to be moved
 Into another overcrowded factory.
 Ghosts whisper in my ears
 Of other years
 Of laughter and voices
 Competing against
 The deafening roar
 Of machinery.
 But now, the deathly silence
 Sits upon me
 And in that silence
 Generations of the exploited
 Are coming alive
 And whispering
 Their dreams
 And their fears.
 – Sally Flood, *Paper Talk*

What is the value of such writing? And what is the value of archiving, researching, and teaching such work? My project begins here, thinking through these questions and the implications of these pieces of writing, both written by working-class people. I will argue that we

need to understand these texts within their social context and emergent networks. Through these networks we will see the dynamic interplay of class-based identity, labor histories, and literacy—linkages that occur within the formation of the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers*, a network that created and self-sponsored such working-class writing in England from 1976-2007. Throughout this chapter, I will explore how the work of the *FWWCP* challenges conventional understandings of literacy, publics, and histories held within the field of Writing Studies. I will show that the *FWWCP* teaches us how we might expand some of these organizing terms to be more inclusive and representative of working-class communities, texts, and literacy practices. With attention to the scope, diversity, content, and organization of the *FWWCP*, we see a group that represents a rich history of working-class testimony in the 20th century. This testimony spans generations and geopolitical boundaries, genres and themes, languages and vocations. The work of the *FWWCP* also relies on community-led organizing efforts, which can be understood as a model of social literacy practices as they sought to challenge social norms and representations of working-class people. Or, said another way, through their organizing efforts, the *FWWCP* enacted alternative literacy practices that enabled working-class people to create public spaces to highlight working-class histories.

In this chapter, I'll suggest why it is useful and necessary to think about the *FWWCP* in its historical context—particularly showing how working-class people self-sponsor literacy in everyday spaces, creating new publics for themselves and a predominantly working-class audience. I will contextualize the political and social landscape in which the *FWWCP* emerged in England, and describe how this group was challenged by—and responded to—this environment. I will then show how the *FWWCP*, by invoking a working-class ethos of collectivity, challenges simplistic constructions of the working class and pushes us to broaden our understanding of

literacies, public writing, and histories. Finally, I will discuss the exigency for revisionist work and interrogate why self-generated, working-class, community literacy has often been overlooked in histories within Writing Studies, especially within community-partnership efforts, arguing that we must continue to build on a revisionist enterprise that emphasizes grassroots and alternative literacy efforts. I conclude with chapter outlines. To understand these connections amongst the field of Writing Studies, I must first provide a brief history.

From (Stepney) Words to Action

The writing that opens this chapter comes from *Stepney Words*, a book of poems created by a group of school children (ages 11-15), in 1971, along with their teacher, Chris Searle. In the early 1970s, Searle taught at Sir John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat School in East London, England. This particular school was established just a few years earlier, in 1966, with the financial support of Sir John Cass's Foundation and was associated with the Church of England. The mission and ethos associated with Sir John Cass's Foundation and Schools has a deep history dating back to the 1700s, when John Cass, a notable politician and philanthropist, opened his first school with the mission of "educating the poorer children in London" ("Origins and History"). The phrasing of "educating the poorer children" elicits class-based hierarchies that circulated extensively throughout the era of John Cass and into Chris Searle's tenure at the school. Indeed, the use of such rhetoric would stigmatize working-class populations throughout England in the 1970s, particularly in Tower Hamlets (the borough where the school was located).

Tower Hamlets was marked by overcrowding and poverty during this time, characterized largely as a working-class community. Even more, various historical events such as the Bangladesh Independence War in 1971 caused an increase of Bengali migrants in Tower Hamlets. As with many cases of migration and war, this event provoked tensions surrounding

racial identity and nationality, in addition to concerns about class and work in an already overcrowded and impoverished community (Glynn).

Many of Searle's students, then, were growing up in an environment rife with such tensions of race, class, and nationality, and were encouraged by Searle to write about how they felt about their life. Searle notes in his book, *None but Our Words*, that in addition to British working-class backgrounds many students also had "origins in Bengal, Ghana, Gibraltar, Cyprus and Jamaica among many other countries" (19). For the first time, many of these students had a chance to talk about their lives in a way that was often unavailable to them, pushing past prescriptive grammar exercises and, rather, using writing as way to describe the world that they saw around them or what they felt—even if it meant, as the anonymous student in the first poem shows us, expressing the fear of being "just ordinary." The feelings this student describes parallel the descriptions from other students as well, who felt underwhelmed at the opportunities for them. Because of this general sense of exclusion, Searle's goal of publishing *Stepney Words* was to give students a chance to be visible, through their words, in a world that often rendered them invisible. This experience with writing and publishing, which foregrounded student voices and their ideas through poetry, was new to many of the youth involved. It presented a way to share their perspectives with an audience both within and beyond the classroom through the publication and circulation of their own work.

During the book's creation, Searle and his students seemed to have the backing of the school; however, this support didn't last long. In fact, Searle recounts the wavering support, stating:

I showed the poems to Trevor Huddleston, the Bishop of Stepney, and he loved them. And it became evident that there was a duality in the church, because the chairman of the school governors who was a priest said to me, 'Don't you realise these are fallen children?' in other words, they were of the devil. But Trevor

Huddleston read the poems and then, with a profound look, said, ‘These children are the children of God.’ So I should have realised there was going to be a bit of a battle. (Wells)

With the help of Huddleston and others in the local community, Searle raised £200 to publish *Stepney Words*. Searle notes that the funds came from “a local plumber, a librarian, a social worker and two other very influential individuals in particular [one of which was a retired docker, communist, and trades unionist], who were very moved by the students’ work” (Searle 20). This financial support paired with the support from the student-poets’ parents.

Unfortunately, despite the financial and social backing, Searle was fired from Sir John Cass’s Foundation and Redcoat School after the book’s release. A prominent leader there remarked the poems that portrayed the poverty and crime in East London were “too grim” and critiqued Searle’s audacity for publishing the voices of these “fallen children” (The gentle author “The Stepney”).

The story could end here—with Searle being fired and the students moving on to their next day at school—but then this dissertation would not exist. Instead, following Searle’s dismissal¹, over 600 students, without his knowledge, skipped school and protested in London’s Trafalgar Square so they might “Bring Searle Back” (The gentle author “The Stepney”). The story of the *Stepney Words* strike made headlines nationally through newspaper stories, television broadcasts, and through the eventual production of what some note as over fifteen thousand copies² of the book. *Reality Press*, a small Jewish print shop from the East End initially printed the 32-page book. *Centerprise Publishing*, a community publisher and founding member group of the *FWWCP* published a re-print called *Stepney Words I & II* in 1976 with an additional

¹ Searle was reinstated years later (see more in footnote 5).

² This number is referenced in the blog *Spitalfields Life*, which is a well-known blog about the history of East London. Although I have not found other estimates to corroborate this number, the author of this blog has interviewed students who wrote in *Stepney Words*. (see: <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2011/08/16/the-stepney-school-strike-of-1971/>)

40 pages of texts and images listed with a 35-pence selling price. Searle and students distributed the original *Stepney Words* around the community, particularly to community centers, libraries, and doctor's offices (Searle 21). As discussed below, the circulation of *Stepney Words* and the strike prompted local responses from residents of Tower Hamlets to take up writing in ways that would build on Searle's foundation. (Indeed, this story has also become a foundational moment for the *FWWCP's* community of writers that I will discuss throughout this dissertation.)

The creation of *Stepney Words* symbolizes more than a physical book of poems; rather, this history is imbued with tensions surrounding class and writing. It represents an example of "powerful literacies," as scholars Lyn Tett, Mary Hamilton, and Jim Crowther describe:

The agenda for developing powerful literacies has to be informed by issues of social justice, equality and democracy in everyday life rather than be limited to a narrow, functional definition primarily addressed to the needs of the economy.... Powerful literacies involve opening up the many voices that are silenced by the dominant definitions of literacy. It involves people deciding for themselves what is 'really useful literacy' and using it to act, individually and collectively, on their circumstances to take greater control over them. Literacy is a resource for people acting back against the forces that limit their lives. (5)

To be sure, the production of *Stepney Words* and the protest by the Sir John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat School students represent moments where these students "decid[ed] for themselves what [was] 'really useful literacy' and us[ed] it to act, individually and collectively, on their circumstances to take greater control over them," particularly by speaking back against the firing of Chris Searle (5). In a moment when dominant financial, religious, and educational leaders attempted to silence the voices of the children, these children responded in both discursive and rhetorical ways through the written, raw experiences in *Stepney Words* and the self-organized protest. These words and actions proved meaningful for those involved, as well as for those in the surrounding community. In my interview with East London resident Sally Flood, also the author of the second poem in this chapter, she explained that the protest garnered attention from

media outlets such as *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun*, and circulated the story throughout the city, particularly to East Londoners who identified with the students and expressed a great sense of pride and support for these children standing up for themselves (Flood “Interview at Mount Terrace”). Sally Flood, who was a member of the *Basement Writers* group and founding member of the *FWWCP*, plays an important role in this dissertation, which I’ll describe throughout.

The strike also resonated with the students in multiple ways. As one of Searle’s students recounted years later, *Stepney Words* provided a new means of agency for those involved to make their voices publically known: “It was one of the proudest days of my life, it taught me that you can make a stand. It was about dignified mutual respect. [Searle] didn’t expect the worst of us, he believed everyone could produce work of value. He opened your eyes to the world” (The gentle author “The Stepney”). Even years later, this student remembers the impact that this event and Searle had on his life. His reflection embodies the possibilities of writing created in an environment of respect in which all were encouraged to actively participate. This reflection also describes an environment, co-created by Searle and the students, which supported literacy as something more than writing. Such an example, I argue, illustrates how literacy, as a rhetorical act of collectivity, defiance, celebration, and respect, was as empowering for students as it was threatening to the structure of institutional support that the school administrators maintained over Searle and the students. In this way, through the circulation of the physical book of poems and the news spreading through the protest, these students became part of a conversation, in which working-class voices challenged the status quo.

This understanding—of the possibility for all people to produce valued work and powerful literacies—became the impetus for Searle and others to continue pursuing collaborative writing opportunities that went against dominant ideas of literacy and working-class youth in

1970s Britain. While Searle was not permitted to return to Sir John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat School until years later, he explained in his own poem "A Strike of Words" the power embodied by the students:

Anyone can write a poem, I still hold that,
 But you children, sharply organized,
 You made your words strike,
 The words of your class march
 Past middle-class poet-cynics
 Shaking their heads, declaring
 'Poetry can do nothing,
 It makes nothing happen.'

Yes, *their* poetry can do nothing
 Morosely making nothing of the world,
 But yours, wed to action
 Can take it over. (Searle *Classrooms*)

The strong sentiment in Searle's poem of the children's capabilities to affect change through writing and organizing cannot be overlooked. Here, Searle calls attention to the class-based tension between the commanding words of the working-class students—words that "march past middle class poet-cynics"—and the diminishing rhetoric of some of the school's leaders who believe "poetry can do nothing." Searle's framing of students shows that power emerges from the union between writing and action.

From this history, we clearly see how the production of *Stepney Words* impacted students, Chris Searle, and some of the local community; however, a much larger history of alternative publishing efforts also emerged. The *Stepney Words* history shows us an instance of writing as it connects to locally based social and political issues with widespread effects. One of the major results of this book was that it emboldened working-class people to write about their own experiences—something that unpredictably grew into a worker-writer movement.

From the *Basement Writers* To *The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers*

Stepney Words served as a catalyst for a larger movement centered on the production of working-class writing through individual groups and the creation of a working-class Federation. After the book's release and Searle's dismissal, he started a writing group called the *Basement Writers*, named for their meeting location in St. George's Town Hall basement.³ Some children from the school were involved, but this group also attracted participation from a broader public who had read news of the *Stepney Words* protest. Of course, one main difference with this group rested in its role outside of the institutional structure that had tried to constrain the students at Sir John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat School. In one meeting, there could be students of Searle alongside writers such as Gladys McGee (a mother of one of the students) and community members whose interest formed after hearing of the school-kids' efforts. Through various writing projects, this group grew to be intergenerational and include locals who started writing later in life.

As a group, the *Basement Writers* cultivated a space for working-class people, particularly those who were often pushed out of traditional education or silenced by governing discourses, to voice their personal narratives through writing. Through this group, individuals collectively created discursive spaces outside of academic arenas that functioned as a means of advocating for working-class narratives, knowledges, and experiences. In this way, the *Basement Writers* and groups like it (which I will discuss shortly) became a vehicle for adults to gather and workshop their writing, fostering the idea that all people could produce meaningful texts.

In 1976, the *Basement Writers* gathered with seven other such writing and publishing groups from London, Manchester, and Liverpool in order to form a coalition of working-class

³ This location was historic for multiple reasons, adding to the importance of the chosen location for a writing group wanting to make their voices known among a repressive political climate. Searle notes that the Town Hall "overlooked the shell of St. George's Church, shattered by Nazi bombs in the Second World War, and outside in Cable Street, thousands of anti-fascists had stopped the march of Sir Oswald Mosley's blackshirts in October 1936" (Searle *None* 49).

writing groups in the United Kingdom. These eight groups gathered at *Centerprise Publishing* in East London — a combined coffeehouse, tutoring center, and bookshop — establishing themselves as *The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP)*. The *FWWCP* developed from a collective belief that, locally and nationally, working-class people needed a space to express their ideas and be heard in a collaborative and supportive setting. The earliest constitutional documents of the *FWWCP* indicate that “The purpose of the Federation shall be to further the cause of working class writing and community publishing, by all means possible” (Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers “Constitution”).⁴

The scope of the *FWWCP* network is far too expansive to discuss in one dissertation; however, in the rest of this section, I will provide an overview of some ways the *FWWCP* enacted their goal of furthering working class writing “by all means possible” (“Constitution”). Indeed, the *FWWCP* remained active from 1976 until 2007. The original eight groups who met at Centerprise expanded to include nearly 100 groups across the United Kingdom, the European continent, Australia, the United States, Canada, and South Africa (a particularly important feat with most of this happening prior to the widespread use of the internet and mobile phones).

These groups created a network in which participants could do the following: attend writing workshops; host performances; produce newsletters, journals, broadsheets, magazines, and pamphlets; publish individual chapbooks or group anthologies; design and attend peer-taught writing courses throughout England; seek out funding and do outreach to expand their network. Ultimately, this work culminated each year with a celebratory FED Festival and Annual General Meeting where groups from across the globe would meet in England and share their work to celebrate this working-class network. In order to accommodate the expansion of writing groups,

⁴ A note on citation: because the *FWWCP Collection* is in progress, the bibliographic information will list the categories currently in use. For documents such as the Constitution and minutes, they will be represented as “Administrative Documents.”

the *FWWCP* would usually hold the FED Festival in different locations each year, switching between Northern and Southern parts of England.

FWWCP Full Members 1993/94

AURORA METRO
Interchange Centre,
15 Dalby Street
London NWS 3NQ

BASEMENT WRITERS
C/O 23 Mount Terrace,
Turner Street
London E1 2BB

BURBURY WRITERS
C/O 8 Holly Road,
Handsworth
Birmingham B20 2DB

CARTWHEEL COMMUNITY ARTS
Hamer CP School,
Albert Roysd Street
Rochdale OL16 2SU

CENTERPRISE
136 Kingsland High Street
Dalston
London E8

CHILDWALL WRITERS
Leybourne Close,
Gateacre
Liverpool L25 4SP

COALVILLE PUBLISHING CO.
The Springboard Centre,
Mantle Lane
Coalville
Leics LE6 3DW

COMMONWORD
21 Newton Street,
Manchester M1 1FZ

CROXTETH WOMENS WRITERS
C/O Moss Way Library
Croxteth
Liverpool 11

EASTSIDE PUBLISHING PROJECT
178 Whitechapel Road
London E1 1BJ

ETHNIC COMMUNITIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Shepherds Bush Library,
7 Uxbridge Road
London W12 8LJ

FOREST ARTWORKS
Youth & Community Office
College Campus
Cinderford
Gloucs GL14 2AZ

FREE WRITERS
24 Blaybely Close,
Redcar
Cleveland TS10 4PX

GATEHOUSE BOOKS
Birley Centre,
Chichester Road,
Hulme, Manchester

HEELEY WRITERS
60 Upper Valley Road,
Sheffield S8 9HB

INSTANT REACTION THEATRE
Kirkby Unemployed Centre,
Westhead Ave.,
Kirkby, Merseyside

INTERFACE
Newtown Community House,
117 Cumberland Road
Reading, RG1 3JY

ISLINGTON POETRY WORKSHOP
19A Marriot Road
London N4 3QN

KIRKBY WRITERS
Kirkby Library,
Kirkby, Merseyside

LONDON VOICES
C/O 79 Holden Road,
Woodside Park
London N12 7DY

NORTHERN VOICES
28 Northumberland Sq,
North Shields NE30 1PW

NORTHSIDE WRITERS
C/O 36 Glenheights Park,
Ballyvolane, Cork City
Eire

PECKET WELL COLLEGE
36 Gibbet Street
Halifax HX1 5BA

PECKHAM LITERACY PROJECT
The Bookplace,
13 Peckham High St.,
London SE15 5EB

PRESCOT & WHISTON WRITERS
12 Aspinall St., Prescot
Liverpool L35 5RU

QUEENSPARK BOOKS
Brighton Media Centre,
11 Jew Street
Brighton BN1 1UT

REACHING OUT
C/O Adult Centre,
Wellsborn CP School,
Abbotsford Road
Liverpool

ROSE LANE WRITERS
Flat 2, 14 Ramilies Road
Liverpool L18 1ED

SCOTTIE WRITERS '83
C/O 7 Avon Close,
Westminster Park
Liverpool L4 1XC

SHORELINK WRITERS
Bexhill Hs,
Down Road,
Bexhill, Sussex

SKELMERSDALE WRITERS
Central Library Arts Centre
Skelmersdale, Lancs

SPEAKEASY
14 Langcliffe Drive,
Heelands
Milton Keynes MK13 7LA

SPIRAL ARTS
Marlborough Road
Gillingham ME7 5HB

STEPNEY BOOKS
19 Tomlins Grove,
Bow, London
E3 1BJ

STOCKBRIDGE WRITERS
232 Boode Croft,
Stockbridge Village
Liverpool L28 4GL

TOTTENHAM & WOOD GREEN WRITERS
55 Northumberland Park
Haringey London N17

TOWER HAMLETS WRITERS
C/O Eastside,
178 Whitechapel Road
London E1 1BJ

VERTICAL IMAGES
10A Dickenson Road,
Crouch End
London N8 9ET

WHISTON REMINISCENCE WRITERS
Whiston Branch Library,
Dragon Lane,
Whiston, Knowsley

WORKING PRESS
85 St. Agnes Place,
London SE11 4BB

WRITE AWAY
C/O Age Concern,
Mea House, Ellison Place
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
NE1 8XS

GREEN INK IRISH WRITERS
C/O Flat D,
14 Grosvenor Avenue
London N5 2NR

RED DEER
26 Wilson Road,
Sheffield S11 8RN

SNOWBALL ARTS CO-OP
4 Argyle St
Ryde, Isle Of Wight
PO33 3BZ

Associate Members

BUCHU BOOKS
Po Box 2580
Cape Town 8000
South Africa

GAMA
Vent 22-24
At 3A08B31
Barcelona
Spain

HOMEFRONT BELLES
Po Box 64,
Civic Square,
Canberra Act 2608
Australia

HORNBY WRITERS
C/O 104 Scargeen Ave.,
Norris Green, Liverpool

OVER THE FENCE WRITERS
27A Johnsvie Terrace,
Hillcrest, Hamilton
New Zealand

VICTORIA COMMUNITY WRITERS
5/3 Tenmyson Street, Elwood
3184 Victoria, Australia

WORDS WALKING
635 Big Ugly Creek Road,
Leet, West Virginia
USA

* New address for info phone 051-... for details (Hilda Nicholson) (out kind we don't want to only send it to...

Figure 1. FWWCP Members 1993/1994. Archival document showing 50+ member groups, including throughout England and international groups.

The extent of such a network is represented somewhat in the quantity of the publications, with estimates of nearly 1 million. But the scope and depth of the *FWWCP* is perhaps more fully represented through the variety of genres, themes, and voices embodied through the publications. As the membership grew through the geographical dispersion of members, so did the areas of working-class experience, eventually including widespread discussions of women's writing, immigrant identity, basic education, vocation, personal histories, mental-health issues, and geopolitical tension and war. And this is just the start of the themes touched on by the *FWWCP*. Working-class experience, then, after a difficult process to be discussed in a later chapter, came

to be represented through multiple interpretations and forms that allowed creativity and originality.

While the emphasis on “worker” was always a primary focus of this group, each member and member group of the *FWWCP* also took this emergent understanding of working-class life and integrated it with ongoing discussions in their own way. Because the number of writing groups and members was constantly fluctuating, and each group’s identity was malleable, it is impossible to describe them in any singular way. However, to understand some of the ways groups situated themselves within a particular framework, I have given a few examples here with the types of work that were frequently represented within each group.

- **Bristol Broadsides:** Stories about living in Bristol and the types of jobs there, including coal mining, rail work, and farming.
- **Centerprise Publishing:** A co-operative bookshop, youth club, café, and community center, in London, committed to adult literacy and publishing through autobiography, history, and poetry.
- **Commonword:** Stories of sexuality, including the creation of gay and lesbian writing groups, such as Gay Northern Writers. Commonword was considered an “umbrella group” because it included multiple writing groups within the main Commonword group.
- **Ethnic Oral Histories Project and Hammersmith and Fulham:** Testimony of immigration; translingual stories about the immigrant journey and life upon coming to Britain.
- **GROW (Grass Roots Open Writers):** A group focused on writers “develop[ing] confidence in expressing themselves” (GROW).
- **Pecket Well College:** A user-led college for adult basic education, which published stories documenting the struggles of adult learners and peer teaching models for basic education.
- **Stepney Books:** Stories mostly focused on living in the East End of London.
- **Stevenage Survivors:** Poetry or stories written about or by survivors of mental distress.
- **Women and Words:** Poems and Narratives representing feminist writing; women’s identity; women and class identity.

These examples are just a portion of the member groups involved with the *FWWCP*, but they provide us with a glimpse of the breadth of the network’s content. The themes and discussions

within the *FWWCP* materials provide a multifaceted corpus of work that is both narrowly focused on working-class experiences and broadened to explore the intersectionality of this identity with others (see chapter 3). In addition to common themes represented within these groups, individual writers took up similar themes, such as industrial labor, learning struggles, and identity throughout their own publications.

Membership in the *FWWCP* required that each group go through an approval process and provisional status. To join, a group must contact the *FWWCP* Executive committee and the committee will appoint a member to visit the group (if possible) and report back to the committee. For some time, the *FWWCP* had a paid worker and central location in Stoke-on-Trent, England, to handle the administrative documents and processes in the organization, but this work was dependent upon various pots of funding throughout the years. Although there was a membership application and vetting process, most groups were admitted. Benefits of the membership rested most often in the networking of the Annual General Meetings and FED Festival each year. This provided a chance to collaborate, share work, run workshops, sell books, and network among the national and international membership base. As the *FWWCP* was built to be inclusive and accessible to all writers, the main criteria revolved around the agency each group had. As described in the *FWWCP*'s manifesto, *The Republic of Letters*,

The main criterion used in deciding whether or not to accept groups into the Federation is whether they are genuinely self-organising and not encouraged into being and still controlled externally within some kind of community development or education programme. Another requirement is that they should have published, or be well on the way to publishing... (Maguire et al. 22)

Membership was therefore a means of maintaining community-based agency and support, within the maintenance of the group and its hopes for continuation as a grassroots collective.

Publications functioned as a central feature of the *FWWCP* for both individuals and groups. These publications were not produced by for profit commercial shops but instead were born out of the community workshops and presses, which kept the small profits (usually of 25-pence to a pound per publication) within the writing groups to contribute to the next publication. Because the design and distribution of texts was a collaborative process, each publication attempted to bridge individual efforts and labor with a common writing group or publisher. Unlike the corporate publishers that comprise most of the publishing industry today, the *FWWCP* was committed to small and local publishing outlets that made the labor involved in this work transparent, embodied, and participatory—in effect, creating a means of publishing that was influenced by and suited to individual writers and the writing groups.

Most groups worked with the following characteristics as their foundation: writers would meet weekly or monthly in groups and share their writing, providing feedback to each other. The feedback typically centered on making what the *writer* wanted to express more effective, rather than a critique of the work. In this way, there was a collectivist understanding and appreciation of collaborative writing processes, acknowledging that everyone is capable of contributing to the group in some way. Writers would work both personally and within the group to revise their pieces and ready them for publication. The publication process, including the type of production and number of copies and distribution, would depend on financial and technological resources. For instance, some groups could publish multiple single author books, if they had the money to do so and writers were finished with their work, while others might publish anthologies for the year or thematic publications throughout the year.

Often, publishing decisions also connected to the development of print technologies and material resources at hand, in order to produce and distribute texts. In the early years of the

FWWCP, groups would use pen and paper as well as cut-and-paste methods. The *FWWCP* would also rely on technologies such as typewriters, mimeographs, and then eventually shifted to photocopiers and other technologies. Once printed, the group focused on distributive efforts that included everything from selling copies at a local bookshop for a small price (25 pence for instance), advertising work through the *FWWCP* newsletters and magazines, and bringing their copies to the annual festivals where groups would congregate for writing workshops, artistic performances, and promotion.

Such publication processes helped embody a working-class collective ethos throughout.

For, as the *FWWCP* writes in *The Republic of Letters*,

Working class publishing is radically different not only in creating new reading publics and new publishing possibilities for people who write, it also actively encourages new writers. It does this on the basis as the last stage in the process of offering writers a means of sharing their experiences with others. It is not a commercial transaction whereby the publisher buys the manuscript from the writer in the hope of making a profit. No royalties are paid to authors. (Maguire et al. 69)

That is, publishing within the *FWWCP* was as much about the content as it was about the process of production. By writing about working-class life, trades, and identity and producing this work with attention to the materiality and circulation of the product, the *FWWCP* formed an alternative or “radically different” publishing network that suited their needs and desires (Maguire et al. 69).

This alternative publishing network relied on an extensive level of coproduction—between generating ideas, writing and revising texts, designing, printing, and distributing. Such coproduction represents the foundation of a national and international structure that spanned generations as a working-class network, but also a network that used collective methods to represent a multiplicity of voices within it. Through the democratic organizing of the *FWWCP*

and their commitment to exploring working-class life through “all means possible,” the *FWWCP* proved that there is no singular definition of working-class literacy or experience, and that the material processes are deeply connected to class (“Constitution”). The multiplicity of identities and the scope of testimony encompassed throughout the *FWWCP* publications illustrate the unifying *and* fractured nature of working-class existence, beginning with what it means to generate and self-publish writing in working-class communities within challenging social and political climates.

Challenging Individual Responsibility Through a Collective Belief in Working-Class Ethos

The story of Chris Searle and *Stepney Words* is one perspective of how the *FWWCP* emerged, but it is also just one of the many events that allowed for the *FWWCP*'s creation. To understand a broader scope of this network, we need to embed it in a larger cultural history, which affected the collective struggles of the working class in the United Kingdom from the 1960-80s. The *FWWCP* was part of a collective movement that began with attempts to speak out against marginalization felt across working-class Britain.

The *FWWCP* is a collective, shaped and affected by numerous individuals throughout its tenure. This complexity represents one of the biggest challenges to telling its story. To do so, I must rely on multiple individual accounts—which are always, of course, partial, limited, and self-interested. Individually, though, they add to the richness and complexity of the *FWWCP*, showing a multifaceted network that affected hundreds (perhaps thousands) of individuals. While this project pulls from some individual accounts, it will also show how the *FWWCP* relied on the agency gained from working-class collectivity—such solidarity that allowed *FWWCP* writers to develop collaborative strategies to create, produce, and circulate stories about the working class *by* the working class. This attempt at collectivity began with the very naming of the organization

as a *Federation*. By invoking this name, the group sought to position themselves as a collaborative initiative before individualistic endeavors. The group also enacted this collective formation through collaborative publishing strategies, writing groups, and performances such as creative readings, songs, and play productions. However, the negotiation between individual and collective representation was often difficult: sometimes, the missions and hopes of the collective organization overlooked or stalled the desires of individuals; other times, the collective structure empowered and motivated individuals.⁵

Ultimately, a collective framing from the *FWWCP* was imperative, particularly during the founding years and the first decade of its tenure, as multiple social and political factors contributed to the widespread oppression of the working class. Author Owen Jones hit a nerve in the United Kingdom, in 2011, when he published *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. Describing the economic and social policies that negatively affected the working class in Britain in the 1970s and 80s, Jones writes,

At the root of the demonization of working-class people is the legacy of a very British class war. Margaret Thatcher's assumption of power in 1979 marked the beginning of an all-out assault on the pillars of working-class Britain. Its institutions, like trade unions and council housing, were dismantled; its industries, from manufacturing to mining, were trashed; its communities were, in some cases, shattered, never to recover; and its values, like solidarity and collective aspiration, were swept away in favour of rugged individualism. Stripped away from their power and no longer seen as a proud identity, the working class was increasingly sneered at, belittled and scape-goated. (10)

There are many examples to validate Owen Jones' above statement that the reign of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would prove to be dark times for the working class.⁶ During

⁵ I'll explore these tensions as they relate to the difficulty of performing such historical work in Chapter Two, through the negotiation and categorization of *FWWCP* texts in the creation of a print archive. In the archive, there are examples of colliding moments of empowerment and failure, collective struggle and personal progress, and the range in between.

⁶ Although many accounts position Prime Minister Thatcher as emblematic of wide-spread social and political tension against the working class, she also, interestingly, played a role (if only symbolic) in getting Chris Searle reinstated a few years after he had been fired at Sir John Cass Foundation and Redcoat School. During this time, she was the Education Secretary (the gentle author "The Stepney"). Importantly, though, many have criticized Thatcher for her educational cuts, beginning with her role as

Thatcher's tenure, a period in which John Kirk describes as the "deconstruction of the British working class," England saw a shift in governmental policies, economic structures, and social attitudes that was largely prompted by rhetoric of personal responsibility and self-interest (2). In effect, through the circulation of these rhetorics about individual responsibility and the implementation of political and social policies, there was an attempt to severely limit working-class agency and solidarity.

Two *FWWCP* members, Pat Smart and Nick Pollard, describe the social and economic exigencies that sparked collaborative writing and publishing efforts. They frame the turbulent political milieu in this time period stating,

It was a period of confrontation between groups of unionized workers, their employers and the government, in which inflation was high, workers' living standards were under pressure and unemployment eventually reached 3 million. It culminated in seventeen years of Conservative party government, the first part of which was a radical experiment in neo-liberal economics, inspired by the free market of Pinochet's Chile. (30)

With unemployment reaching close to 3 million, a miners' strike occurring in 1984 that would signal to many the defeat of the trade unions, and an increased privatization of public services, the working class' collective rights and institutions were systematically stripped away. The *FWWCP*, then, developed within and was responding to this context of working-class experience.

The political discourses and actions described above represent various levels of attacks on working-class collaborative institutions and trades unions, due to a long period of Conservative⁷ politics. These political moments prompted the deindustrialization of the British

Education Secretary and even resulting with the nickname Margaret Thatcher the "Milk Snatcher" after her department cut free milk in schools.

⁷ Two main political parties of this time in the United Kingdom were the Conservative and Labour parties. As noted in their history and creation in 1900, The Labour Party "was the result of many years of hard effort by working people, trade unionists and socialists, united by the goal of changing the British Parliament to represent the interests of everybody." This legacy of the

economy, created a move toward a service economy, and provoked unsettling ideas of an entrepreneurial climate that focused on the function of individuals rather than the potential of communities. Although this was happening throughout the 70s and 80s (both within and outside of the United Kingdom⁸), for many, this sentiment was solidified by Margaret Thatcher's 1987 framing of society as merely individuals' responsibility for themselves. During an interview, Thatcher states,

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!' or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!' 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first (Keay and Thatcher).

One can imagine that reframing society as society-less would trigger a sense of anger and rejection from the working class. The statement that "there is no such thing [as a society]" develops an individualistic and entrepreneurial approach to politics rather than one unified by a common good for all classes of people. Thatcher's rhetoric here, too, creates a dichotomy of the "they" who "cast problems on society" (described here as those who have "too many children" are "homeless" or have "a problem" that they hope the government can help with) and those who do not. Although Thatcher did follow this statement up by indicating what she sees as the difference between "reciprocity" of individual work and the "entitlements" expected by some "manipulating the system," many people took this statement as an attack on the working class, as a way to say that class issues are merely something experienced (perhaps even caused by) *individuals* and individual control, not the broader population and social structures. In a period

Labour party, and its continued desire for "economic and social reformation" for decades contributed to the view of many that it was, indeed, the working class's party ("History of The Labour Party").

⁸ See Miriam David's "Comparisons of 'Education Reform' in Britain and the USA: a new era?" for more connections between Reagan and Thatcher administrations.

rife with cuts on working-class-based structures (trades unions, industries, housing), it appeared in many ways that the decline of working-class structures was not an individual problem but rather a systemic agenda of the administration.

Writing their Way into Working-Class Politics

While the rhetoric and actions of Thatcher's administration exposed overt efforts to dismantle working-class structures and communities, the *FWWCP* provides an example of how such efforts were also met with politically motivated work from working-class writers. Indeed, in its first decade, the *FWWCP* was enmeshed in political and social conditions under Thatcher, and I argue, functioned as a response to the neoliberal rhetoric and policies saturating the United Kingdom. Growing out of this environment and shifting to highlight complex identities and experiences of worker-writers along the way, the *FWWCP* became, as member Nick Pollard notes, a "political organization" that "sought to represent marginalized cultures, specifically the culture of the working classes" (Maguire et al. 180). The network dedicated itself to developing social awareness of class struggles and strengths at the local level, producing change with more inclusive educational practices, troubling stigmas of working people, and advocating for political platforms that serve working-class needs.

Although there are multiple examples, one such text that embodies both the political nature of the *FWWCP* as well as represents the creation and circulation of such rhetoric is a text called *Who Was Harry Cowley?*. Queenspark, a publishing company in Brighton, produced this text, which functions as collective testimony about a local hero nicknamed "The Guv'nor." In this text, the contributors remember Harry Cowley (1891-1971), a chimneysweeper, through a collage of voices and perspectives. Multiple perspectives of Cowley and his impact—through his vocation and activism—are represented through the inclusion of photos, interviews, letters, and

newspaper articles. In this way, the publication brings together various voices and mediums, all the while documenting Cowley's campaigns for the unemployed and homeless, his fights against British Fascism in the 1930s, and his fight against unfair rent prices. Cowley's own political life was therefore remembered and re-circulated through the collective production, publication, and sharing of this book. It is also one example that illustrates both the political nature of the *FWWCP* and its reliance on collaborative literacy efforts (see: *Who Was Harry Cowley?*⁹).

This example shows how one *FWWCP* group collectively organized in direct opposition to the harsh individualism invoked throughout the political rhetoric of their time. This was done through deliberately inclusive and participatory organizational efforts at nearly every stage in the writing and publication process with the overarching goal of the *FWWCP* "to encourage and promote writing done by ordinary, working class people and people who may struggle to get their ideas down on paper" (The FED "About the FED"). While the publication *Who Was Harry Cowley?* shows the political workings of some *FWWCP* and its members, other groups and publications were less overtly political. What remains political about the *FWWCP* as a whole is the class-based collectivity from which it was formed and sustained, as well as the emphasis it placed on lived experience as testimony, which allowed working-class people to have a voice. The very focus on working-class voices, however, is also part of the reason the *FWWCP*'s work has largely gone unnoticed beyond local communities and in disciplinary discussions beyond the U.K.¹⁰

Connecting the *FWWCP* to Writing Studies

⁹ This publication, like others I will discuss, can be found in the *FWWCP Collection* at the *Trades Union Congress Library*. Its bibliographic reference will indicate its location by the region it was published in. For instance, Brighton is in the South East region, and that is how the boxes of archival documents are currently sorted for publications.

¹⁰ Interestingly, British Professor James Britton, who was a strong influence on the 1966 Dartmouth Conference, actually corresponded with Chris Searle about *Stepney Words*, noting that Searle's students' writing was "'nonliterary' but full of honesty and conviction" (Searle *None* 17). In a book project, I would like to further explore ties between Britton's work in England and its connection to the Dartmouth Conference and Composition as a largely U.S.-based field.

Despite the uniqueness and relevance of the *FWWCP* network to Writing Studies, little work actually references the *FWWCP*.¹¹ In one sense, why would it? The *FWWCP* texts are written by bricklayers and miners, bartenders and chimneysweepers, seamstresses and dockworkers—about people traditionally valued for the physical production of their bodies—not for the intellectual capabilities of their minds. These texts are written by people who have often been framed as “dumb” or “uneducated” even “illiterate” by themselves or others because they have been conditioned to believe that working-class life is a lesser, and under-educated, life. In fact, when the *FWWCP* wanted to gain recognition from the Arts Council in England, they were emphatically told their work has “no solid literary merit” (Maguire et al. 138). I am challenging such framing, in order to show the *FWWCP* as an important collaborative, non-traditional literacy network. Within the *FWWCP*, we see the negotiation of literacy practices that enrich histories of literate development in Writing Studies and provide more attention to the possibilities and production of self-generated community writing.

Specifically, in Writing Studies, understanding the work of the *FWWCP* challenges some of our organizing terms—literacy, publics, histories—in order to be attentive to how issues of class are embedded in these narratives. The *FWWCP*’s history also pushes us to rearticulate or redefine these terms to include how marginalized populations deploy literacy and participate in alternative collaborative spaces. As I’ll show throughout this dissertation, the *FWWCP* provokes the rethinking of *literacy*, *publics*, and *history* and gives us examples of how we might challenge these notions through our theories, practices, and pedagogies. In the following sections, I describe how the *FWWCP* uses literacy and collaborative literacy practices to create new public spaces for the circulation and preservation of their histories. These actions by the *FWWCP*

¹¹ See Parks and Pollard (“Emergent” and “The Extra-Curricula”) for the only extensive scholarship done on the *FWWCP* in connection to Writing Studies. Outside of the field, Tom Woodin writes about the *FWWCP* in relation to education.

provide a valuable model that shows us: (1) How community literacies emerge from alternative learning sites; (2) How the *FWWCP* created new public and rhetorical space to participate in knowledge creation or intellectual work; (3) How the *FWWCP* developed and preserved class-based histories.

The *FWWCP* challenges how the field has framed the value of such community generated literacy projects and how we engage with discussions about class identity. In the years after the *public turn* in composition (2005), many scholars have written about the intersections between university and community structures, through community engagement practices, that lead us to question the sustainability of such projects and whose interests might be served (Deans et al.; Mathieu; Restaino and Cella). These scholars and others have also productively questioned how we can support community literacy efforts by recognizing literacies from various communities (Flower; Goldblatt “Alinsky’s”; Mathieu; Parks “Emergent”). The structure and effects of these examples vary, but, as we are scholars, many examples from community engagement practices begin from a connection with universities and are sustained through such efforts, as opposed to emerging organically from the community. While these are valuable projects, a model that we haven’t looked at enough is how alternative forms of writing, literacy, and publishing have grown from largely self-organized and self-sustained collective efforts. Indeed, these projects provide an important but limited vision of literacy. The *FWWCP* allows us to expand this vision, demonstrating how working-class communities develop their own grassroots writing and literacy efforts.

In these ways, this study of the *FWWCP* brings forward histories and practices that complement and expand Writing Studies today. The *FWWCP* developed a model of engagement that spans decades and transnational borders and affected material and personal change for

members. This network of writing and publishing groups distributed testimony of felt personal change, showed social and political awareness, and produced examples of teaching, publishing, and writing workshop methods and materials. I argue that, through these practices, the *FWWCP* enacts multiple types of literacies beyond what we study and presents how working-class communities generate and perform rhetorical acts—acts that can show us what grassroots community organizing looks like, how community-led teaching functions, and why self-generated and sustained community work matters.

Collaborative Literacy

In this next section, I will explore how the *FWWCP* provides a model of collaborative literacy efforts that expands literacy in ways that focus on personal empowerment and social activism. Through the examples from the *FWWCP*, we see the rebuilding of a working-class ethos that confronted neoliberal policies and rhetoric, while also expanding who could be part of this working-class identity. The collaborative writing and publishing groups of the *FWWCP* became a means of voicing the concerns, experiences, and desires of a disempowered class population. Although discussions of literacy are prevalent within Writing Studies, I will draw from scholars in New Literacy Studies in order to frame literacy practices that extend beyond traditional college classrooms and consider multigenerational learners. In *Writing Ourselves: Mass-Observation and Literacy Practices*, Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street, and David Bloome explain one main aspect of New Literacy Studies as such:

One implication of New Literacy Studies is that one can never just study literacy, one is always studying literacy and social life. And...the study of social life cannot be reduced to abstract structures, but must lie close to what people do, what social meanings it has for them, and what social consequences it has for them. How, when and where people use written language depends a great deal on their shared expectations and on how social institutions 'embody' written language. (3)

This view of literacy as sociocultural and embodied provides a valuable lens to use in relation to the *FWWCP* because this network was constantly dependent upon the lived experiences of members—through the testimony of their physical labor, as well as through the labor that went into the production and circulation of their own texts. In this way, the *FWWCP* also aligns with Brian Street’s description of “social literacies,” which function as a response to power that pushed working-class people to the margins through financial, educational, political, and social decisions that privileged those with greater economic standing (16). Social literacies, Street notes, include examples of language development and use that “occur naturally in social life, taking account of their different meanings for different cultural groups and in different contexts” (16). The *FWWCP*’s use of literacy as a social mechanism was a direct response to—and a resistance of— power (be it political, social, linguistic, etc.) that seemed to marginalize their experiences. They created such a model because they were interested in resisting power dynamics (for instance, those who told them their work had no “literary merit”) and creating alternative examples of literacy, writing, and circulation.

In this way, the *FWWCP* represents an “ideological model” of literacy, which “varies with social context and with cultural norms and discourses (regarding, for instance, identity, gender and belief)” (Street 17). Literacy, Street notes, is “always ‘ideological’—it always involves contests over meanings, definitions and boundaries, and struggles for control of the literacy agenda” (17). In this way, literacy use is “always embedded in relations of power” (17). The work of the *FWWCP* crosses political and discursive boundaries by focusing on those who felt stigmatized by working-class status, those who spoke varieties of British English and other languages completely, and those who were locals or immigrants fighting for a voice. In effect,

these narratives, built through a working-class ethos of collectivity, contribute an expansive vision of literacy represented by multiple populations and generations.

Through the development of writing groups, the production of texts, and the circulation of writing, the *FWWCP* created an alternative writing network to forward working-class voices. In the self-governing spirit of the groups and the procedural involvement, we can see multiple levels of collaborative literacy techniques that move beyond simplistic notions of reading and writing as the sole means of literacy. This work connects to what Tett et al. describe as literate actions that are grounded in and “informed by issues of social justice, equality, and democracy in everyday life” (3). And, by working within each group’s contextual personal and social constraints, the *FWWCP* opposes a limited view of literacy that develops as a “narrow, functional definition primarily addressed to the needs of the economy” (3). Said another way, the groups developed as a felt response to exigencies, rather than developing with a limited understanding of literacy and writing forwarded by the current dominant discourses.

Ultimately, the trajectory from the protest of Searle’s dismissal, to the Basement Writers’ development, to the *FWWCP*’s creation and growth, allows us to gain a sense of the key points that created an emergent network of local, national, and even international working-class writers and publishers—a network that circulated estimates of close to 1 million chapbooks throughout its tenure. The *FWWCP*’s approach and organizational response to the political environment was not about economic needs or models, such as in the current structure of state and national standardized testing and curricula, but rather as a means of responding to marginalization in concrete ways that changed relationships of power through a network of social literacies.

The *FWWCP*’s history gives us a sense of the opposing values circulating during the 1970s and the obstacles that working-class people faced because of those values, assumptions, or

norms. But this history also can teach us how community groups responded in ways that made sense to them, through linguistic and cultural differences, across geopolitical spaces, and within diverse educational spaces by challenging the structures and discourses around them. The *FWWCP* can continue to inform a shift in discourses and structures, continually expanding how we understand (il)literacy, public writing, and histories. To understand these ideas within the context of working-class community writing—a context that is contingent upon social practices, political structures, and ideological beliefs of working life and working-class people— pushes us to understand the intersections of literacy and class in new ways.

While I've mentioned the term literacy multiple times already, I have mostly shown how scholars understand this term and how the *FWWCP* gives us an expanded vision of what is at stake. Here, I want to reflect on this framework and describe its multifaceted—even contradictory— nature. In fact, while I use literacy as an essential term throughout this project, it is with full acknowledgment that this word and its definitions are constantly shifting: participants and situations shape understandings of literacy. For example, although some would argue that literacy is the ability to read or write in specific ways, my use of it here is more rhetorically based—contingent upon context and purpose. Literacy varies in spaces beyond the university, in communities that use writing and verbal expression as a form of testimony to document, preserve, and circulate their histories in their own communities. In this way, the sponsoring of literacy often exists and originates within a community itself rather than being primed by sponsored support from universities or other institutional structures. And the *FWWCP* represents such spaces and literacies that are not about commodification or standardization but rather about the preservation of a history that might otherwise be left untold.

Some scholarly work already exists that recognizes the importance of literacies developed in communities. Here, I'm thinking particularly of Ellen Cushman's work with *The Cherokee Syllabary: Writing the Peoples' Perseverance* and John Duffy's *Writing from these Roots: Literacy in a Hmong American Community*. These projects provide examples of communities beyond the university whose literacy development and use represent not only a means of communication but also the preservation of a culture. Duffy calls this the "rhetorics of testimony" where Hmong people used literacy to "author first person accounts, mostly unpublished, of their life histories" (153). Cushman describes how the creation of the Cherokee syllabary largely enabled the preservation of the Cherokee Nation's history in a shift from oral to textual based literacy. While Duffy and Cushman recognize the importance of literacy as a means of testimony and cultural preservation for ethnically marginalized groups, the *FWWCP* evinces how class identity also carries specific cultural importance (more in chapter 3). Indeed, the notion of life histories resonates with much of the work of the *FWWCP* as a genre used particularly by people who spent their life learning a trade and wanted to narrate this experience of physical labor. Life histories also proved meaningful for people who had a difficult time with learning in traditional forms of education; *FWWCP* member Pol Nugent notes this stating, "many people in these groups had never been asked before 'what's important to you'" (Pauszek and Nugent). Instead, their experiences and knowledges were obscured in both implicit and explicit attempts to diminish the working class. When we see literacy enmeshed in the power dynamics of a culture, we can better analyze why or how certain literacies are systematically pushed aside or unsponsored in academic spaces.

Jacqueline Jones Royster's description is particularly productive for understanding literacy in relation to the *FWWCP*, as it accounts for people using literacy as a vehicle for both self-expression and structural change. In her seminal book *Traces of A Stream*, Royster explains,

A useful definition of literacy is that it is a sociocognitive ability. It is the ability to gain access to information and to use this information variously to articulate lives and experiences and also to identify, think through, refine, and solve problems, sometimes complex problems, over time. (45)

Although Royster uses this framework to analyze the experiences and essay writings of elite African American women, her definition appeals to individuals and communities who use literacy and are particularly positioned in non-traditional educational spaces. When situated alongside the *FWWCP*, this definition accounts for both the expression of lived and embodied experiences by working-class people, as well as the possibilities and challenges of understanding and working through “complex problems” (45). That is, while the *FWWCP* community members could write a poem about working-class life, they also had the unique experience of “identify[ing], think[ing] through, refin[ing], and solv[ing] problems” such as social stigmas of working-class people, inadequate educational support, unfair rent prices and lack of representation in political structures. In a culture where not everyone (especially not immigrants or working-class people) had “access to information,” the *FWWCP* flipped “access” and “information” to be about lived experience. In this way, the worker—the embroidery machinist, bricklayer, chimneysweep, dockworker— is privileged with access to information through their daily life and laboring. Similarly, the worker embodies not just information but *knowledge* and expertise about their work.

With Royster's definition, literacy expands in order to include the multiple ways that communities develop and deploy literate acts, especially from marginalized subject positions. In effect, *FWWCP* members already had literate agency – but they created a space to highlight this

agency for multiple audiences. Here, I explore how members formed and sustained the *FWWCP* network around their working-class identity, which provided ways for adult learners to negotiate literacy in complex and meaningful ways – ways that might have otherwise been overlooked as they occurred in liminal spaces, amongst populations often stereotyped as “basic” or “remedial” learners, or even “illiterate”. In other words, I examine the *FWWCP* and its member groups (such as Pecket Well College, chapter 4) as sites that use literacy to advocate for social change in communities that have otherwise been discounted. These adult learners, often marginalized by their class background and educational experiences, productively organized around these identities to forge a community of writers and, in effect, advocate as Raymond Williams does that, “culture is ordinary” and that everyday people can and do participate in cultural and political work (7).

Throughout this project, the discussion and use of *literacy* is neither simple nor wholly positive. In fact, some members the *FWWCP* and Pecket Well College adamantly reject the use of the term because its use is often framed in a deficit understanding, focusing on the *illiteracy* of these learners rather than the abilities they have and the strategies they’ve learned. This project does something different: it hopes to show an expansive understanding of literacy as a process of negotiation within situations, rather than a state of expertise or a standard of development. As such, my hope is neither to reify negative connotations of literacy nor suggest that some of the *FWWCP*’s resistance to this word is unwarranted or needless but rather interrogate the richness of literacy that is represented in both moments of agency and oppression. Said another way, this project hopes to provide examples of how literacy manifests on a spectrum, which is always contingent upon who is using the term, how they are assessing it, and for what purposes. In this way, literacy never maintains a stable identity, nor should it have to. With full respect and

appreciation for some members who resist this term, as well as those who view it as an expansive understanding of “writing from the heart and telling the truth [about your history and experiences],” I report what *FWWCP* members value about language and writing in order to show how literacy exists on a spectrum moving from self-expression to collective agency in alternative spaces (Flood, “Interview at Mount Terrace”).

Moving Beyond Disciplinary Definitions of Public Writing

The notion that writing is often “public” in nature seems apparent in scholarship today. Indeed, there have been numerous scholarly examples that seek to identify, construct, and negotiate what it means to do public work or to connect the classroom and our scholarship to what Paula Mathieu calls “real world events, texts, and exigencies” (*Tactics* xi). In some instances, public writing aligns with examples of service-learning projects (Restaino and Cella), public writing projects in composition classes (Goldblatt and Jolliffe; Mathieu and George; Welch), or community partnerships that seek to develop publications written by community members (Goldblatt *Because*; Kuebrich; Parks *Gravyland*). In recent years, scholars such as Shannon Carter, Ben Kuebrich, Deborah Mutnick, and Steve Parks have pushed the “public turn” forward, suggesting that our field not only needs to think of our work as public but also “political” (Carter et al.). The *public* and *political* turns are important for this project because they ask us to think about structures of power within the discipline on a large scale, as well as the political choices we make to resist or reify these structures each day within the classroom, our curriculum, and in spaces removed from the university. However, much work with public writing and partnership focuses on the relationship to university classes or university-created models of literacy, models that do not always enable us to sufficiently investigate how communities sponsor their own literacy beyond such partnership work.

When we discuss writing as a public and political activity, we must account for the conditions that enable and constrain how this writing is produced, under what circumstances, and for whom. Within the field, there are many examples of university structures that have attempted to invest in partnerships that promote public writing. For example, Eli Goldblatt's work with Tree House Books in Philadelphia focuses on how university stakeholders might share responsibilities with communities in order to foster community literacy and pedagogical practices; Paula Mathieu and Diana George and Paul Feigenbaum give us valuable examples of working with preexisting writing communities such as street newspaper networks and creating nonprofits, respectively. This work collectively seems devoted to understanding and creating public spaces in order amplify and expand the number of voices represented in this work.

I am personally compelled by this work and the lineage of community projects such work has inspired. Yet, one goal of this dissertation is to explore how community partnership work has sometimes neglected how its own formation has also often simultaneously limited what circulates as important public writing (usually classroom-aligned writing projects). Often, this comes at the expense of the bodies, populations, and types of texts that are still excluded from classrooms and scholarship, particularly the working class. Some exceptions to this include Diana George's work about Catholic Worker house publications ("The Word on the Street") and George and Mathieu's work on dissident press publications, such as Hobo News ("A Place For the Dissident Press in A Rhetorical Education").

The *FWWCP*'s intervention in Writing Studies is through its ability to reanimate a discussion of class-based literacy practices. While there has been inspiring work done to draw attention to how gender (Enoch; Royster and Kirsch) and race (Enoch; Kynard; Royster) influences the field's understanding of literacy and rhetoric, less work has been focused on class

identity within these discussions. Aligning the *FWWCP* with a lineage of literacy work certainly creates a valuable additive example of community literacy. But the *FWWCP* provides much more because it forces us to attend to discussions of class and interrogate how working-class writers articulate class identity. The focus on the *FWWCP* provides a powerful lens to trace how working-class writing groups sponsor their own literacies. In *Who Says?: Working-Class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness, and Community*, scholar William DeGenaro articulates the importance of recognizing class as a means of division within both society and scholarship, arguing that the inclusion of working-class rhetorics can “deconstruct literacy centers and workplaces, [by] considering the intersections of language, ideology, and social action” (6). DeGenaro advocates the need to make the struggles of class inclusivity known, as well as its ability to expand scholarship in important ways: “Rhetoricians can expose scholarly audiences to working-class voices—voices that have much to say about literacy, culture, identity, equality, and democracy. In short, class-conscious rhetorical scholarship can allow working-class voices to participate in important conversations” (8). My own work seeks to echo this call for working-class voices and revisionist histories by discussing the *FWWCP* as an alternative site of literacy use and instruction. My work draws from communities within the *FWWCP* that are socially and politically excluded; for example, these identities are compounded based on working-class or working-poor economic status as well as their national, ethnic, linguistic, gendered and educational identities (see chapter 3). For example, many writers in the *FWWCP* were immigrants to the United Kingdom; others, who might be British citizens, represent varying levels of linguistic diversity. These experiences were also combined with what was perceived by some as a lack of traditional educational experience.

DeGenaro explains how class is often overlooked, even under the best of intentions. He argues for a more nuanced engagement with working-class rhetorics, stating their ability to “appropriate the histories of rhetorics for a social and political program; that is, confronting the elitism that has characterized educational, political, and civic institutions throughout the Western tradition” (6). John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon also note the need to explore class “as deeply interwoven with other formative elements of society—race, gender, work, structures of power” but they acknowledge that class is “the element that is often least explored and most difficult to understand” (12). Despite this important intersectional work of working-class studies, class is all too often seen as a marker for stratification in discussions surrounding writing and literacy and clearly calls for more work to be done.

Together, this scholarship identifies a gap where we can further develop the understanding of working-class identity and its connection with community literacies. My own work attempts to address this discussion by focusing on a community-generated network as a means to develop recognition of working-class spaces and discourses. I will then use the *FWWCP* to expand how we understand the publics involved in public writing. In this way, I believe the *FWWCP* provides a model that we can use to understand literacies within nontraditional learning spaces, occupied by working-class people, as well as explore the implications for Writing Studies within universities.

This work goes beyond adding community voices to scholarship. Rather, it actively creates new physical and rhetorical spaces with community members through the formation of two print archives and a digital archive of the *FWWCP*'s publications and historical artifacts. To be sure, the *FWWCP* cannot be a standalone example, but its transnational, intergenerational, and multi-

genre scope make it a valuable start for us to see the complexity of literacy and writing evoked by working-class people.

Moving Beyond The Histories We Know and Making Rhetorical Space

Our written histories in the field of Writing Studies tell us where we have been, what has been valued, and by whom. Implicit within these histories is also what and who has been excluded or undervalued in discussions—in this case, I’m thinking of histories focused on working-class literacy and public writing. Acknowledging that writing occurs within public spaces, with working-class writers and audiences, does not automatically generate a change in the rhetorics circulated within a discipline. Instead, there must actually be a space—rhetorical/discursive and physical for these histories and examples to thrive. Representation and the ability to speak, be heard, and be seen necessitates that we consider what materials have been included and what histories have been collected within our work from both an ideological and methodological standpoint. I see an erasure of working-class writing – and a lacking of structure/space that would allow this work to readily circulate in classrooms or the discipline. I begin thinking about this in discursive and theoretical ways, extending this work in Chapter Two to show how my research intervenes through the production of a physical archive that has been collaboratively developed with the *FWWCP* community.

As Christian Weisser reminds us, in *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse*, public space is constantly shaped by the conditions around it and is always motivated through actions that are “*ideologically interested*” (96). Weisser examines how public sphere theory asks us to account for the ways in which geographic and discursive spaces intersect and collide to form our understanding of public writing, or writing that functions in civic and social spaces. Weisser’s valuable work draws attention to political, economic, and material factors that contribute to the

creation of and our interaction within a public sphere. As such, Weisser argues, “any understanding of public discourse as a product of a particular cultural climate must take into account the ways that ideology shapes and structures nearly every aspect of what, where, and how public discourse occurs as well as who gets to speak in public settings (96). That is, the creation, use, and circulation of discourses are all non-neutral activities, as is the creation of public space. This work shapes how we understand literacy, based on textual and verbal artifacts at hand. Quite literally, we might ask: which texts are represented as a means of public writing? *Who* is represented within these spaces and by these texts? What voices have we lost and gained in this work? *Who*—which bodies and populations—is/are considered or overlooked?

In order to begin rethinking literacy and redefining public space, we must move beyond the histories we know in the field and engage with alternative and revisionist historical work that expands our field toward new paths. In his 2012 article, “Remapping Revisionist Historiography” David Gold argues that historiography has undergone a “dramatic transformation” as scholars have “consider[ed] alternative rhetorical traditions and sites of instruction and production” as well as have enthusiastically expanded the engagement in methods for historiographic work (16). According to Gold, this shift comes in the form of challenging disciplinary histories that have created master narratives and rethinking the examples we use to understand rhetorical and linguistic practices:

We now know that long before the emergence of contemporary theories of discourse, pedagogy, or knowledge making, school and college English instructors sought to empower students through language instruction, link rhetorical instruction to democratic action, and develop locally responsive pedagogies that took into account the needs and desires of diverse communities. (23)

While Gold emphasizes the histories of English instructors, in recent years, scholars have also expanded this discussion to include uncovering alternative histories that show how communities

seek to “empower [themselves] through language instruction, link rhetorical instruction with democratic action and locally responsive pedagogies” (23). In this way, we have examples that push us to think about where we look for meaning as well as who we include in this process.

Here, I’m also recognizing such models of community literacy work that are still gaining traction in our scholarship and practices, yet symbolize integral work from iconic educators focused on activism. Some examples of this work can be found in discussions of the Highlander Folk Schools (Branch; Jacobs; Lathan; Schneider *You*), the Sea Island Citizenship Schools (Kates; Schneider “The Sea”), and the Freedom Schools (Epps-Robertson). Although these examples collectively represent community-based education initiatives that explicitly sought social change in some of the most significant historical moments surrounding race and citizenship, I would argue that knowledge of these examples is still often missing from discussions of this field’s histories and understanding as literacy practices. In other words, the lineage of community-based histories and literacy practices must become more apparent within traditional academic spaces.

Susan Kates describes the exigency for including diverse histories within community literacy work, in her article, “Literacy, Voting Rights, and the Citizenship Schools in the South, 1957-1970.” Here, Kates calls for increased attention to literacy enterprises that occur beyond the university. While she locates her discussion primarily within the context of the Civil Rights Movement, her work also makes clear the need for additional examples, specifically as they might enable scholars to see how communities deploy literacy in politically significant ways:

Literacy history in its various forms has not yet surfaced as a way to shape our responses to new pedagogical problems. We must rely on the history of past literacy campaigns to inform our collective pedagogical imagination for the sake of students we may work with inside and outside of the contemporary university. If we value the link between civic action and the world, we need to give literacy initiatives like the Citizenship schools more scholarly attention so that we can

create a better understanding of the ways in which diverse groups of people have used writing and speaking instruction throughout history for politically and socially transformative ends. (500)

Through Kates' support of diverse groups, we gain a sense of the work still needing to be done. While she is particularly concerned with black populations who have been relegated to second-class citizenship because of racial tensions, and their ability to enact a means of public writing or writing that functions for "politically and socially transformative ends," Kates' view extends to many populations and projects (500). Some scholars including Rhea Estelle Lathan, Candace Epps-Robertson, and Stephen A. Schneider have taken up similar work in recent years, which I'll discuss more in Chapter 4. These scholars focus on race as well as regional identity in places such as Appalachia.

The *FWWCP* relates to this collection of scholarship methodologically as a revisionist history but expands to include a global population beyond the American-based framework represented within these previous examples. The *FWWCP* provides Writing Studies a broader space to explore literacy, particularly through the addition of transnational working-class texts. In this rich historical context, the working-class focus of the *FWWCP* is unique because of its intervention in an unwelcoming public sphere. Despite the rhetoric and social policies at the time, the *FWWCP* created new rhetorical space for working-class writing. Indeed, the *FWWCP* developed its own agency and functioned as a means of creating "*rhetorical space*" as Nancy Welch describes: "public space with the potential to operate as a persuasive public sphere" (477). Welch continues to explain that rhetorical space often emerges out of necessity or in moments of contestation against problematic power structures by the populations that are oppressed by them: "Ordinary people *make* rhetorical space through concerted, often protracted struggle for visibility, voice, and impact against powerful interests that seek to deny visibility, voice, and

impact. People *take* and *make* space in acts that are simultaneously verbal and physical” (477). The *FWWCP* provides us an opportunity to rethink the nature of public space, how writing functions within it, and who participates in this work, particularly as it exists beyond disciplinary boundaries and developed in moments fraught with political and social upheaval. That is, the *FWWCP* functions as an example of public space that working-class writers or “ordinary people” *took* and *made* to suit their needs and desires to voice their concerns and advocate for themselves.

The making of rhetorical space is particularly important for this project in two ways: first, the *FWWCP* as an organization created discursive spaces for working-class people to have their voices heard in public spaces by writing, publishing, and circulating chapbooks and textual examples of public writing. Secondly, though, the legacy of the *FWWCP* and its member groups includes moments of moving beyond discourse and instead creating new physical spaces for their work. For instance, in Chapter 4, I will explore how member group Pecket Well purchased their own building in order to have a space to create a peer-led residential college, thereby mobilizing discursive needs into physical action. To re-animate this work, my own projects (chapter 2 and 5) move beyond historical work and analysis in order to shape a new physical space in the form of a more permanent archive of the *FWWCP*'s work. Through the act of creating physical and digital archives of the *FWWCP*, my project seeks to expand community-made rhetorical spaces in very real and material ways that make these histories known and accessible, as well as contribute to stability for preservation.

The historical work of this project relies on both the history of the *FWWCP*, as well as the preservation of their writing. The writing of the *FWWCP* also represents a rich testimony of working-class experiences, written by working-class people themselves. In particular, this

project uses a recovery approach—through a process of archival curation, development, and interviews — based on questions of visibility and representation, in order to highlight the histories, narratives, and identities of working-class people. Viewing the *FWWCP* as a literacy history with socially transformative ends enables us to revisit what we mean when we talk about literacy in relation to self-sponsored working-class communities who have continually found ways to deploy literacy, create spaces for rhetorical action, and tell their own *truths*, as *FWWCP* member Sally Flood says, about working-class life.

The history of the *FWWCP* manifests in complex historical and turbulent political moments, illustrating how working-class people have used literacy, created public space, and pushed the physical and discursive boundaries set by others to fit what they needed. As I imagine the work of the *FWWCP* in relationship to Writing Studies, I find myself reflecting on the idea that literacy is always non-neutral, that the work of recovery within this project must necessarily expose possibilities behind these hidden histories and diminished public space, and that to move forward with this entails transparency for continued projects, especially when they are engaged with communities beyond our own field. This dissertation only covers the beginning of this work—specifically tracing a small slice of the *FWWCP*'s history and the social context in which it emerged, illustrating the ways working-class people organize and self-sponsor their own versions of literacy.

The Work of the Remaining Chapters

In the following chapters, I will move from discussing the *FWWCP*'s creation to its maintenance, from national to local examples, and including printed to digital preservation formats.

Chapter 2 builds on revisionist histories and archival scholarship in Writing Studies to outline my work with the physical creation of *FWWCP* print archives at London Metropolitan University and Syracuse University. Through a discussion of *access, inclusion, and preservation*, I argue that such collaborative partnership work forces us to think about the discursive boundaries and material conditions of embodied labor. This chapter provides a methodological overview, articulating and actively embodying an understanding of archival methods, which in turn are shaped by the transnational movement of people and texts, as well as the physical creation, sorting, and categorizing of archives, finally accounting for the material conditions that factor into this work. Such work also shifts how we understand knowledge production and literacy practices across community and university spaces.

Chapter 3 emerges from the created *FWWCP* archive that I describe in Chapter 2. It is an archival case study, which uses *FWWCP* organizational document (minutes, publications, applications), to trace key moments concerning how the group could maintain a working-class ethos within a changing political landscape around the intersections of education, class-based identity, gender, multiculturalism, and nationalism. Throughout its tenure, the *FWWCP* negotiated its own thematic expansion in connection to identity politics, directed by participants with multiple perspectives, political opinions, writing styles, and working-class understandings. Through archival documents, I narrate how membership challenged the *FWWCP* network's class-based identity particularly as they negotiated questions about multiculturalism in the organization, gendered identity, and how women factored into the *FWWCP*, and, ultimately, how the network both promoted and resisted groups interested in the intersectionality of experiences.

Chapter 4 moves from the national framework of the *FWWCP* organization in chapter 3 to center on how one member-group, Pecket Well College, existed within the *FWWCP* and

established their own educational model. This model came in the form of a user-led college for adult basic education—an alternative learning site that shows how adult learners, most of whom were illiterate or had severe difficulties reading and writing, negotiated their own agency and developed literate practices through the use of organizational, vernacular, and pedagogical literacies. Beyond collaborative writing experiences, Pecket created pedagogical tools for basic learners, constructed a community-based curriculum, and engaged in a peer-learning practice of fundraising, administering, and supporting their own college.

Chapter 5 brings together discussions in the previous chapters to show the need and hopes of the enactment of collaborative archival methods in digital formats. This chapter discusses the exigency for digital preservation along with the material constraints of such work, arguing for a new model of collaborative digital archival building. I discuss the set of relationships, ethical questions, and strategies involved in creating this archive by setting the stage of what this archive does and how it becomes a model for re-circulating *FWWCP* histories in both scholarly and non-scholarly arenas. The creation of the *FWWCP* digital archive enacts the ethos of this partnership. Ultimately, this concluding section brings together next steps, asking what we might take away from the *FWWCP* archive model for our partnership work as it highlights the agency communities already have.

Conclusion: While these chapters provide snapshots throughout my work with the *FWWCP*—snapshots of building an archive, performing archival methods, interviewing members, and developing a digital archive—my conclusion broadens these moments to discuss the larger relevance and exigency for such work today.

Chapter 2: Access, Inclusion, and Curation: Negotiating Mobility and Materiality While Building an Archive

“Brick Lane is a mixture/ of aromatic spices/ curries, onions and bad drains,/ Pakistani restaurants/ Jewish trimming shops/ And betting shops,/ Down at heel workers/ And hopeful prostitutes,/ Cars and vans add to the pollution/ With heavy exhaust fumes./ Pavements and gutters/ Are littered with overspill/ From dustbins and workshops.

This is where the immigrant/ Looks for fulfillment!/ This is the breeding ground/ For discontent,/ Where the Meths drinker mixes/ With the down and out,/ Where Workers are exploited/ And small time drug peddlers/ Sell their dreams!/ This is where the thug/ Dons the crown of King/ And bullies thrive,/ Where do-gooders/ Salve their consciences,/ This is Brick Lane.

Just a corner of Whitechapel/ That holds this mystery,/ It is part of what I am/ My family history,/ One day another face/ Will gaze upon this scene/ And wonder at this garden./ Where my footsteps once had been.” – Sally Flood, *The Brick Lane I See*

An Archive Embodied

The first time I met Sally Flood in London, England, in 2013, she offered to tell me her story: “Would you like to hear it from the beginning?” Sally¹² asked, not really a question but an invitation for me to sit down and listen. I came to London in order to attend the FED Festival, a day-long writing event organized by *The FED: a Network of community writers and publishers*, the writing group which had grown out of the previous *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* after its demise in 2007. I was interested in how Sally and others became part of the *FWWCP* and what it meant for them. On the surface, her story is about her entrance into the *Basement Writers*, the group formed after the *Stepney Words* strike, and her role in the larger *FWWCP* network in the 1970s. However, her account also embodies many of the characteristics of the *FWWCP* that make it a unique site of research. Indeed, throughout Sally’s stories—which have continued through the four years that I’ve known her—there are linkages between the perceptions of literacy and working-class identity.

¹² Although it may seem odd for me to refer to some *FWWCP* members by their first names, I am doing this strategically to represent the personal connection that I have with this group, and I am using the names the individuals prefer. In this way, I am privileging the relationship formed through this research rather than the standard academic attribution.

Similarly, these stories draw attention to material conditions or knowledge-creation work by those who have traditionally been excluded from learning spaces, based on this working-class identity. Throughout each of our interviews she discussed the value of the *FWWCP* to her personally as well as what it meant as a collective intervention for working-class people to be heard by political leaders or others in power (most notably, non working-class people). As one of the *Basement Writers* who attended the foundational meeting at *Centerprise Publishing* to form the *FWWCP* in 1976, Sally is the oldest known living member of the *FWWCP* at 91 years. The goal of the *FWWCP*, according to Sally, was, "To get [working-class] writing recognized. We were writing, but [the political leaders] didn't want to know. And we were certainly recognized after [the *FWWCP*]...Well, that's our writing. We write in truth. We write what we feel" (Flood "Interview at Mount"). Throughout my time with *FWWCP* members, I have come to see how their desire for their work's preservation is connected to the physically embodied experiences that they have taken part in, or the truths they know.

At one of our first meetings, Sally invited me to her home so that she could better show me how the *FWWCP* affected her. I found my way to her house in the East End after taking London's underground tube transit and walking along the streets of Brick Lane, Stepney, and Whitechapel in the pouring rain. Years after the *Basement Writers* and the creation of the original *FWWCP*, this location still maintains many of the characteristics from previous generations as a culturally diverse working-class area (though now also part of a rising middle class), particularly through its relatively inexpensive housing prices, extensive immigrant population, and service-industries based around these cultures. Wedged between a street full of ethnically diverse businesses, and the immense, newly state-of-the-art, Royal London Hospital, was the small terraced housing structure where Sally lived. The current and historical position of

this space, through its cultural uniqueness amidst an array of immigrant populations and extreme distinctions of wealth and labor, contributes to the testimony of the East End that Sally and others in the *Basement Writers* group published.

During the tenure of the *FWWCP*, a variety of concerns faced people in the East End, including poverty-based tensions of labor and immigration, a rise of British Fascism, and a general discontent amongst working-class people. Because of these and other historical frictions, Sally spoke of the importance of coming together as writers for a common purpose: “When you meet as people, everyone's the same” (Flood “Interview at Mount”). Throughout our time together, Sally reiterated this idea of sameness in order to explain the *FWWCP*'s ability to bring people with various backgrounds together with a common goal. In fact, the *FWWCP* operated with solidarity of class-based sameness as its foundation.

Still, the class-based solidarity was constantly shaped by individual experiences as well. Therefore, to understand what the *FWWCP* meant for Sally, it is important to know about Sally's personal experiences. As I walked into her house, Sally explained to me that her location next to the Royal London Hospital was a prime spot for construction and gentrification over the past few years. In fact, the one-row terraced housing building that she lived in comprised her entire street, which stood below the towering hospital. Although the outside of the building held the charm of a different era, Sally explained that most of the other houses had been modernized inside. Her own house had not. The changes it had gone through were merely those of a house lived-in for decades: “I've been in this house since 1962. I brought my family up here. I had my baby here” (Flood “Interview at Mount”). Most notable was the addition of a small mechanical seat that would lift Sally up the stairs by a tube connected along the railing. Although the house technically spanned three floors, each one consisted of only a small portion of living space, and

Sally indicated that she never ventured to the third floor anymore because of her physical mobility issues. As I wondered about the difficulties of living alone at (then) 89 years old, with a bathroom on one floor and the rest of the house on two others, I also kept hearing Sally explain why she stayed there: This house was her own. It was where she raised a family. It was where she and her husband were able to own something. It was also an area of London with working-class people like them.

Once we made it to the second floor, I entered the kitchen, where Sally had filled the small rectangular table entirely with *FWWCP* publications, photographs, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, and magazines. I sat down while Sally got us some tea and biscuits, and it was then that she began telling me about all these artifacts she had chosen. I came to realize Sally had assembled and curated her own history for me to see, right there in the vernacular spaces of her home. This moment represents a larger point about the ethos of this project, a kitchen-table ethos we might call it, in which I was physically removed from the university and learning about community literacies in the very spaces they emerged. In fact, at the outset of this project, I intended to blend “archival” and “interview” research together; the result, however, is clearly more than a simple combination of these methods.

Before I discuss the ethos of this project, however, I want to describe what I learned about Sally. Born in 1925, Sally Flood grew up in East London, the daughter of a Russian-Jewish immigrant father who was a cabinetmaker. While being evacuated from London in World War II, Sally spent some time in other parts of England, where she had to negotiate her identity as an East Ender and as a Jewish female, which ultimately meant changing her family’s surname. As much as she might be able to rhetorically mask her ethnicity, Sally was unable to mask her identity as a working-class female. When she returned to London, Sally thought she might take

classes to become a teacher, but her mother decided against this stating “They’re going to exploit you, you’re going to be a machinist” (The gentleauthor “Sally Flood”). Sally told me about this story, stating how she left school at 14 years old and was, indeed, an embroidery machinist for most of her life, while also raising a family. Although she was drawn to writing, she never had an outlet to share her work and rarely had much time to write for herself. Sometimes, while working, she would create poems throughout the day and rip them up before her boss came by. This changed drastically in 1971 when she learned of the Stepney school strike.

After the Stepney School Strike and the creation of the *Basement Writers*, these scrap poems brought on new meaning for Sally. As we sat at her kitchen table, she pulled out her copy of *Stepney Words* and told me about the 600 children who went to Trafalgar Square to advocate for their teacher Chris Searle and the reasons he was “sacked”:

They said that he was making a profit out of the children. They didn't want to give the children a voice, actually! That was the truth of it! Anyway, The first thing I heard of Chris, it was on the front of the *East London News*, and it showed him and the children had come out on strike. (Flood “Interview at Mount”)

She felt proud of these kids – East End kids – standing up for what they wanted. Sally also described the flyer she found after the strike that asked people to be part of the *Basement Writers*. It was here that her first work was published and circulated: “I didn't think I could write, until I joined the *Basement Writers*... Chris Searle was a big impact on me. We still keep in touch [40 years later]” (Flood “Interview at FED”). Indeed, the *Basement Writers*, and the *FWWCP* provided Sally a space to tell her stories and contribute to a community of writers. Sally spoke of the *Basement Writers*’ impact on her and how proud she was to be part of the *FWWCP* from the beginning of its existence and throughout the decades:

Ah. It changed my life actually...I sent [the *Basement Writers*] a poem and I couldn’t believe it. They published it and they asked me to join them. And that really changed my life. Yeah, because once I became part of the group, it was

fantastic. I ended up reading at the Festival Hall and the Globe, places I would've never dreamt of before. So, no, the Federation has definitely changed my life. And I'm still part of them. And what's nice is they welcome me, and that's great. (Flood "Interview at FED")

Here, Sally references the *FWWCP* as a welcoming collective for her. We also see how the *FWWCP* shaped Sally's later experiences of work and writing, by providing a community in which she could access new public and rhetorical spaces for the circulation of her work.

The *FWWCP* also placed strong political importance on working-class histories, according to Sally. For instance, when she talked about the political context of the *FWWCP*, she explained, "Most of our writers come from poorer districts and they can tell a very different story...When we first started writing, they told us that it wasn't literacy. Because it was coming from *the wrong class*. And we proved them wrong" (Flood "Interview at Mount", emphasis mine). Here, Sally recounts the friction between classes in which the people of the "poorer districts" and their writing was not valued. This was the working-class writing of the *FWWCP*.

I begin with Sally's story because it emphasizes the types of vernacular spaces and histories that are important throughout my project, and the ways these histories have been conveyed to me through personal interaction with *FWWCP* members. Such interactions, I argue, contribute to how we understand knowledge-creation and production, as people like Sally curate their own histories. It also represents the lived and embodied experiences that are consistent throughout my work, such as traveling to Sally's home, drinking tea with her, and sitting at her kitchen table. This project emerges from the energy—or the "passionate attachments," as Jacqueline Jones Royster describes (279), which enable me to see my knowledge of the *FWWCP* as shaped by people and places. Sally's narrative embodies just one piece of the testimony and histories encouraged by the *FWWCP*. And she clearly articulates the importance of drawing attention to class through such writing networks. More importantly, though, my experience with

Sally illustrates the ways that individuals describe their own literacies and construct their histories through personal experiences.

In chapter 1, I described the ways in which the *FWWCP* became an alternative writing network that challenges disciplinary understandings of public writing, literacies, and histories. Here, I develop this idea by showing how the *FWWCP* shaped my research methods and methodologies. My methods had to take into account members such as Sally, and the stories that they curated for me, as well as the material conditions surrounding the *FWWCP* members and their documents. These assemblages affected each stage of the process of collecting the *FWWCP* histories. Focusing on *access*, *inclusion*, and *preservation*, I argue that such partnership work forces us to think about the discursive boundaries and material conditions of embodied labor. Such work also shifts how we understand knowledge production and literacy practices across community and university spaces.

Kitchen Table Ethos and the Context of the *FWWCP* Projects

The kitchen table, as an important site of writing, is not new to the field. In “Kitchen Table and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition,” Anne Ruggles Gere argues that “we have neglected composition’s extracurriculum,” which she equates with largely self-sponsored writing that occurs outside of classroom instruction. She characterizes such writing by the “desire of participants” and its potential to have ramifications in personal, economic, and social realms (80). Gere doesn’t intend for the field to “appropriate the extracurriculum or tear down classroom walls”; rather, she seeks to legitimate the extracurriculum as a self-directed enterprise that contrasts a sole focus on the professionalization of the field (86). Gere’s description of writing that is motivated by participants’ desire and occurs beyond traditional learning spaces parallels the participation with the *FWWCP*.

I want to extend this description though to think about the kitchen table ethos of the *FWWCP* and my collaboration with the group. For instance, a kitchen-table ethos represents the values, types of practices, and relationships built through this project on a broader methodological level. In Writing Studies, we talk about collaborative methods, but I will discuss this collaboration through going to the *FWWCP* members' houses and attending their writing groups in the community. This movement beyond university-sanctioned spaces also contributes to the co-production of knowledge in new ways, such as through the curation of archival materials by Sally or the inclusion of stories that might not otherwise emerge if it weren't for my own travel to these spaces. My physical dislocation from the university and entrance into the vernacular spaces of *FWWCP* members and the public spaces of the *FWWCP* gave me access to conversations, histories, and texts that I could never have anticipated. And, by being in these spaces, my research was guided by the concerns, ideas, and values of *FWWCP* members.

The relationship Sally describes about the *FWWCP* is one that cannot be discounted in regard to belonging to part of a group – a collective—and feeling consistently welcomed in that community. This is the ethos the *FWWCP* created, which motivates the histories that each member tells. This ethos is also what shaped the methods and content of this project. First, Sally was not merely a research participant; rather, she was rhetorically in charge of her narrative, directing the conversation with artifacts around her house in order to describe the history that was largely unknown to me. Similarly, the modes of research used throughout this chapter evince the agency and knowledge of the *FWWCP*. Through stories like Sally's, the *FWWCP* becomes a history of people organizing together to keep their cultural heritage alive, through the physical gatherings of members in writing groups, as well as through the sharing of stories and the verbal and written circulation about their lived experiences. This network was more than just a

gathering of groups, though. Rather, the network was brought about through the creation of publications, the physical labor of members to create these texts, and with the necessary knowledges involved to develop such a space and sustain an intellectual community.

In this chapter, I will explore some collaborative experiences with the *FWWCP* and the creation and negotiation of methods with this community (such as the interview led by Sally's stories rather than my own questions). My work emerged as an attempt to celebrate, document, preserve, and study the *FWWCP* as an extensive transnational network of working-class writing, and led to a variety of projects:

- The creation of a print archive of *FWWCP* texts at London Metropolitan University's *Trade Union Congress* (TUC) Library.
- The beginning creation of a parallel print archive in the United States (with duplicate copies from the *TUC*).
- The creation of a digital archive of the *FWWCP Collection*.
- A Study Abroad Civic Writing course in which students from Syracuse University and other U.S. based universities attended writing groups in England and studied the history of the *FWWCP*. Through these courses, which ran in Summer 2015 and Summer 2016, two collaborative publications have also been created. (See: *Preserving Hidden Histories* and *Transitions*).
- A *CCCC Research Initiative Grant*, which studies the impact of *FWWCP* texts in the composition classroom and their ability to transfer across universities and contexts.

Within each of these projects, I have collaborated with *FWWCP* members and other scholars, with the goal of maintaining the *FWWCP*'s ethos in all elements of this work. While there are

multiple collaborative *FWWCP* projects, this chapter focuses on the creation of a printed archive of *FWWCP* materials at London Metropolitan University's *Trades Union Congress* Library. The instability of research sites and the material conditions of my work have necessarily changed how this research was conducted – and I would argue for the better. Indeed, the challenges I faced point to the uncertainty of movement and the ephemerality that surrounds this research and the ways that I have collected data.

Although many scholars in Writing Studies discuss archival work, there are few, if any, stories about the actual creation of printed archives. To be sure, one significant reason for this might be that we are not archivists. However, I will discuss clear intersections between archival creation and Writing Studies here and show the exigency to do such archival work within my project. Within the field, work on archival curation and creation seems to focus on establishing projects in connection with the digital humanities.¹³ Physical labor and material resources affect both print and digital archives, but these distinctions are particularly relevant when it comes to locating, transporting, cataloguing, and using printed archival materials. Creating a printed archive required considerations about the access, inclusion, movability, and preservation of texts.

The Context of Building the *FWWCP* Archive

Having discussed the importance of Sally's narrative and what it represents, I will now describe the context that created a partnership with the *FWWCP*, a context that has also shaped the methods used within this project. Despite the importance of Sally's testimony and her desire to preserve such working-class histories, there was a huge issue with the *FWWCP*'s legacy. The myriad publications produced by *FWWCP* members between the 1970s and 2007 were scattered

¹³ This work includes K.J. Rawson's *Transgender Digital Archive* and Shannon Carter's *Remixing Rural Texas*. These projects use digitized materials and highlight born digital works or remixes of such materials. Jim Ridolfo's work digitizing historical Samaritan documents for public and professional use is another digital humanities archival project. I'll discuss these works more fully in Chapter Five; however, I mention them here to delineate how the creation of a printed *FWWCP* archive differs from some of the current archival research in the field.

across England in basements and garages, at risk of being discarded or lost. Due to the constant movement of people and texts, there was no solidity with the *FWWCP*. At previous moments, *FWWCP* members attempted to find ways to archive the books, but the infrastructure of the organization was unstable, and there was no clear base to house the books. This was especially detrimental when the *FWWCP* officially ended in 2007. As *FWWCP* member and FED Chair Roy Birch explains:

The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers died an untimely and painful death in 2007. The New Fed [*TheFED: A Network of Writing and Community Publishers*] was born in 2008 from the still smoldering ashes of the Old. Lacking the social advantages of its predecessor (funding, friends, credibility, guidance and opportunity) life was never going to be easy for the new organization. It wasn't. Survival was its main priority. (*Preserving Hidden Histories* 8)

The *FWWCP* ended for multiple reasons, but notably because an aging and declining membership base combined with a lack of funding. The naming of TheFED grew out of a connection to the old *FWWCP* but with the distinction that it would not have an explicitly working-class emphasis in the same way as before. Birch notes that after the demise of the *FWWCP*, TheFED hadn't really gained the enthusiasm and structural sponsorship it once had. For a few years, the new FED flailed, fearing the loss of the *FWWCP*'s network as well as the ability to preserve the organization's textual artifacts.

There was an increased exigency for something to be done with these publications; otherwise, there would be no way to preserve such history, nor the chance for them to be used or studied. As of 2007-2008, however, there was no central place to store the publications. There were no financial or technical resources to do so. And there was no one able to do the physical labor involved. Moreover, many members from the original *FWWCP* passed away before

accounting for their history in any official capacity with the network. Without money, labor, technology, and storage, the preservation of *FWWCP* texts seemed bleak.

It was during this time that a new sponsorship structure slowly emerged. The beginning of the *FWWCP* partnership with Syracuse University dates back to moments when my advisor Syracuse University Professor Steve Parks (then at Temple University) used Knight Foundation money to bring some *FWWCP* members to his home in Philadelphia to perform their written show “Feds Under the Bed.” This is when Parks met *FWWCP* member and Sheffield Hallam Occupational Therapy Lecturer Nick Pollard, who also produced many of the organization’s serial documents, including *FED News* and *FEDERATION magazine*. Each of these continuing efforts proved significant for the national organization to interact via correspondence, share their opinions and news via book reviews, op-ed pieces, and reports on writing groups. After the *FWWCP* members performed their show, touring parts of the eastern United States, Parks designed courses at Temple University focused on *FWWCP* materials and that also had students work with *FWWCP* members, travel to the United Kingdom, and collaborate on publications, including *Pro(se)letariats*, a book discussing class impact on education (see: Burns et al.). Through Parks and Pollard’s partnering efforts with multiple *FWWCP* members, they also produced a new edition of the *FWWCP*’s manifesto *The Republic of Letters* and scholarly articles about the history of the network. It was this initial work that developed a long-standing partnership with the *FWWCP* that eventually led to what is now the archival collection. This partnership also enabled the *FWWCP* to host their annual writing festival at Syracuse University’s London-based campus with reduced costs. This was particularly useful as *FWWCP* membership declined and finances deteriorated. In effect, these moments of partnering and even sponsorship efforts were built on a mutual sense of trust and desire to sustain the *FWWCP*, so

long as it continued to represent the ethos it established years before. For instance, when the *FWWCP* hosted writing festivals at universities, they were still non-traditional learning spaces run by and for working-class individuals and largely non-academic audiences. That tenet remains today.

The exigency for an official archive was apparent. But, ironically, it had to be created within contexts that the *FWWCP* had painstakingly avoided for many years—in partnership with academic and scholarly institutions that have structurally ignored or diminished the work of such working-class writers. Recognizing this tension—between the ethos of academic institutions and the *FWWCP*—was crucial to everyone involved. In order to understand and respect the collective working-class ethos that the *FWWCP* established for decades, it was important to account for *how* this archive was going to exist and the ethical choices that would come from building and sponsoring this emergent archive in collaboration with the organization. After all, the creation of this archive brings forward both ideological and pragmatic questions about the purpose and value around such work—about whose lives, histories, and testimonies we highlight in Writing Studies. In order to expand what texts, people, and histories are being preserved, requires discursive and ideological changes, as well as practical action. The ability to make that happen, though, relied on a series of moments and (un)conscious networking.

During these moments, Steve Parks, Nick Pollard, and other *FWWCP*/FED members attempted to find places to house a representative portion of *FWWCP* documents. One attempt centered on Syracuse University's London campus housing the texts, which would illustrate an international partnership by allowing the FED festivals to continue at the London campus, as well as facilitate the preservation of the materials. However, SU London didn't have the infrastructure or resources to do this.

It was after these moments, in 2012, that I began working with Steve Parks, Nick Pollard, and the FED Executive Committee through Skype and email correspondence.¹⁴ Our interactions began through work with a graduate seminar, in which I learned about composition histories and partnered with the FED Executive Committee to learn about community literacy practices. Together, we discussed ideas, such as finding a local archival space or community center, or even thinking more nationally about spaces such as the British Library. But each option was met with challenges of finding the sponsoring resources, including monetary support, physical labor of creating an archive, and the appreciation for the *FWWCP* archive as a strong intellectual and historical resource. For these reasons, I decided to attend the next FED Festival in 2013. I expected that it might be my first and only time to meet *FWWCP*/FED members in person, see the festival in action, and collect archival materials and information from living members.

But something different happened. It was clear that each stage of the *FWWCP*'s hope for an archive reflected a shifting understanding of material conditions and resources. And 2012-13 brought about a series of sponsorship ideas, as well as an increase of resources and energy that created both the infrastructure and intellectual space to finally create the print archives. At this point, one *FWWCP* member group Pecket Well College or Pecket (which I'll discuss more in chapter 4), secured funds by selling their residential college building that was purchased in 1992 with support from community members, local charities, and some funding from Arts Councils in Yorkshire. Pecket could not afford to keep their organization running, but with the building's profit, Pecket hired an Oral History and Archive Project Director (Pol Nugent, a friend of Nick Pollard) and an Oral Historian at London Metropolitan University (Cilla Ross, a friend of Pol

¹⁴ The invocation of "we" throughout the rest of this chapter signals a partnership between myself and Steve Parks at Syracuse University, the *FWWCP*/FED, Jeff Howarth and Jenny Harding from London Metropolitan University, and Nick Pollard at Sheffield Hallam University. As I'll describe throughout this chapter, this is the group that has collectively decided each step of this project.

Nugent) to quickly lead the creation of a digital archive and oral history before the Pecket's group funds ran out. Pol Nugent, as a community organizer and former Pecket participant and worker, understood the vision and necessity for the group to preserve as much of its history as possible. Nick Pollard was also the Chairperson of Pecket's Archive Project. It was through this chain of events with Pecket that we began discussing the status of the larger *FWWCP* community as well. In each stage, personal and professional networking influenced this project in ways that allowed it to continue.

Through this chain of events, a connection between the *FWWCP* and London Metropolitan University (LMU) emerged. During this time, Jeff Howarth took over as LMU's *Trades Union Congress* Librarian and began talking to Nick Pollard. LMU's *Trades Union Congress* (TUC) Library featured histories of trades unions, working-class lives, and activist materials. And it is an institution that grants public access to archival documents. Therefore, the TUC quickly became a potential fit for the *FWWCP* materials. Moreover, LMU's heritage as a working-class school, and one of the most ethnically and socially diverse in England, make it particularly compatible with the *FWWCP*'s ethos and scope.

Rethinking Sponsorship and New Methods of Collaborative Archival Work

In Chapter One, I discussed the political and social means of oppression that many working-class people felt during the *FWWCP*'s tenure. While the working class was certainly impacted by economic and social power, these struggles also disseminated into structures of education, as we saw with the *Stepney Words* strike and the feelings of isolation by many working-class people. Within the example of Stepney, and Sally Flood's narrative, we see the interplay of governmental and social power, economic influence, and the ways they impact perceptions of literacy. In these examples, institutions (the Church of England, Sir John Cass's

Foundation and Redcoat School, the British government, working-class people, and the *FWWCP* network) as well as individuals/groups (Chris Searle, Trevor Huddleson, Sally Flood, the Basement Writers, Margaret Thatcher, *FWWCP* members) affect the dynamics of literacy in myriad ways. Scholar Deborah Brandt uses the phrase “sponsors of literacy” to describe such factors as “any agent, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (166). Literacies have the potential to go unnoticed or be highlighted depending on the support (or denial) of sponsors. Looking at the *FWWCP* with this idea of sponsorship, its mission centers on the group providing a community of sponsorship for marginalized writers (including working-class people in the 1970s and people with difficulties articulating themselves in words or speech). The *FWWCP* complicates Brandt’s description because it is a collectively created attempt to show people that working-class lives matter and that they can build a structure to enable this articulation. By using self-published books, the *FWWCP* was able to sponsor their own histories through a community-led circulation and production. Even more, by attempting to step out of a solely individual and capitalist model of publishing that seeks individual profit for production, the *FWWCP* used a collective framework that used sales to allow access to publishing for everyone in the groups. This model drew attention to labor, responded to it through a democratized process, and then worked to make publishing accessible to anyone involved.

As many scholars note, sponsorship— in literacy development, use, and preservation— can simultaneously become a mechanism of marginalization or a structure of support, as well as oscillate in the positions between (Brandt; Duffy et al.). My understanding of sponsorship is largely influenced by the recent work in *Literacy, Economy, and Power: Writing and Research*

after *Literacy in American Lives*, where scholars have articulated the complex intersections of literacy with power dynamics, and how this has extended understandings of Brandt's work. These scholars question, "How has the concept of sponsorship been appropriated and used in more recent studies of writing" (Duffy et al. 3)? This question is answered in a variety of methods including Ellen Cushman's discussion of how sponsorship in the Cherokee Nation was not merely a binary of sponsor/sponsored but rather an intricate network with power manifesting in multiple ways, contingent upon those involved and the needs of those people. Of course, there are always challenges within literacy sponsorship work, specifically as literacy connects to all facets of identity and has consequences, benefits, and complications on multiple levels.

Because of the associations of literacy with identity and culture, there are always risks. These risks include everything from financial instability to familial disagreements to the complete undoing of a community. As Miles Myers reminds us,

Literacy is not a neutral activity. It does change self-identity, family relations, and politics. Resistance to literacy may be for many students an intuitive effort to *preserve culture, self, and family and is not then a matter of anti-intellectual or remedial behavior*. It may be, from one point of view, a heroic defense of another form of literacy valued by one's family community. (35, emphasis mine)

Paul Willis also points out the connection between working class families and culture in his book *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Willis argues that working-class culture is an identity that is reinforced through families, educational systems, and within working-class communities in such a way that pushes working-class kids to get and often accept working-class jobs regardless of possibilities beyond these positions. Willis notes how narratives within each of these spaces create a pattern of reinforcement or social reproduction of working-class life suggesting, "the language in the home reproduces...that of work culture" (73). Breaking away from such a structure is not only difficult but also, in many cases, undesired

because of the ruptures that take place. In these examples, we see how literacy sponsorship intersects with working-class communities in unique ways that might challenge class culture and solidarity.

Through the *FWWCP*, we see echoes of how literacy is both culturally and personally important and its relationship to powerful ideological and material consequences. For the *FWWCP* in particular though, preservation—of working-class testimony, history, and culture—is key. An archive of the *FWWCP* texts became the means to preserve working-class narratives and histories, but this archive was also dependent upon resources from other institutions. In effect, the *FWWCP* archive is where sponsorship and literacy come together specifically with community partnership work.

Affordances and limitations of community partnership work must always be considered. In “The Unintended Consequences of Sponsorship,” Eli Goldblatt and David Jolliffe address such affordances and limitations, arguing that sponsorship is often a risky endeavor. To truly engage in the “gains” of sponsorship, they argue that academic institutions must undergo structural and ideological transformations that challenge hierarchies of authority and agency, as well as broaden the mission and values of universities to welcome in projects and people that might challenge the traditional structure (Goldblatt and Jolliffe). I identify with Goldblatt and Jolliffe’s idea that universities must undergo ideological shifts, and the *FWWCP* project sits between both of these examples, thinking about sponsorship within a particular community (the *FWWCP*) that largely navigates outside of universities. The *FWWCP* shows the possibilities when we allow community partnerships to change our archival—and, thus, sponsorship—practices. I argue that we must take this into account in archival methodologies and practices, if we want to not only talk about ideological change but also enact it in our research methods.

As we embarked on the *FWWCP* project, we found ourselves needing to negotiate the sponsorship of archives at the level we were starting – quite literally building an archive from the ground up. But scholarship rarely mentions how to negotiate sponsorship between academics and individuals, organizations and institutions, working-class people and privatized education—all of which were also a negotiation across international geographic borders and discursive barriers. In effect, there was no road map for how we came to understand and be involved with the *FWWCP*, but there was an exigency for its preservation and an ethical imperative to maintain the ethos of its community. Interestingly enough, scholarship was not the key to understanding the *FWWCP*. Rather, the *FWWCP* changed and affected my own mobility and the ways I understanding collaborative literacy projects, specifically in regard access, inclusion, and preservation.

Access: Establishing an Accessible Archival Space for the Community

Building an archive in collaboration with other institutions and communities necessitates an understanding of archival work that requires us to think about agency and ethics. Such work demands a more nuanced sense of how literacy sponsorship traverses academic and community spaces. The tensions within this project mean thinking about how these spheres—in scholarly institutions, public libraries, and the *FWWCP* community—fit together and how they could continue to support the *FWWCP*'s ethos throughout the process. To do so, there must be an evolving sense of methods and methodologies that support collaborative work across communities. Methods should be inclusive of the communities involved, specifically individuals that identify with working-class identities or non-traditional educational experiences. This collaborative work attempts to breakdown some of the methodological barriers between community/university partnerships while fully acknowledging the precarious, even contradictory, nature of this work as part of a university degree. This is not a prescriptive

example; rather, the benefits and challenges of flexible methods provide a model for how the field can continue to learn from the community literacy work happening beyond the university.

In order to get to more ideological and pedagogical questions about the function and scope of the archive, we had to understand how the parts fit together—how this evolving sense of sponsorship would function. The *FWWCP* developed because they felt that the working-class was generally excluded or misrepresented. As a result, they generated their own texts about working-class experiences. The goal of building the *FWWCP* archive is to continue advocating for the representation of working-class voices in both scholarly and non-scholarly sites. Taken together, all of this leads to a discussion of what it means to sponsor an archive of community-generated, working-class texts.

Because the *FWWCP* fought to be heard in public spaces, which they created through their own networks, there was a conscious effort to find spaces where these texts would be respected and actively used. As previously noted, LMU's heritage as a working-class school, and one of the most ethnically and socially diverse in England, make it particularly compatible with the *FWWCP*'s values and our hopes for its continued use. The ultimate selling point, though, was that the *FWWCP* texts would be housed within the *Trades Union Congress* Library where documents could be publically accessed by anyone, right next to years of labor histories. The *TUC* Library was established in 1922 in collaboration with the TUC Parliamentary Committee, the Labour Party Information Bureau, the Women's Trade Union League, and the Labour Party. The *TUC* began outside of educational institutions and was "developed for the use of the *TUC* and affiliated unions" (Trades Union Congress Library Collections). Due to the expansive nature of its specialized documents, the *TUC* Library has since become a tool for scholarly researchers interested in trade unions, labor history, and campaigns. As the website notes,

A major strength of the Library are the large holdings of pamphlets from unions, pressure groups and campaign movements, collected from the 19th century onwards, which have survived here as in few other comparable libraries. Important research collections cover: union activities, international affairs, labour biography, women workers, strikes, Labour Party publications, the Communist Party and other political groups and campaigns. (Trades Union Congress Library Collections)

By physically placing the *FWWCP* texts alongside these labor histories, we are also making an ideological argument about the contribution of the *FWWCP* testimonies. In effect, public audiences and scholarly researchers can access the *FWWCP* texts, alongside other social and political histories of working-class people and institutions.

Each of these discussions surrounding access became vital in the negotiation of the impending archive and the ways we could secure a sponsorship structure that would be ethical to all involved. Most importantly, in talking to LMU, we got a guarantee that *FWWCP* members (now part of the FED) could collaborate on the design the archive throughout its creation. LMU benefitted from getting an international partner and level of scholarly prestige with Syracuse University, and both universities agreed to write grants together to continue finding funding for this project to continue. Thus, after months of negotiation of with LMU librarians, *FWWCP* members, and others, a collaborative *FWWCP/FED*, Syracuse University, and London Metropolitan University partnership was realized. This partnership also planned that the long-term goals would be to create a transnational print and digital bridge, as a representation of the transnational collaboration and culture that had existed within the *FWWCP* for decades and that could hopefully add to the sustainability, preservation, and circulation of the *FWWCP*'s histories across communities and institutions.

This collaboration manifested in two particular moments between 2013 and 2014, which allowed the physical creation of the archives to begin. First, in order to get a large amount of

texts to London Metropolitan University, Nick Pollard rented a van to bring *FWWCP* materials that he had collected and saved after its demise, so that the materials would not be thrown away with the dispersal of the organization. Perhaps moving books from one place to another may seem easy, but this was not a simple task for multiple reasons, including getting time off of work/away from family, the cost of transportation, and the physical laboring involved to transport books. Pollard had to make the more than three-hour journey from Sheffield to London in order to officially donate these texts. This physical act, of driving boxes of texts between regions in England, embodies the spirit of the *FWWCP* through both the materiality of the exchange and the realization and appreciation of this network's circulation. During this visit, Nick also brought a portion of duplicate texts that would eventually come to Syracuse University for a dual print archive. Ultimately, the official start of the *FWWCP Archive* at London Metropolitan University resulted from this large donation of texts.

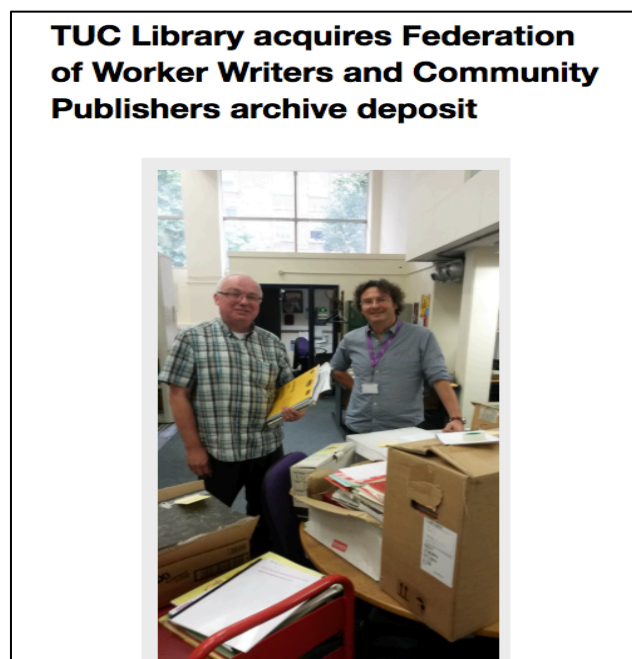


Figure 2: TUC Library acquires Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers deposit. Image shows Nick Pollard and TUC Librarian Jeff Howarth with some *FWWCP* donations. For entire story, see: <http://blogs.londonmet.ac.uk/tuc-library/2014/08/01/fwwcp-deposit/>

The event that solidified my own partnership with the *FWWCP* was a trip to England to attend the 2013 FED Festival. However, while my intention for this trip was to gain knowledge about the *FWWCP* history and begin collecting duplicates to bring back to Syracuse, what actually occurred was something more important yet not quantifiable, particularly in the embodiment of community values and relationships that have influenced both the methods and scope of this project.

Interlude: It's 2013 and I am with Pol Nugent, who picks me up from a train station in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. Without knowing me, she offers to house me while I research and attend TheFED festival. Pol greets me with a hug and proceeds to take me to the store to pick up special Yorkshire cakes for our dessert. That night, I meet her mum Maze (then 89 years old), who talks to me about the best kind of tea (Yorkshire Tea, naturally) and prompts me to try her favorite candy bars that she has stashed in her biscuit tin on the TV stand. Later that evening Pol explains to me that she and Maze had been wondering what a young American scholar (me), from a private institution such as Syracuse might be like. After a couple hours together, discussing work and exchanging stories of our upbringing, she says to me, "Ah, Jess, I'm so made up. You're one of us." Here, my position was acknowledged, not as an outsider or just a scholar, but a person who they identified with among differences, a person who understands and appreciates the experience of working-class life. Without these embodied moments of identification—across generations, location, lifestyle, and class—this project does not exist.

At the FED Festival's Annual General Meeting, a group of returning members, including Roy Birch, Ashley Jordan, and Dave Chambers, signed on for a year of Executive Committee work, proclaiming that the *FWWCP*/FED, LMU, Syracuse partnership seemed prepared to take action. At this time, they also co-opted myself and Lucy Parker, another new member, to the

FED Executive Committee. With a renewed sense of energy and possibility from the FED members and new people interested in pursuing the project, there was a clear feeling of value and commitment toward the project and each other—a commitment that continues through each part of this work. Each of the relationships described in the previous passages allowed our collective group to make decisions about this archive—decisions that are not easily understood through a disciplinary lens. Rather, embodied moments and understandings of the *FWWCP* shaped the formation of the archive in tangible ways. These decisions and even their imperfections demonstrate how this partnership continued to evolve through challenges.

It might seem a bit too whimsical for all of this to have happened. There is indeed some serendipity involved along the way; however, at each stage of this project, two things have come into play that have determined the ability of this project to survive: community support and funding. The first is something that cannot be quantified—the kitchen-table ethos or sense of community values and kindness, developed through multiple years of collaboration that extends between the *FWWCP* members, Steve Parks, and myself. Without this sense of community (of Sally inviting me to her home, of Pol Nugent and Roy and Lucia Birch giving me a place to stay, of Nick Pollard and Steve Park's decade long collaborations), this project does not work. Partnered with this somewhat ephemeral notion of community, there was also the very real materiality of finances.

Funding was—and still is—a constant negotiation for all involved. In fact, in the early stages of this project for me to even get to London, we had to raise money through various organizations. To interview members, attend the FED Festival, and transport books between Yorkshire (where Pol Nugent and Nick Pollard were located) and London, I applied for and received a Research Travel Grant from the Graduate Student Organization at Syracuse

University (\$500), Dean's Scholarship Award (\$700), a HASTAC Scholar Award (\$300), and two Moynihan European Research Awards (\$1,000 each) between 2013-2015. We also secured a CCCC Research Initiative grant (\$9,460), which allowed us to develop a project team and go to London with the purpose of conducting focus groups with the *FWWCP* (more on this in the next section). Thanks to Pol Nugent and other members of Pecket and the *FWWCP*, I was able to save money on housing for at least part of each trip I took to England. Additionally, Steve Parks and I developed a Study Abroad course, which I taught in London in the summer of 2015 and we co-taught in 2016, which paid a majority of my transportation and housing in London for 5 weeks. These grants, mostly based on pedagogical and labor work, were the central factor in allowing this project to continue.

Materiality and movement have impacted, and continue to affect, every step of my journey with the *FWWCP* through the literal movement across geographic spaces to attend the FED Festival, talk with Sally and others in their homes, and attend writing groups across England. This also necessitated that we get grant money to do this work. So, in this way, grants posed a contradiction – a university sanctioned funding source was the only way this project on community-literacy could continue. And these difficulties and contradictions continued for nearly every donation from members and each stage. Transportation money was not readily available, as the 2008 newly formed *FED* had inherited a deficit from the previous *FWWCP* organization, only to be minimally improved in the years since. For many members, their health prevented them from being able to make a trip. For others, trips were harder because traveling any distance requires the ability to read signs or timetables to find your way around. Taking into account these varying abilities and needs, starting an archive was not as simple as moving books.

Therefore, our methods had to account for the materiality of this project, including: locating printed versions of *FWWCP* publications, fluctuating finances and travel costs, moving printed texts from houses to archives, and finding technologies required for preservation. When we began this project, then, the research was constantly dependent upon the movement, mobility, and materiality of texts and people from the *FWWCP*. For the *FWWCP*, the perceptions of literacy imposed on them by standard educational structures or social environments were often oppressive when connected to the material conditions of the working-class, which is why the very need for an archive of working-class writing exists. Therefore, I argue that this process of community engagement had to be responsive to the access and agency among community members and in negotiation with them.

Inclusion: Gathering Materials that Represent an Inclusive Approach to History

In Chapter One, I talked about the ways in which scholars have mentioned the need to be more inclusive in our theoretical framework, but I'm also interested in how this takes shape in the enactment of such work. How can our methods and methodologies be inclusive? The moments I describe with the *FWWCP* partnership highlight the ethical dilemmas involved in methods. In recent years, scholars in Writing Studies have articulated some challenges of defining and understanding the relationship between methods and methodologies. For instance, in the 2012 collection, *Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies*, editors Lee Nickoson and Mary Sheridan acknowledge the fluidity between methods and methodologies, claiming, this “slippage exposes the complex ways researchers navigate this intertwining of practice and theory” (2). Methods, they write, are the important steps we take, in order to “identify research topics, design strategies for collecting, managing, and interpreting the collected data, and determining how to represent [our] findings” (2). While methods address the

pragmatic parts of our research, methodologies are “the epistemological and theoretical interests that drive researchers’ understanding of their study and of themselves” (2). In other words, methodologies are theories that guide our thinking and what we are doing, while methods are *how* we are doing or enacting these theories. This distinction is important because, while there is much discussion on methodologies throughout the field and in archival scholarship, less work has focused on the methods we use. Indeed, one factor within discussions of methods/methodologies is *how* and even *if* we present this work in our research, or what purpose it serves.¹⁵ However, this project centers on an audience of both scholars and community members, arguing that our methods must be legible and responsive to multiple stakeholders when working with community members and community-based archival texts.

Such work demands a transparent connection between methodologies and methods, and also opens up discussions on the embodied choices we make—choices that have consequences for what we understand as research and materials. In *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan take up how archival work and personal experience intersect and shape the research we do in archives, arguing that our methods must account for who we are as researchers and people. They explain that archival work can account for our physical experiences and emotional responses (including mishaps, serendipitous findings, planned attempts, unexpected feelings within the archive) and make us responsive to the processes involved in experiencing archives, finding data, interpreting it, and questioning how we might render the personal and the scholarly as connected. This work is possible if we use

¹⁵ Peter Smagorinsky addresses a tension with the lack of methods discussed more broadly in the field, in his 2008 article, “The Method Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Research Reports.” Smagorinsky begins by describing the myriad journal manuscripts he has reviewed for fields within the social sciences and humanities and argues that, too often, there was a lack of clearly articulated methods used by writers in order to conduct their research. Smagorinsky notes that until the 1980s, the shortness or lack of Methods Sections in journal articles represented an implicit trend or belief in Composition that an article’s focus need not be on the methods of the researcher. By not focusing on methods (in writing), this has led to a decline in our field’s overall understanding and ability to represent how we do research work.

spaces where people lived as part of our research process, if our methods are malleable enough to account for fluidity and to be attentive to unexpected leads, and if we integrate people around/familiar with our research subjects; taken together, Kirsch and Rohan argue, this can enable us to “better understand the actors involved in shaping the politics, culture, and history of the times” (2). These ideas point the embodied response to research, and how personal connections shape research – such as the way Sally Flood curated her narrative for me, or my interactions amongst *FWWCP* members in their personal spaces.

While much work exists on the methodological underpinnings of archival work, particularly as a form of revisionist histories, only recently have scholars taken up how to conduct such research. Indeed, not until 2009, when Barbara L’Eplattenier addresses this gap in her article, “An Argument for Archival Research Methods: Thinking Beyond Methodology,” were these distinctions overtly apparent in the scholarship.¹⁶ L’Eplattenier says we need to draw more attention to archival methods and actually discuss those methods in our writing and courses. Here, L’Eplattenier believes that we can start by articulating why, who, and how we study what we do in the archives. This relies on the development of fuller methods sections that show the “pragmatic goals, issues, and actions of our archival research” (71). Reporting this information would enable researchers to discuss the location of their research, the benefits and challenges of the data findings and collection, as well as important circumstances around this research. Of course, the difficulty of reporting and using archival methods is that each archive is

¹⁶ For instance, while Linda Ferreira-Buckley importantly argued, in “Rescuing the Archives from Foucault,” the need for rhetoricians to take a turn back to the archives, her focus in this 1999 piece is about reclaiming methodologies. This piece signals an important moment of distinction for Ferreira-Buckley who urges that scholars teach students the “specialized research techniques necessary for revisionist histories” (582). This marks an admittance that the histories we have traditionally collected, archived, and preserved, could benefit from an expanded knowledge of just what histories archival researchers might concern themselves with, particularly by re-reading histories and finding new strategies to talk about them and “revis[e] traditional accounts of history” (582). Since this admittance, historians in Composition and Rhetoric have published significantly on rereading histories (Jarratt’s “Speaking”) and revising the histories we’ve studied and preserved, most of these using feminist methods (Glenn and Enoch; Royster). To be sure, these ideas are interesting for understanding the significance of an archive—its possibilities and pitfalls, as well as the cultural significance, but it does not present a tangible example for actually *doing* archival research, nor does it provide tools for constructing and curating archives to fit these values.

unique—ranging from historical education papers to community publications, located in highly accessible sites to locations accessible only with proper institutional status, and in formats of printed texts to digitized texts or digital archives of sound and video.

We see more possibility and diversity of archival work in *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* by Alexis E. Ramsey et al. This book represents an integral text that focuses on how we might conduct (the how-to of) archival methods, as the final three pieces describe various ways that scholars were able to create their own archives.¹⁷ Many of the examples, such as Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch’s chapter, “Invigorating Historiographic Practices in Rhetoric and Composition Studies” point to a more fluid and ephemeral concept of an archive, which leaves room for researchers to find and create important arenas for archival work, beyond going to an already established traditional archive (i.e., in a university setting or a specialized academic library). This work, according to Glenn and Enoch, starts with the consideration of the materials we include for our work: “Simply rethinking the starting point of primary and archival research enriches the histories of rhetoric and composition with possibilities for new perspectives and voices” (15). This discussion also draws attention to the power that methods have in regard to the in/exclusion of certain texts and histories within the field. Instead, they argue, archival work should be “to search for new kinds of evidence that might reveal different understandings of how people throughout history have learned and developed rhetoric and writing” (16). This approach to archival work opens up possibilities for understanding archives in both traditional and non-traditional spaces.

¹⁷ Some examples in *Working In the Archives* by Ramsey et al. include the following archival creations: For Brad E. Lucas and Margaret M. Strain, this emerged through a consideration of oral history interviews as archival material; Lynn Z. Bloom built an archive of textbooks in order to facilitate her own research question, “What essays by what authors did American college students read in Freshman Composition from 1946 to 1996” (279)?; Finally, Nan Johnson documents how she became an archivist over time by collecting ephemera and clippings, such as a cover of *The Shelby Dry Goods Herald* that eventually led her to see “the synergy between rhetorical forms and the material texture of daily life” (299). Each of these scholars note how archives are expansive, if we allow them to be, and if we consider (or perhaps reconsider) the possibilities of seeing archives emerge in places we may never expected.

While these scholars articulate the ethical underpinnings of how we highlight the voices of marginalized populations, doing so—particularly in partnership with these members—requires a nuanced and reflexive understanding of sponsorship that includes the communities at hand. Ethical imperatives in archival work now ask us as researchers, even more, which bodies and people we deem as archivable and how we might transform our methods to be responsive to the specific needs of the archive’s population and its circulation; but actually doing this work takes constant negotiation, reflexivity, and compromise within how we sponsor such work through ideological, financial, or material means. Reflexivity, here, involves thinking about what’s at stake with the work we do – who benefits from this work? Who is included/excluded from this work? Which bodies, texts, and literacies are privileged within these frameworks? How is knowledge created and changed from this work? And, how are these methods sustainable? To grapple with these questions also means dealing with more pragmatic issues with the material constraints of funding, geographic location, institutional sponsorship, and availability of resources. These issues represent structural differences between grassroots efforts such as the *FWWCP* and solely university-based research.

We see such structural differences in the next stages of setting up a *FWWCP* archive, once the location was determined. With an archival space accounted for at London Metropolitan University, and Nick Pollard’s initial donation, the next stage centered on gathering more documents, histories, and information through interviews, focus groups, and workshops. This was particularly difficult when many members were nearing their 70s or older, may not have access to email or a phone, and some of whom have difficulty with reading and writing because of their educational background; yet, to be ethically inclusive and responsive to these community members and to maintain ethos as a collective archive, these facts are not able to be overlooked.

In 2013, at what seemed to be the FED's final festival, Lucy Parker and I conducted a workshop (which was requested by the FED members and the Executive Board) to gather information from remaining *FWWCP* members and plan strategies that the project team could continue. This workshop was attended by—and really conducted by—a conversation between former *FWWCP* members, like Sally Flood, Chairman Roy Birch, Vice Chair Dave Chambers, Secretary Ashley Jordan, Treasurer Louise Glascoe, and long time members such as former-Chair Roger Drury and Roger Mills, who had been at the initial Centerprise meeting in 1976. During this time, we discussed the design of the archive, the ways to reach out to members for more material, and the goals for how it would be used. We also discussed the level of involvement the FED would have in organizing the documents and maintaining communication about and access to the texts at all times. Here, the FED members strategized how we might reach out to former members who were contacted but could not attend this initial meeting. We utilized multiple forms of outreach, the most successful of which was contacting a main group from the FED (post-2008) Executive Committee, many of whom had roots in the *FWWCP*, and asked them to continue to suggest names and contact information. We sent emails, called numbers, looked people up through social media, and spread the word through any members that were still active.

It took months to contact people and we are still expanding the contact list, tracking down members—some have moved, others are slow to respond, and many have passed away. Once Nick Pollard officially made a primary donation to the *TUC*, this prompted other members to contact us about donating their work because his ethos and *FWWCP* involvement was clear. Donations from members themselves represented a significant understanding of the *FWWCP*'s value in this work. For those who were aging and had few copies (if not only one!) of these texts left, their donation of materials embodied a strong belief in the preservation of these histories.

Here, I saw that the methodology about inclusion and access didn't really account for the material realities and physical circumstances of the people involved—the actual laboring of bodies needed to make this archive happen.

The same difficulties Nick Pollard faced (of time, labor, money) continued for nearly every donation to the archive. For some, the transport was difficult: given their working-class backgrounds, transportation money was not readily available, and physical health, for many members, also prevented them from being able to make a trip. As I'll discuss in Chapter Four, this was particularly humbling for me when three members from *FWWCP* member group Pecket traveled via trains and bus for hours for me to interview them, while having extreme difficulty with reading and writing—something that can easily be taken for granted by those (including myself) who can look at a timetable, read directions or look them up on my phone, and text people if I have a question. In this situation, the pride for Pecket and generosity of these members trumped the anxieties of traveling, but it was in no way an easy feat. Taking into account these varying abilities, starting an archive was a constant negotiation of mobility and immobility, material and financial resources, as well as emotional, mental, and physical labor.

With the physical relocation of materials, we also had to deal with more technical aspects, such as copyright, intellectual property, and fair use. For instance, while the *FWWCP* was a collective, individual authors often maintained copyright, causing issues with establishing a digital archive. Other authors had moved or died, or had not thought about this work in a digital environment. Although many members had implicitly begun archiving years early (either through their own collections of printed books, their desire to have reading performances recorded on tapes, and their attempts at creating workshops to circulate and share their ideas), there wasn't an official or clear sense of how and if an official *FWWCP* archive could emerge.

A simultaneously confusing, though equally important question, was how to get duplicate books to Syracuse University, as the goal was to form a parallel print archive as a means of the transnational partnership. When I first went to England in 2013, I was able to pick up two suitcases and more carry-on bags full of duplicate books in West Yorkshire from Nick Pollard. I personally transported them via train to London and then by plane to Syracuse. That is, I transported over 100 lbs. of books across the Atlantic Ocean—something that, albeit wanted by the *FWWCP*, still felt disconcerting. In the years since then, we have continued to transport books across the ocean through suitcases and, very hesitantly, through the mail. Instinctively, this felt odd carting rare community works far away to a private institution in New York. Some might even ask: why was I taking books from England to America? How could we justify uprooting this archive and taking it out of its original context? While these were challenging questions to consider, the *FWWCP* FED members themselves dispelled many of these concerns, with their continued friendships, partnerships, and hope for circulation beyond England. Getting use out of these texts became the primary importance.

*Interlude: I know that each time I am in London, my time will be spent getting coffee and going through the archives with Lucy; attending writing groups in Newham with Dave, Paul, George, Phil, and Alex who will not take no for an answer when they ask me to grab dinner and a couple of pints at The Golden Grove; and then there are Roy and Lucia, Andy, Paul, and the Stevenage Survivors writing group who welcome me each time to their group with hugs and my favorite biscuits, invite me to home cooked meals, and remind me, of course, that I have a place to stay. All of this is most often accompanied with my favorite Victorian Jam cake made by Lucia. Each of these moments, though meaningful to me personally, represent something bigger about the *FWWCP*/FED community and their ethos. These are typical moments of acceptance*

and welcome, friendship and care, that characterize the FWWCP in every sense of its community and provide the basis for how such a group emerges and continues. Despite being thousand of miles away, there are emails, phone calls, Skype and Face time messages, and letters to remind me that these moments are the only way such a project can exist. I see these moments as the embodied experiences behind the literal creation of the archive—such experiences that have made this project what it is.

The technicality of moving *FWWCP* books was only possible, and ethical, because the *FWWCP* wanted it to happen—and because there was an embodied partnership between us. More importantly, though, this was a representation of the ethos that the *FWWCP* worked to maintain as an international organization. At the height of its membership, the network spanned four continents with member groups writing about working-class identity in numerous languages across nearly 100 writing groups. Although the possibilities of transnational partnerships were less possible before the internet and digital age, members from South Africa would correspond via mail with the *FWWCP*, members from France and Italy would come to England for the Festivals, and members from Australia and the United States would share their publications with members in England. Now, however, transnational partnerships are much easier and the FED expressed their desire for the archive to be transnational and for it to be preserved in whatever ways it could, *as long as it would also be used and circulated*. In this way, LMU and Syracuse University provided the means of preservation, the resources, the physical labor, and the appreciation for safeguarding these histories, as well as the connections to put these texts to use in multiple arenas. The *FWWCP* collaboration has taken on transnational circulation through the teaching of *FWWCP* documents in multiple courses at Syracuse University, London Metropolitan University, Long Island University - Brooklyn, University of Akron, and through

the creation of a study abroad course that links American students with *FWWCP*/FED members with community partnership work.

Preservation: Curating History with the *FWWCP*

The next step of inclusion and access involved thinking through the meta-data of the *FWWCP* texts and how various audiences could use them. This meant deciding what texts would be included in the printed archives and how they would be sorted. With such diverse genres, themes, writers, publishers, writing groups, and values, the sorting of texts became both a pragmatic and ideological concern. While we wanted to curate for usability, we also wanted to be reflective about the hierarchies and power structures embedded in such cataloguing and labeling. For example, to label something with a description of “women’s writing,” or “black writers,” or “immigrant writers,” already marks this writing and it marks it as something other than “working-class writing,” the main goal of the *FWWCP*. Moreover, these labels—while used by the writers themselves—mean different things for each person. The need to categorize, though, was necessary for the practicality of an archive. Therefore, on multiple in-person occasions and via other means of communication, members from the *FWWCP* specifically decided on how they would like these methods enacted. We reached out to founding members and posed questions about what to include and how. Again, the main project committee also already included representatives from the *FWWCP* as well. We received a variety of answers from members, including that all materials should be included—publications, pamphlets, minutes, funding forms, workshop proposals, correspondence, etc.

While there were discussions about sorting the archive by writing groups, time period, and themes, the FED group at the first archival workshop in 2013 decided that it was important to illustrate a sense of regional participation within the publications. The group wanted the

archive to provide an opportunity to understand how the geographic location affected working-class people. For instance, you might have miners writing from Yorkshire, whereas people in London were discussing different work and immigrant experiences, and those on the coasts were talking about working as a dock worker or other local issues. We used regional categories to sort the texts, including: Yorkshire; East and West Midlands; Northeast England; Northwest England; London; East of England; Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland; and other international texts. In effect, the FED group wanted to think about geographic difference first, thereby providing an opportunity to understand how the geographic location affected working-class people perhaps through use of dialect, types of vocation, or events that were happening (such as immigration in London).

To begin this sorting of texts, former *FWWCP* members and FED members expressed interest in this work. They were also the perfect people to start such a task, as their voices were represented within the archive, thus having an embodied relationship to the texts. In this way, it represents a method of work that cannot be quantified with disciplinary or institutional methods but rather relies on the community at hand that began the first steps of sorting the texts into regions, volunteering their time to do so. Then, only once a regional categorization was noticeable, my students (from the study abroad course taught through Syracuse University London) and I continued the sorting—with the continued advice, leadership, and sorting from *FWWCP* members who could do this work. During this summer abroad course, *FWWCP* members visited the archive and talked to my students about the regions, the publications, and the history of the *FWWCP*. In some cases, we were able to visit remaining groups in London, attending workshops in the areas of Newham and Stevenage. Some members from Yorkshire,

such as Pol Nugent, and Rosa Vilbr, an oral historian from London also travelled to class to do workshops on accessibility, writing, and archiving.



Figure 3: Image of *FWWCP* archive at LMU



Figure 4: Image of *FWWCP* texts sorted by region

By May 2015, between the *FWWCP*/FED members and the Syracuse University students, the main collection of texts (about 3,500 individual pieces) was sorted into regions. These regions were then divided into writing groups or publishers—at the request of the *FWWCP*/FED members. This also required going through stacks of paperwork that included membership applications, meeting minutes, correspondence, funding requests and applications, and other files. Before its demise in 2007, the *FWWCP* had a central location in Stoke-on-Trent, England, to house the administrative documents and some of the publications. Together these documents represented close to 30 years worth of social interaction, community organizing, and collective publishing that served as the foundation for the *FWWCP*'s international network. The administrative documents also narrated a story of how the *FWWCP* evolved, the challenges they faced, and how they were able to sustain themselves for years, which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

Many of the founding members, who could not do the physical sorting but wanted to be actively involved with the archive, also attended focus groups in June 2015 at LMU in order to instruct and comment on the archive's progress. Over this two-day meeting, former *FWWCP* members met with staff at LMU (including librarian Jeff Howarth and Oral Historian Jenny Harding), Steve Parks, Nick Pollard, and I. Here again was a moment of active involvement from multiple members who influenced the very structure and method of curating the archives—involvement that fundamentally changes the archival methods and ideological structure of this archive. In other words, without this community partnership, this archive would look very different: it would be a story told by outsiders rather than a history told by the very people who lived it.

The final step of this initial categorizing of the texts revolved around the need for accessibility and use for subsequent users. In the focus groups with *FWWCP/FED* members, they determined that the archive would need to include the following categories: Title, author, publisher, date, medium (ex: booklet, serial, newspaper), type/genre (ex: pamphlet, prose, briefing, poem), and themes. We decided that themes should include: *gender, race, sexuality, mental health, migration, conflict, education, literacy, community, class, domestic/personal, and activism* to begin. Although these categories intersect, the goal was to represent the multifaceted layering of these texts, their authors, and the networks from which they emerged.

In effect, we attempted to enact the *FWWCP/FED*'s collective decision-making, as well as destabilize the authority of university partners to suit the needs, the requests, and the hopes of the *FWWCP* members. Each of these choices were about access and inclusion as a means to preserve this history. And we only made decisions after conversations between scholars and community members. This process also meant choices could be revised so that our methods and

methodologies considered both material realities and ideological consequences. This wasn't always easy, but it does show how archival work is rhetorical, how our methods can be expanded and challenged, and how the work of methodology relates to ethics and ideologies, as well as material realities.

Building on Insights from the Archive and Bringing the Texts to Life through Interviews

From each of these examples of access, inclusion, and preservation, it is clear how sponsoring the *FWWCP* archive was not a hierarchy of sponsor/sponsored but rather a network of sponsors, shaped by members and their goals. As we continue to move forward, we must think about how the circulation and use of this archive will also be based on *FWWCP*/FED members' continued interactions with the archive's indexing and sorting (as new material comes in), through archival workshops, and by creating a digital representation of the *FWWCP* collection. This archive began and is continually evolving with embodiment and collaboration at its foundation, so that the archive's creation follows the model of the *FWWCP*'s own methods.

Between the archive workshop at the FED Fest in 2013 and 2014 to gain input, Annual General Meetings, and the two focus groups in 2015, there were multiple opportunities for FED members to be involved along the way. Ultimately, nearly 40 members gave input on how the *FWWCP* and FED would be represented through archival efforts. Yet, as this work continues and we look ahead, there are many issues to think through. For instance, the third phase of this project initially was meant to be the development of a digital archival bridge (see more in Chapter Five), featuring interviews and digitized publications, but this segment has been one of the most difficult to continue because of intellectual property issues, lack of labor and monetary resources, and the difficulty of finding sustainable technology for such work. Initially, we applied for an NEH Digital Humanities Grant (which was rejected) in order to find a sponsoring

mechanism that would provide the material resources that would allow such important work to be done. Without such sponsorship, this project lacks the labor resources to continue this work for long periods of time. Understanding this need, we have continued to apply for grants through both national and international organizations, in order to find ways to continue the preservation of this work in a digital arena.

With the printed archive begun, I wanted to move on to the next part of this archival effort: putting it to use through its circulation. My goal was to move on to research questions about literacy practices that would represent a small piece of the archive's possibilities and scope—insights that I build on in the following chapters. To do this, I relied on a combination of archival research (from the emerging *FWWCP* archive) and interview data. In *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Kathy Charmaz explains the processes researchers can use to gather data through grounded theory. Here, she explains how interview and archival methods can complement each other, a sentiment also held by Kirsch and Rohan in their discussion of embodied research. I use what Charmaz calls “extant texts” or texts that complement interview data but whose construction are not affected by me as a researcher (37). Such texts in my own project include organizational documents, correspondence, and publications produced through the *FWWCP* writing groups, all texts that were produced before my research and were not affected by my role at all. To study these texts, I used the following questions that Charmaz proposes:

How was the text produced? By whom? What is the ostensible purpose of the text?...How does the text represent what its author(s) assumed to exist? Which meanings are embedding within it? How do those meanings reflect a particular social, historical, and perhaps organizational context? What is the structure of the text? How does its structure shape what is said? (39).

By using these questions, I was able to collect examples of how texts within the archive were produced by the network – what the process was and how these texts factored into the organization’s political and social conditions. Building off of Charmaz’s understanding of data collection and coding as a recursive exercise, I was also able to revise my interview questions to be more attentive to the trends that *FWWCP* members were describing and see how they connected to the textual artifacts in the archive.

Upon beginning my research, I did not know how interviews would fit with the archival work, but I knew that I wanted remaining *FWWCP* members to give voice to their work, quite literally through their own voices and embodiment experiences. Instead, what ended up happening is that my own methods of archival and interview research changed based on the agency enacted by Sally and others. And, ultimately, the questions that set out to explore (see appendix) were just the basis for showing interesting tensions and developments within the organization, which I’ll discuss in Chapter Three. The longer I spent with members, the more I realized that my questions weren’t as important as their words. And the result of such flexibility provided more ability to think about the implicit and explicit statements about class and literacy that *FWWCP* members mentioned.

Ultimately, my methods of interviewing were a combination of semi-structured interviews (through multiple mediums, including email, in person, and in groups) and, as we see from Sally, a practice more in listening and learning than asking questions. In the case of shorter interviews with people I was less familiar with, the questions revolved around the participant’s background history and were aimed at their own articulation of their identity and relationship with the *FWWCP*. I designed these questions as short answers and identified them as such via email and in person; however, many people gave lengthy answers to these questions and led me

to see how extensive the relationships in this network are. For instance, I started with background questions about the role of members, how the groups worked, and what the goals of the *FWWCP* were. Expanding on these questions, I followed up asking about the meaning and value of the *FWWCP* for individual members. Although it was a collective endeavor, I also wanted to see how participants saw themselves participating in a working-class organization, particularly in their specific time period. For this work, I aligned with Charmaz's idea that data is always socially constructed and mediated, but coding provides a way to move beyond confirmation bias and understand the data in its contexts. She writes,

With any data-gathering approach, consider how participants invoke ideas, practices, and accounts from both the larger and local cultures of which they are a part. Scrutinizing how you collect data and which data you obtain helps to locate them. Such scrutiny also helps you when coding and categorizing because you will be able to place your emerging analysis in its social context. (40)

When we consider data analysis in its context, we move “beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (43), thereby hoping to dispel confirmation bias in our work.

My work in the archive, listening to conversations and conducting of interviews, and the subsequent coding of interviews enabled me to see how questions about the role of the *FWWCP* as an organization, as well as its role within a specific historical and political context, were actually linked to identity-politics that I didn't fully understand until interviewees mentioned them and I noted these trends in the archival documents. For instance, while many people spoke about the *FWWCP* as a collective working-class organization and expressed how much the group added to their confidence as a writer, I was struck by how much of the data referenced the *FWWCP* evolving from a working-class group into one that had to account (not always with ease) for multiple identities—specifically in the rhetoric of naming groups and defining them in

relation to the FWWCP. In fact, some of the biggest tensions in the *FWWCP*'s history revolved around these moments, particularly how a working-class group negotiated identity as gendered subjects. From this information, I was able to restructure how I viewed the archival materials, because the people who wrote them and lived these experiences were able to bring their own voice along side them in this project.

Conclusion

In Chapter One, I unpacked the historical and social conditions of the *FWWCP*'s tenure and illustrated how this working-class group used self-sponsored literacy practices, created public space, and pushed against emergent conservative political and discursive boundaries to have their histories be known. But the *FWWCP*'s work is important to Writing Studies not only as a historical example but also as an alternative model of class-based literacy practices and collaborative methods. The preservation of such a model requires changes in our own disciplinary practices and methods of partnership work. Building on these insights, I've shown in Chapter Two the various material constraints and ideological concerns that have arisen from preserving the *FWWCP*'s work in printed archival format. As we move forward with archival methods and continue to do revisionist histories, ethical considerations must continue to be a part of our projects, as many scholars have argued. I argue they also need to be responsive to community's ethos at hand and be representative of these communities, as was the case with the *FWWCP* archive.

Because of the particularity of this project (including the actual creation of an archive), my data collection and practices were dependent upon others. Indeed, this work was contingent upon the *FWWCP*'s involvement and constantly mediated by their own views of knowledge and sense of collaborative methods—methods that necessarily had to be reflexive about both the

ethical underpinnings and material conditions of this community. Working with the *FWWCP* continues to teach me the value of working with people for whom preservation is not merely a scholarly exercise but rather a preservation of their cultural identity. Through the collaboration of building an archive, and the methods developed through this embodied research, this project represents a form of sponsorship that privileges community needs and actually takes shape from such needs and desires. In effect, embodied methods are not just relating to others or being affected by them but actually molding and shaping a project through their knowledges and practices.

The creation of the *FWWCP* Archive represents more than the product created, because it embodies these moments of lived experience and working-life, as well as the moments of collaboration and preservation. The materiality of the texts together represents decades of social histories, totaling thousands of documents. But the materiality of the archive also reveals transnational partnerships and friendships, shared resources and struggles, as well as an ongoing commitment to the ethos and value of working-class lives and histories. Through the pairing of community partnership work and archival methods, this archive represents the voices, histories, and the lived experiences of working-class people in the ways that they want to be seen and heard.

Chapter 3: Composing A Working-Class Federation Among Separatist Desires

In Andrea Lunsford's 1990 CCCC Chair's address, "Composing Ourselves: Politics, Commitment, and the Teaching of Writing," she describes how scholars in Composition¹⁸ have spent years "defining" ourselves and what it is that we do. Lunsford argues that these definitional efforts are "too often limiting and constricting" and, rather, she "propose[s] that we attend closely to *composing ourselves*" as a field (72). Here, Lunsford argues that we should pay attention to how we compose ourselves historically and subjectively as a means of telling our own stories of writing. If we fail to do this, Lunsford argues, "we will be composed in the discourses, the discursive practices, the writings, of others" (72). This statement pertains to scholars in Writing Studies, and it also has implications that extend to the types of texts we teach, as well as the stories, histories, and discourses we allow to shape our field. I'd like to think about this statement in connection to the *FWWCP*, as a self-generated network for working-class people: what did it mean for them to "compos[e] themselves" as a working-class group? How did these discourses shape their Federation? And what might these discourses ultimately contribute to how the field of Writing Studies composes itself? To answer these questions, my analysis focuses on a few key administrative documents from the *FWWCP* Archive¹⁹ at London Metropolitan University such as the *FWWCP* Constitution, membership applications, grant funding forms, and periodical documents created by the group itself, including *FEDeration Magazine* (monthly magazine) and *FED News* (newsletter), as well as interviews that I conducted with *FWWCP* members.

I argue that the *FWWCP*, through defining itself as a working-class federation, was enacting a critique of the political and social environment by working collaboratively against the

¹⁸ I'm using "Composition" here to indicate Lunsford's term, but I've chose to use "Writing Studies" throughout this dissertation.

¹⁹ When I use the phrase "*FWWCP* Archive," I will be referencing the printed *FWWCP* documents that are housed at London Metropolitan University's *Trade Union Congress* Library.

precariousness of their laboring and working-class identity. When both their livelihood as workers and their cultural histories were in jeopardy, the *FWWCP* used literacy to reveal oppressive socioeconomic forces, expose working-conditions, celebrate working-class identity, and preserve their own truths about working-class culture. In this way, the *FWWCP* invokes and challenges ideologies of writing, literacy, and knowledge, together as a working-class network by recreating the organizational genres and texts used by formal organizations, thereby taking direct action in the creation of the Federation, its publications, workshops, performances, as well as the creation of public spaces. By composing themselves in the discourses they wanted, the *FWWCP* subverts the negative framings of the working class and instead presents a new and complex ideological stance about the intricacies of working-class literacy. However, this class-based collaboration also resulted in both intended and unintended consequences for the *FWWCP* that now found itself addressing identity-politics that were splintering the very community that the *FWWCP* created. In effect, through the continual revision of their organizational documents and the sponsorship of their own network, we see how the *FWWCP* responded to the plurality of identities with varying effects.

Defining Working-Class Culture through the Federation

Implicit and explicit ideologies are always represented through textual documents. Textual documents from the *FWWCP*, for instance, provide us with a sense of the ideologies that were circulating within the organization about working-class identity and culture. Tony Scott writes, in *Naming What We Know*, “To be immersed in any culture is to learn to see the world through the ideological lenses it validates and makes available to us. Writing is always ideological because discourses and instances of language use do not exist independently from cultures and their ideologies” (48). Scott’s definition helps me frame the *FWWCP* Archive

within a cultural understanding of working-class literacy that manifests in institutional documents and daily life—or formal and vernacular spaces. It also reminds us that there are multiple “ideological lenses” operating simultaneously. Therefore, within a dominant story of the *FWWCP* collective, there are constantly interwoven and competing stories as well from subgroups and individuals. I’ll first show how the *FWWCP* attempted to disrupt anti-working-class social and political movements through their collaborative work.

The Federation developed during a time when large-scale national politics shifted to include more localized forms of participation. In *The Republic of Letters*, Dave Morley and Ken Worpole note:

During the 1960s political and social activity turned away from the electoral, national and bureaucratic towards the local, campaigning, direct action, sectional and self-organized. Groups of working-class people, finding that no formal structure dealt adequately with the needs and issues as they felt them, began to represent themselves. They took direct action in the form of rent-strikes, the playgroup and nursery movement, squatting, housing and tenants' co-ops, free schools, the creation of local and accessible print and resource centres. And, growing out of face-to-face politics but rapidly transcending the local, there grew black politics and the women's liberation movement. (Maguire et al. 11)

The *FWWCP* grew from these politics and movements, particularly through groups such as Centerprise bookshop, one of the first alternative and community bookshops in London, Queenspark Books, which was committed to recoding local histories in Brighton, and smaller writing groups such as the Basement Writers in London and Scotty Roads in Manchester. Localized groups, such as these, who were fighting for their own form of representation, became an alternative organizing process.

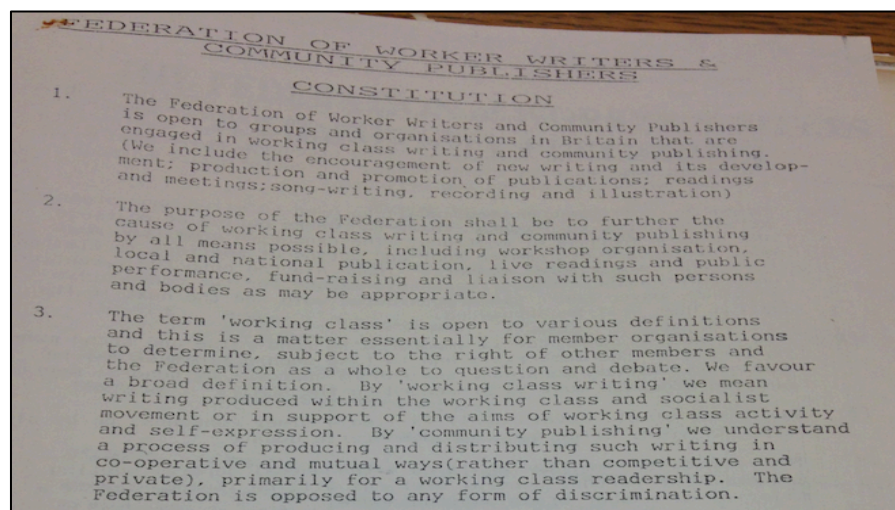


Figure 5: *FWWCP* Constitution 1978. The bottom of this document reads: “This constitution is as agreed at the AGM of the Federation on January 28th 1978 and amended at the AGM on 16th April 1988”

One of the first examples of the *FWWCP*'s direct action is through the creation of their 1978 Constitution²⁰ (see figure 5). This document functions as a type of literacy in which the *FWWCP* articulates the goals, rules, and values of the organization. It reads,

The purpose of the Federation shall be to further the cause of working class writing and community publishing, by all means possible, including workshop organization, local and national publication, live readings and public performance, fund-raising and liaison with such persons and bodies may be appropriate. The term working-class is open to various definitions and this is a matter essentially for member organizations to determine, subject to the right of other members and the Federation as a whole to question and debate. (*Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* “Constitution” 1978)

From this first part of the Constitution, we see how the *FWWCP* developed a collective ethos that would “further the cause of working class writing...by all means possible” and through a variety of publication genres and modes of circulation (performances, workshops, written publications). Moreover, the *FWWCP* acknowledges “various definitions” of the working class are acceptable, and they promote questions and debates about such definitions. Such debates will

²⁰ Although the *FWWCP* began in 1976, the earliest known and accessible version of the Constitution is this 1978 copy.

come up later in this chapter, specifically as working-class writing extends to include members from racial, gendered, sexual, linguistic, and national identities.

In the next section of the Constitution, we see the explicit ideologies of the *FWWCP*, in support of the socialist movement, and against discrimination of members – such ideologies that framed the *FWWCP*'s tenure. Here, the *FWWCP* claims an explicitly “broad definition” of the term working-class writing. It reads,

We favor a *broad definition*. By ‘working class writing’ we mean writing produced within the working class and socialist movement or in support of the aims of working class activity and self-expression. By ‘community publishing’ we understand a process of producing and distributing such writing in co-operative and mutual ways (rather than competitive and private), primarily for a working class readership. The Federation is opposed to any form of discrimination. (“Constitution,” 1978)

By naming such work as part of “the working class and socialist movement,” the *FWWCP* is also pointedly referencing its departure and condemnation of the national politics in charge during these same years. Although the Labour Party held office under Prime Minister James Callaghan between 1976-1979 before Thatcher took office, tensions were rising between the government and the working class. After nearly 2,000 strikes by industrial workers in 1978 over wages and rights, the winter of this year would be called “The Winter of Discontent” (see: Martin). This was the context leading up to and that remained a part of the early years of the *FWWCP* and its formation as a working-class collective.

Another important point within this early Constitution is the attention the *FWWCP* draws to “co-operative” and “mutual” publication – a collective and localized sense of “community publishing” rather than a privatized and “competitive” form. One way in which the *FWWCP* founding group encourages cooperation and community is through the acknowledgement that multiple “persons and bodies” should be represented within the group, and that they are

“opposed to any form of discrimination.” The rhetoric within this document acknowledges a wide and inclusive network with a “broad definition” of its membership base, which suggests that there are differences in the way these values are embodied and enacted. In this wording, the Constitution was envisioned to be a living document that represented openness toward a multiplicity of people, identities, and experiences (“Constitution” 1978).

For the *FWWCP*, the Constitution functioned as a genre to begin building a community focused on working-class solidarity, a solidarity built through writing and publishing. Solidarity and community were not just obscure ideals though. Rather, they were values that the *FWWCP* strived to enact through this genre and social conventions within their workshops. In the short piece “Disciplinary and Professional Identities are Constructed Through Writing,” Heidi Estrem describes how writing is a means to enact and create identities. Writing conventions and genres contribute to the creation of identities within disciplines as well as professional environments. Estrem states, “Approaching disciplinary writing as an act of identity and affiliation illuminates how writing in new contexts is not only about learning abstract conventions but also about learning how to be within a group with social conventions, norms, and expectations” (56). Building on Estrem’s description, I argue that the *FWWCP* created a professional identity through their constitutional documents and performance of such genres but also moved beyond this through the “social conventions” and “norms” that they created through writing workshops, performances, Annual General Meetings, and collaborative publications (56).

The *FWWCP* archive also supports the sense of embodied community, invoked through the Constitution but in less bureaucratic genres. Genres such as letters, performance poetry, and opinion pieces written in *FEDeration Magazine* were geared toward open and democratic forms of dialogue within the *FWWCP*. For example, in the 1980 opinion piece, “Giving voices to

worker writers,” *FWWCP* Chairperson Jane Mace explains how the network functioned as a space where people challenged and supported each other on personal and political fronts. First, she notes the extent of this network, stating that there are over 200 titles circulating in the *FWWCP* and sales which “by now probably total half a million” (Mace). The readership of these texts ranged from local writers, trades unionists, and activists to those in education circles, such as oral historians and adult education supporters. Besides the number of publications and the scope of circulation, though, Mace writes,

Debate at the [Annual General Meeting] and the six workshop discussions was often heated. Workshops explored the importance of people communicating their own history, definitions of socialist writing, and the experience of working-class feminism (Mace).

Here, we gain a sense of how the *FWWCP* workshops functioned as a space for people to “communicate their own history” on contentious political topics such as “definitions of socialist writing” (Mace). This definitional work around socialist terminology was also happening alongside workshops committed to exploring the intersection of working-class experience and feminism, showing how the *FWWCP* engaged with topics of political ideology, gender, class, and history. And, while these discussions prompted disagreement, the *FWWCP* also fostered a space of community where members would share and celebrate their creative work together: “Controversy raged: but the same people who disagreed round the meeting tables applauded each other’s poetry in the evenings” (Mace). Said another way, through the Constitutional documents, open forms of communication, and embodied experiences of workshops and performances, the *FWWCP* produced an environment that supported both solidarity of working-class identity and difference among its members.

Solidarity wasn’t always easy, but it did shape the *FWWCP*’s attempts to break down hierarchies within workshops and publishing. In this way, the *FWWCP*’s version of sponsorship

challenges linear models and “the way that ‘literacy’ is socially distributed to different groups,” as Tett et al. argue, by creating a local response to hierarchized power structures. Tett et al. write,

...powerful literacies have to be oppositional. They have to open up, expose, and counteract the institutional processes and professional mystique wherein dominant forms of literacy are placed beyond question. They have to challenge the way that ‘literacy’ is socially distributed to different groups [...]. (4-5)

Take for instance the production of Roger Mills’ *A Comprehensive Education*, a book about his own experiences with the education system in London growing up, which he wrote during his journeys to and from work each day on the tube. Mills notes in *The Republic of Letters* that this book emerged from a “chance visit to Centerprise,” the publisher of *Stepney Words*:

I found books that they had produced themselves. They included a collection of poetry by a young black schoolboy and the autobiography of a middle-aged local taxi driver. Neither the type of people I had thought of as writers. As a consequence of this revelation I joined a writers’ workshop which met there regularly. My fragments of writing, with the encouragement of other group members, began to morph into autobiographical stories which in turn became the basis of the book. (Maguire et al. 199²¹)

This story shows how Mills found a collaborative space within Centerprise (one of the founding *FWWCP* groups) and was able to write about his understanding of education in a way that was then circulated in schools to some extent through what Mills calls “independently-minded teachers” (Maguire et al. 199). Perhaps most unique about this idea of literacy in relation to the *FWWCP* is the way that they took it up with varying and contradictory results. To parallel Tett et al.’s statement, we see how Centerprise initially formed as an “oppositional” group and how Mills’ testimony shows the significance of working-class voices to him. The development of its own form of self-sponsorship challenged the “professional mystique” of literacy and allowed the *FWWCP* to counter more traditional (read: institutionalized) forms of literacy that diminished

²¹ I use the Maguire et al. citation here because *The Republic of Letters* pulls together voices from multiple *FWWCP* members throughout. It’s clear in some sections who is writing, as we see here with Roger Mills. However, other sections use a collective voice. Therefore, I’ve kept all in-text citations as Maguire et al. to represent the collectivity of this book, while also indicating any individual known attributions.

class struggle. This formation allowed the *FWWCP* to continually develop in response to the changing groups involved, political or social events, funding trends, and writing technologies. The *FWWCP* continued to collectively negotiate the Federation's identity as an organization in both the naming and descriptions of the network, as well as the methods it used to conduct writing groups, develop publications, and revise administrative documents. These changes were possible because the *FWWCP* materialized from a group of people who were cognizant of (and responsive to) the social and material conditions of working-class people and therefore needed to work within this framework.²²

As the debates got more heated, however, the *FWWCP* struggled to maintain its democratic and inclusive form of sponsorship. And it would be too idealistic to say that the *FWWCP* accepted everyone at all times, or that it supported all people in the same way. Rather, as the Federation grew, members and member-groups realized that even within a working-class organization, there were questions about the social distribution of literacy and its intersections with power. By building a community of worker writers and community publishers, the *FWWCP* validated individual experiences and enabled individuals to workshop their writing, raise money to print copies of their work, and provided an infrastructure of support for this circulation. But, the rhetoric of inclusivity did not continue to manifest in inclusive practices for some members. I will now turn to how the *FWWCP* navigated these conflicts.

Negotiating Moments of Difference alongside “Equal Opportunities”

As I discussed previously, literacy and its sponsorship are not neutral—rather, they are constantly affected by power structures embedded in positions of class, gender, race, nationality, language, education, etc. And an ethical representation of these complex debates is crucial to

²² For example, if a *FWWCP* member wanted to produce a book in the early years, they had to rely on little funding, and low-tech resources such as typewriters, copy machines, and staplers. Later on, this developed to be more inclusive of digital technologies such as pdf manuscripts, but this was again only possible within the resources of the group.

understanding the scope of the *FWWCP* through the archive. The *FWWCP* began with a collective formation as a working-class group and then branched out into a multifaceted group that identified with (or as) immigrant writers, women writers, middle class writers, gay writers, black writers, Asian writers, etc.²³ However, this identity-based negotiation of literacy practices was complex—simultaneously affording, complicating, and even prohibiting the agency and mobility of *FWWCP* members. Splintering occurred within the *FWWCP* because some members believed a focus on identities other than class was a negative abandonment of working-class values. Others found this as an empowering and necessary tactic for the inclusion of identities and people within a working-class framework. Many supported this view as well because they personally understood the intersectional nature of identities. In this section, I'll describe the tensions that arose around the following debates: the inclusion of working and middle class members and the different opportunities afforded to each; the distinct goals of nationalism and multiculturalism in response to an organization seemingly committed to “equal opportunities” and working-class values; and the negotiation of gendered identity in a male-dominated network.

The *FWWCP* editors of *The Republic of Letters* describe the difficulties of maintaining a collective view when they soon had to consider other positions as well:

Most of the groups are based in socially mixed areas, or reflect the fact that the break-up of the pre-1939 rigidity and hardship is still very real to many people; they have been discouraged from recognizing class as a reality in their new conditions of living and working. Even member groups that have started sure of their base and identity have changed. Further, in looking at class *cultural* oppression, we have had to confront its overlaps and entanglements with the oppression of black people. Despite the hard work and self-criticism of people writing now we have had to face the fact that white working class traditions have contributed to these oppressions. (Maguire et al. 26)

²³ The *FWWCP* used these specific terms in their network.

Maguire et al. note how class-based solidarity was sometimes followed at the expense of other cultural and social positions. Dealing simultaneously with competing interests as a network meant that the significant impact of the *FWWCP* on class identity might simultaneously conflict or even suppress gender or racial experiences. In fact, one of the most intricate aspects of the *FWWCP* was how they negotiated coalition politics beyond class-based identities—and how the sponsorship network enabled and constrained this distinction and these identities.

Because documents such as the *FWWCP* Constitution and the other policy statements are meant to represent bodied people and their experiences, these documents were constantly changing as well. For example, the varied identities of members are reflected in the texts they produced both individually and part of the collective enterprise. However, by the 1980s, it was apparent that the texts being published began to represent a predominantly white, male, ethos. Indeed, the 1980s and early 90s were laden with debates drawing attention to the need for more transparent and explicit discussions about what working-class writing meant and who working-class writers were. To put it bluntly, some people feared that the *FWWCP* from 1976 represented a predominantly English, white, working-class, male perspective that failed to adequately represent the complexity and richness of the bodies, needs, and experiences of those in the organization. This caused subsequent changes in both the rhetoric and actions of opening up the organization for diverse populations based on intersecting identity factors. The most forceful debates in the archive (found in opinion pieces, minutes, and writing workshop descriptions) address groups who have labeled themselves or have been described through their groups as “women writers”, “black writers,” “gay writers,” and “immigrant writers.” The labeling of these identities here is clearly too simplistic and risks essentializing anyone who might identify with these groups as one thing; however, this naming is important to understand the complexity with

which debates emerged about identity-politics and the naming of identities beyond “working-class” within the *FWWCP*, which included identities influenced by gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and patterns of experience with work, education, and social life.

Through the Constitution, we see how the *FWWCP* attempted to develop a rhetoric of collectivity in the purpose, definition, and goals of the organization. The extent to which some members wanted to maintain a working-class ethos rather than develop an understanding of intersectional identities, however, became problematic for the *FWWCP*. In the 1980s, the *FWWCP* Executive board created an “Equal Opportunities Statement” in order to supplement the group’s Constitution stating: “We welcome all people irrespective of their race, gender, disability, age, sexuality, educational attainment or class” (*FWWCP* “Equal Opportunities Statement”). This document prompted years of dialogue about how working-class identity might intersect with other identities in competing *and* allied ways. In effect, the Equal Opportunities Statement was an official acknowledgement from the Executive Board that the embodied experience of individual *FWWCP* members was not equal and needed to be more explicitly acknowledged.

This document began as an inclusive statement for the benefit of the group as a whole and was supported by numerous iterations from the *FWWCP* Executive Committee. Inclusivity was also explicitly addressed through a revision of the *FWWCP* Constitution in 1991, which stated:

By ‘working class writing’ we mean writing produced within the working class and socialist movement or in support of the aims of working class activity and self-expression... *The Federation is committed to the policy and practice of equal opportunities and is therefore opposed to any form of discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, creed, gender, class, sexuality, disability, or age. In implementing this policy the Federation positively works to provide a forum for the discussion of issues connected with working class writing, racism, sexuality, disability and age* (*FWWCP* “Constitution” 1991, emphasis mine).

Although there are distinct and explicit connections between the “Equal Opportunities Statement” and the 1991 Constitution, the process that enabled these changes also created tension for years within the *FWWCP*—tension that contributed to both the growth of the organization’s scope and the departure from a (seemingly) stable sense of working-class identity. The broad terminology of the “Equal Opportunities Statement” makes it impossible to describe all the debates taken up surrounding this document; however, I will provide some of the main debates that emerged in response to this statement and then provide a discussion of how the *FWCCP* subsequently took up questions of gendered experience.

To begin, it is important to note The “Equal Opportunities Statement” coincided with a more national and even global debate about multiculturalism. Discussions of multiculturalism explicitly began in England around the 1960s, and we see such discussions continuing today connected to multiple expressions of identity.²⁴ Although the *FWWCP* did not at the time use the term “multiculturalism,” the desire for inclusion and opportunity for all members parallels such an understanding of people.²⁵ One of the first moments representing a discourse of multiculturalism specifically in the United Kingdom occurred in 1966 by the then-Labour Home Secretary of the State, Roy Jenkins. In a speech to the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, Jenkins explains a view of multiple cultures that is not about diminishing some cultures through assimilation but rather in favor of embracing diversity throughout the country:

²⁴ Such tension has also surrounded Britain’s current decision to exit the European Union and the role of immigrant populations and national identity.

²⁵ The terminology and definitions related to multiculturalism, remain nebulous in many instances, ranging from discussions of “assimilation,” “integration,” “cultural plurality,” and “diversity.” In an acknowledgement of these differences, Ali Rattansi uses the following definition to explain the view of multiculturalism in 1980s and 1990s Britain as, “The acknowledgment and promotion of cultural pluralism... multiculturalism celebrates and seeks to promote cultural variety, for example minority languages. At the same time it focuses on the unequal relationship of minority to mainstream culture (qtd. in Rattansi 11).” The practice of “cultural pluralism” and “cultural variety” intersects with questions about ideology and discourse as well. In this case, the practice of “multiculturalism” for cultures extends beyond words to citizenship and rights, health care, as well as social and political policies.

I do not regard [integration] as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture. I do not think that we need in this country a 'melting pot', which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman...I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. (267)

Jenkins argues for the practice of integration that allows immigrants to hopefully maintain their culture within British society. While many politicians in both Labour and Conservative governments seemingly supported the acknowledgement of multiculturalism and the potential benefits for a multicultural society, the enactment of such ideas proved divisive through the years after Jenkins' statement. Also, Jenkins' use of "Englishman" elides the role of women within this term, which leaves room for more discussion of identity.

One example of this divisiveness occurred in the context of education, surrounding debates about teaching geared toward British nationalism as opposed to a multicultural approach. In the late 1970s, the Conservative leader Ted Heath supported what became known as *The Swann Report*, a report that advocated "Education for All" and acknowledged the connection between racism, social views, and educational access. The origins of this report can be "traced back to the concern expressed by the West Indian Community²⁶ during the late 1960s and early 1970s about the academic performance of their children" in British schools (*The Swann Report* vii). This report, finally published in 1985, pulls together evidence that suggests how factors of racism, curriculum, linguistics, and social views affect the access and performance of West Indian school children, as opposed to the white, British, majority. West Indian populations might have been the initial lens through which to understand racism, education, and language, but this is clearly not the only population affected by such discussions. The Secretary of State for

²⁶ The West Indian population represents just one example of an immigrant community that suffered in 1958, what Max Farrar calls "violent assaults" based on race and ethnicity in an increasingly globalized London (see Farrar).

Education and Science, Keith Joseph, noted in the report's preface: "The government is firmly committed to the principle that all children, irrespective of race, colour or ethnic origin, should have a good education which develops their abilities and aptitudes to the full and brings about a true sense of belonging to Britain" (qtd. in *The Swann Report* n.p.). Ultimately, the report concludes with the argument that British "society is faced with a dual problem: eradicating the discriminatory attitudes of the white majority on the one hand, and on the other, evolving an educational system which ensures that *all* pupils achieve their full potential" (*The Swann Report* 768).

Although *The Swann Report* lays out strategies for change in education that would ideally benefit a larger portion of all British students, by the time it was published, the government had shifted its leadership (now led by Conservative Margaret Thatcher) and its priorities about multicultural education. The implications for the report, even beyond its initial West Indian population extend to important discussions about many *FWWCP* members as working-class people who were *not* considered part of the majority because of their socio-economic and educational backgrounds (even if they were in the national and racial majority – i.e., British citizens and white).

Access to education is invariably affected by multiple identity factors and a larger social and political system. Miriam David, a professor of Education in Britain, argues that the Educational Reform Act (1986) became a way for the government, through the National Curriculum to privilege a "traditional view of education" and "to inculcate a specifically British set of standards, related to an academic curriculum, judged relevant to the *more able children*" (98, emphasis mine). She acknowledges the goal that "difference and diversity would be extolled rather than diminished" but also explains that children who did not have "*quintessentially British*

experiences... were expected to adapt to a specifically British form of education, valuing only traditional English subjects and knowledge, rather than appreciating the diversity and richness of the varied cultures from which British citizens are now drawn” (David 98, emphasis mine).

David’s analysis suggests that multicultural education advocated for under *The Swann Report* did not fulfill the original intentions set forth through Jenkins’ positive ideas of integration, as the Thatcher government rerouted money away from these educational changes. *The Swann Report* and the Educational Reform Act show how multiculturalism affects—and is affected by—views of education, race, nationality, class, and language. The historical and political framework and enactment of multiculturalism in Britain remains important in relation to the *FWWCP* because the organization was developing alongside these conditions, policies, and the social debates concerning how a multi-cultural society functions.

Troubles with Multiculturalism?: Conflating Communities through Race and Gender

Conversations about multiculturalism often focus on immigration, but this was just one facet of the *FWWCP*. Instead, the *FWWCP* was most concerned with understanding multiculturalism’s impact on class identity because class was the organizing principle for the Federation’s existence. As explained in Chapter One, most members of the *FWWCP* were *not* considered part of the majority (even if they were British citizens) because their educational backgrounds and socioeconomic class had often placed them in a marginalized position. Within this context, Owen Jones explains how the focus on multiculturalism created problems for working-class populations in unexpected ways that pitted race and nationality against economic concerns. When economics are *seemingly* removed or pushed aside, it creates an even larger space for rich and socially powerful people (usually privileging wealthy, white, English, men in this scenario). Jones writes,

It is not just the fetishizing of the demands of the wealthy and powerful that rendered the working class invisible. The promotion of multiculturalism in an era when the concept of class was being abandoned meant that inequality became almost exclusively understood through the prism of race and ethnic identity... Most dangerously of all, middle-class people have ended up ‘refusing to acknowledge anything about white working class as legitimately cultural, which leads to a composite loss of respect on all fronts: economic, political, and social.’ (Jones 101-2)

In other words, Jones portrays the problems that emerged under the banner of multiculturalism for working-class people: most significantly, discourses around multiculturalism erased the significance of working-class identity *as an identity* unique in its own right that many working-class people were attempting to express. Even more, the problem with “refusing to acknowledge anything about white working class as legitimately cultural” is that it forces the white working class to fight for their own cultural space – which we will see happened (and continues to happen) at the expense of other groups.

A racialized split of the working-class meant that political parties could draw loyalties from each of those groups, arguing for a nationalistic rhetoric and effectively diminishing the solidarity of class-based groups. Such rhetoric conflates nationalism with white, English identity (note: this focus has often even prioritized *English* not *British* identity, as I’ll discuss in the next section). For instance, Jones describes this strategy for those in the far-right British Nationalist Party, which later formed the National Front, a party dedicated to white-nationalism and anti-immigration. Jones argues that the British Nationalist Party “cynically manipulated mainstream multiculturalism,” having the effects of “recasting white working-class people as an oppressed ethnic minority, allowing [the BNP] to appropriate anti-racist language” for white working-class British people (234). Such politics with the rise of the National Front and the creation of the British Nationalist Party affected the working class in the *FWWCP*, as they attempted to understand multiculturalism for themselves. Said another way, it seemed as if the working class

was simultaneously negotiating contrasting views imposed upon them that (1) wanted class to be invisible and (2) wanted to separate the white working class from other working-class members. The problems with this separation, of course, are manifold. It first attempts to find racialized divisions within a group focused on class experiences. And it assumes that the white working class is a homogenous group—failing to recognize that it is, like all groups, a composite of identities. Still, these were the framings the *FWWCP* was actively negotiating against.

To be clear, the *FWWCP*'s alignment as a working-class, socialist, organization that was meant to be accessible to all places it in direct opposition to a far-right political party; however, what we see from this period of time is how the *FWWCP* negotiated moments when the white working-class population (a strong part of its base) was often pitted and sometimes pitted themselves against other minority groups. At times, some *FWWCP* groups were perceived as racist or at least diminishing to a non-white working class. Or, as noted in the *Republic of Letters*, some structures within the *FWWCP* became an unintended means of oppression (26). In this way, the white working class became a group that was either seemingly privileged through race and (sometimes) their citizenship or, conversely, rendered invisible, leading to both internal and external anxieties about class in an already difficult political time. Simultaneously, though, groups in the *FWWCP* were building spaces for black writers groups, designing ethnic oral history projects from immigrant populations, and creating groups based on mental health awareness, sexual identity, and gendered expression. With these opposing actions occurring in the very same group, it's important to see the *FWWCP* as both a collective unit and yet with varying (even opposing) perspectives among its groups and members.

Intentions of the *FWWCP* aside, we must see how the rhetorics within the network operated and how this complicated the goals of the *FWWCP* and shifted its ethos as a class-

bonded community. Jones' statement resonates within the *FWWCP* documents because such debates manifested through multiculturalism and its effects on class controversy, national persecution, and racial, sexual, and gendered discrimination. To be sure, multiculturalism itself is not to blame; rather, the following examples show the difficulties the *FWWCP* had in responding to a belief in "equal opportunities" in theory and the practice of such ideologies. To put it simply, the *FWWCP* was having a bit of an identity crisis, with some advocates wanting to expand working-class identity to represent additional groups and others wanting to maintain a status quo focused on the working class *only*, thereby also triggering controversy about who is privileged or silenced in such framing.

For instance, in 1986, the *FWWCP* issued an "Anti-Racist and Sexism Statement," which prompted increased attention to black and women writers specifically through the creation of a Women's Anthology, *Move Over Adam*, and a "Black Writers Day" (which I'll discuss more later). On the one hand, the previous "Equal Opportunities Statement" and the "Anti-Racist and Sexism Statement" helped create a rhetorical space for people, particularly women and black writers, to express their concerns about marginalization occurring even *within* the distinction of working-class writers. On the other hand, the labeling of women and black writers can also be limiting to populations who identify differently with a community. The goal of such distinctions, beyond class-identity, emerged because many members felt they were simultaneously discriminated against as a result of their racial or gendered identities as well. Raising awareness about these perspectives, for some, created a sense of solidarity and empowerment to negotiate their role within the organization in a new way. One member discusses how varied backgrounds "give strength to [the] common cause" of the *FWWCP* and add to the network in valuable ways:

As a Federation we meet under a common banner of 'Working Class Writers', but it must be acknowledged that all members have different backgrounds, different

problems and consequently different priorities, within the overall aims of a working class organization. These differences must be acknowledged, respected and enjoyed, because they give strength to our common cause. We welcome writers from all racial and ethnic backgrounds and believe that the Federation must reflect the strength and diversity of the working class in Britain. (Tricia)

This view and the rhetoric of “reflect[ing] the strength and diversity of the working class in Britain” harkens back to Roy Jenkins’ speech on a multicultural British society that is integrated through its diversity, rather than separated by differences. This view was also held by many *FWWCP* members, providing a local contrast to some of the more national rhetorics of white-nationalism at the time.

The rhetoric of understanding and respect circulated through documents such as the “Anti-Racist and Sexism Statement” and the “Equal Opportunities Statement” falls in line with many openly democratic facets of the *FWWCP*. However, major problems existed within these documents and the discussions surrounding them. For instance, naming racism and sexism (as well as sexuality, religion, age, nationality, etc) under the same statement without any discussion about them individually risks the conflation of too many experiences together and therefore becomes so broad that the documents often fail to adequately represent complex identity issues. By combining “Sexism” with “Anti-Racism” there is an implied statement that discrimination based on gender and race are synonymous and that they can be handled in such a way. To be sure, some *FWWCP* members wanted to bring race and gender discussions together in ways that created a sense of solidarity and commonality among members. But how about racism that occurs among women of non-black²⁷ races? Where does racism against *men* of color fall into these categories? How might we talk about sexism that occurs in connection to sexuality? In

²⁷ I use non-black here because the Anti-Racist statement specifically references black women and the creation of Black Writers Groups, but the *FWWCP* was known to have groups from Asian, black, native, Jewish, white, and mixed races. Moreover, questions of race were further complicated by distinctions of ethnicity (ex: being white, Jewish, and Russian) or distinctions within Britain between English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh backgrounds.

other words, the sweeping terminology of “Sexism” and “Anti-Racism” in a single policy fails to acknowledge the complexity of identity that occurs within the interplay of these terms and the embodiment that manifests beyond rhetoric through the lived actions of members. Importantly, the *FWWCP* was realizing that simplistic binary thinking would not adequately represent the experiences members faced. Although there were many views about women and black writers in the *FWWCP* that emphasized the benefits of highlighting such diversity, not everyone was pleased with these discussions. Overall, though, this debate folded into others that were about the core struggles of class-based identity that would continue to define the *FWWCP*.

Class Slippage or a Strengthening Federation?

The *FWWCP*, in many ways, was trying to save class identity as its foundational tenet while separating themselves from the extremes of the British Nationalist Party or National Front that were trying to gain white-working-class voters, so we must see their argument working on multiple levels. For some, taking on new cultural identities did not seem to enhance the class identity that they were so desperately attempting to advocate, and instead these identities seemed to dilute the effectiveness of class collectivity. Others advocated the necessity of intersectional identities and the ability for the Federation to strengthen from increased membership and diversity of ideas across groups of people. This in between space of not wanting to identify as something other than a class-based organization, and not wanting to be lumped into the working-class support of British nationalism, and the dialoguing which occurred here is what interests me.

Tensions continued to play out through discussions of gender and class, particularly about the extent to which new groups need to emphasize class identity. One particularly divisive debate about the existence of women’s groups came in the 25th issue of *Voices*, a magazine published by the *FWWCP* in the early years of its formation. In this issue, and throughout the

FWWCP's tenure, the question of women's roles in the group is fraught—with some men such as Jimmy McGovern (from the Scotty Roads writing group) arguing against the admittance of feminist writing groups that are not explicitly marked as working-class. At this time, an all-woman writing group called Women and Words joined the *FWWCP*, much to the distaste of some. For instance, in his piece “A Letter from Jimmy McGovern: Feminist Groups,” McGovern claims that diverging from class-based identity “risk[s] alienating people...genuine working-class women, vital to the Federation” (27). He critiques feminist work because it puts feminism as the priority (rather than class identity, as he believes should be first), but his writing also has much more bias, as he critiques feminists for their “exclusive[ness]” and makes condescending assumptions stating, “feminists would view the Federation as only a second or third string to their bow (excuse sexist metaphors), their primary concern being feminism” (28).

McGovern cautions that even though there is an “undeniably irresistible appeal of ‘unity,’ a unity of oppressed groups everywhere” the *FWWCP* cannot acquiesce to this at the expense of class-based solidarity (28). In some ways, McGovern is attempting to preserve the foundational principle of class identity within the group but his perspective doesn't acknowledge the expense at which this is continued. Perhaps the sentiment of McGovern's class-based statements might appeal to many people within the *FWWCP* or considering joining, as they understand the needs of working-class unity for change; however, his rhetoric switches to become more extreme, advocating for a “ban [on] all non-working class groups”:

So to all comrades who see the Federation as a political weapon I'd say: learn from the feminists, keep the movement exclusive; ban all non-working class groups and so ensure that we have the necessary sense of direction, the necessary common purpose, to use the resultant political clout. (28)

McGovern's rhetoric has multiple issues: first, he conflates woman and feminist (and argues feminists are an exclusive group); second, he assumes that feminists would automatically make

class identity less important than gendered experience (and then draws attention to a metaphor about a bow that he then, confusingly, makes sexist). What he fails to account for here is what some feminists would describe as intersectionality of identity (see Crenshaw), or the ways that these factors are always interwoven. Moreover, by making these claims and arguing for a ban, McGovern ironically enacts the exclusiveness and alienation that he fears, which is also contradictory to the very nature of the *FWWCP* that began with accessibility and inclusion. It would be easy to dismiss McGovern. But that wouldn't actually allow us to understand this argument about identity—particularly how working-class identity operates with other identities—that became integral to the *FWWCP*'s growth and then part of its demise.

McGovern's diminishing view of women's and feminist groups differs from other views within the *FWWCP* at this time. Women and Words write a piece following McGovern's and they advocate the *FWWCP*'s ability to sponsor women in positive ways. They see the *FWWCP* "helping to give access to writing and publishing groups in society who are generally barred from those areas, and about breaking down the notion that a writer has to be a solitary genius with a mystical gift" (29-30). The rhetoric of access and "breaking down" barriers, used by Women and Words, parallels the concept of "oppositional literacies" explained by Tett et al. because it accounts for the need to challenge traditional or hegemonic forms of literacy gatekeeping. Even more, Women and Words explain the positive impact of the *FWWCP* by writing that their group "has made a difference in [their] lives...and [they] believe that that kind of possibility should be open to everyone who wants it" (30). One of the major values of serial documents such as *Voices*, *Federation Magazine*, and *FED News* was that they provided space for the representation of both of these opinions and their disagreement.

In true *FWWCP* spirit, the tensions expressed between Jimmy McGovern and Women and Words were encouraged, and the *FWWCP* created another forum to dialogue in a later issue of *Voices* from Winter 1983/84. The debate of feminist/working-class groups grew to include all forms of what the group Scotland Road '83 calls "Separatist Groups." In this piece, Scotland Roads '83 expresses their extreme dissatisfaction for groups that have a separate focus beyond working-class identity: specifically, they use examples of feminist groups, gay writers, and black writers. Written in a collective voice, Scotland Roads '83 argues that the goal of the *FWWCP*'s Constitution was to think about how the Federation might "grow and strengthen" (24). Here, they explain that this is a difficult task, often resulting in the dilution and weakening of a community. They acknowledge the importance of political movements that draw attention to feminist issues, gay rights, black writers, but they reject the view that these groups should be part of the *FWWCP* because they see this as a cost to working-class identity:

We in Liverpool support those exclusive groups; we admire what has made them strong; and we follow their example by saying that we do not welcome them as members. Of course in our movement we have individuals who could belong to any of those other movements... We welcome them all as individuals and we value what we can learn of their oppression through their writing. But all these individuals are aware that what unites us is class (24).

Scotland Roads '83 frames the logic of their rejection of separatist groups around class-based solidarity here and then later describes this as an issue of the resources and networks available to such groups. They argue that while other marginalized groups have outlets which "cater exclusively for them outside the Federation," working-class people "only have one outlet: the Federation; and we will jealously guard it" (24). Calling upon the *FWWCP*'s Constitution as evidence, Scotland Roads '83 defends their view that Separatist groups are "unconstitutional." They create a slippery slope argument, stating that "umbrella groups" or sub categories of groups within the *FWWCP* might "spread into extremely negative consequences – such as a subgroup

devoted to ‘fascist verse’” (25). The comparison here that admitting a gay writers’ group or a women’s writing group as part of the *FWWCP* could then force the *FWWCP* to admit a fascist group seems a bit ridiculous, particularly because it fails to acknowledge any sense of agency in the groups admitted. That is, before any group was admitted, they would have a *FWWCP* Executive Committee member view the group and report back before their provisional member status was accepted or rejected. Therefore, should a group somehow enter the *FWWCP* and then focus on fascist verse, there would be mechanisms in place to reject such a group that fundamentally goes against the *FWWCP*’s Constitution. Still, to completely dismiss the claim by Scotland Roads ‘83 also overlooks important factors that shaped the *FWWCP* and their intense desire to separate themselves from the political groups with fascist views.

Rather than dismiss such a response, I want to think about the ways that working-class identity was fraught, and the ways that groups felt compelled to respond (with a range of effects, both intentional and unintentional perhaps), given the alternative of the British National Party and National Front. Rather than making an argument about the morality or ethics of this debate, I want to think about why it happened and what the effects were, in order to present the representational entanglements within the *FWWCP*. (Note: writing this currently after a Brexit vote that was largely impacted by white, working-class voters in Britain, I think it’s important to consider how class identity has functioned historically in ways that might have especially shaped the current conditions leading to Brexit.) Dismissing Scotland Roads ’83 completely does not provide any insight into why some people felt conflicted on how they might safeguard class within a social and political system that seemed to dismiss the working class. At the same time, the arguments of Scotland Roads ’83 seem to imply that the *FWWCP* should continue as a white, male-dominated group, posing extreme tensions within the whole of the *FWWCP*.

Rhetoric is important to understanding just how strongly people in the *FWWCP* felt about identity-based discussions and the fears some had of an even more extreme stance on working-class writing. In fact, Scotland Roads '83 admitted that they "have been accused of racism, sexualism and sexism" because of their attempts to keep the *FWWCP* focused on class but they explain that they "don't want to be narrow and dogmatic" in their views (25). They note the importance of the Constitution based on class: "we simply need the constitution, for the constitution enables us to stick to our aim—the encouragement of working class writing" (25). It's a bit difficult to think how a feminist group promoting women's writing might be unconstitutional. Even more, the use of such rhetoric, particularly from the standpoint of white, male writers also pits women writers as fundamentally opposed to the goals of the *FWWCP*, which I will show is inaccurate. However, the debates about nationalism and difference taking place make this rhetoric important to try to understand. This is neither a defense nor agreement of the rhetoric used by Scotland Roads '83, but I do think this shows a significant moment of dialoguing for the *FWWCP*. Given the political context, we must also think about the discourses circulating about white (read: English), working-class people. Some questions emerge from my thinking on these documents: Was Scotland Roads '83 trying to separate themselves from the white-working class mindset, ala the rhetoric of the National Front and BNP, to preventing extremist rhetoric (such as a group dedicated to "fascist verse") from entering into discussions? Was Jimmy McGovern, albeit dismissive in his gendered rhetoric, prioritizing class identity as way to support the working-class collective? Was Scotland Roads '83 relying on constitutional bases to add weight to sexist, racist, or sexuality-based views?

There are no easy answers to these questions, nor do I want to advocate for such rhetoric that even suggests dismissiveness or worse toward women²⁸ or other groups; however, this debate is important to understanding that even within the creation of an alternative working-class network such as the *FWWCP*, there were still more alternatives. There was neither pure working-class identity nor struggle, despite its collective formation and naming as the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers*. There was only the constant negotiation based on hopes for a stronger working-class identity. And because the *FWWCP* encouraged such dialoguing, there was also room for structural and discursive changes to occur.

Ultimately, conversations about race and gender eventually produced changes (of varying degrees) in the rhetoric and structure of the organization. For multiple years, the Executive Committee negotiated how to improve access for all members, and many agreed that working-class identity must be more extensive than the Federation previously allowed. One Executive member, Tricia, summed up some of the arguments for an inclusive class-identity stating,

The Federation exists for working class people and working class writing and there are black working class people and there are gay working class people who write. I think they should be encouraged along with the traditional white working class...All groups must satisfy the Exec[utive Committee]. That they are appropriate to join and a separatist group would have to prove as much as any other that they fulfilled the criteria, that is, to show they are furthering workers culture. (Tricia)

Other members throughout Executive Committee meetings in 1986 supported this statement as well, and it ultimately led to the full creation and revision of the “Anti-Racist and Sexist Statement” and an explicit addition of workshops and publications devoted a more expansive vision of working-class people, particularly at the intersections of race and gender.

²⁸ I use “women” here because this is the direct group that McGovern and Scotland Roads ‘83 discuss.

The *FWWCP* trajectory—from the original *FWWCP* Constitution to the more inclusive policy statements and even the 1991 Constitutional revision—shows how the network attempted to establish a legacy of cultural inclusion through formal genres of writing. And these genres represent basic successful practices toward inclusion. However, they weren't perfect. Such documents also create moments of conflation of identity. We see the results of such discursive conflation in a January 24, 1987 document, collaboratively written by some Executive Committee members, called "Black and Women Writers in the Fed." This document draws attention to the benefits of racial and gendered discussions and the difficulties of enacting ideas in a way that is ethically responsive to the needs of the *FWWCP*. For instance, some conversations suggested the *FWWCP* implement quotas of "black people on the executive [committee]" and a "workshop on black writers at the [Annual General Meeting]" in order to promote the work and representation of black writers (*FWWCP* "Black and Women Writers"). Additionally this document emphasized the need for all groups to "examine ways of positively encouraging black people to join, not just talk about it" (*FWWCP* "Black and Women Writers"). In this way, the Executive Committee took steps in order to openly reflect on the racial breakdown of the organizations leadership and groups. Yet, within these discussions, it was also noted that "black people and women were lumped together as a subject and that some people felt as if they might not be welcomed to attend such specific events" (*FWWCP* "Black and Women Writers"). Here, we see another instance in which the language of inclusivity fails to account for the lived experiences of stakeholders involved. Ultimately, this report concluded that "[The] Federation still has miles to go on this issue" and that "it must be stressed that these workshops are for everybody" (*FWWCP* "Black and Women Writers"). The *FWWCP* attempted to be inclusive and prioritize the experience of black and women writers through these events, but

simply adding these labels to a workshop doesn't change the social atmosphere. Hoping this discussion appeals to everyone is clearly not the same as making the *FWWCP* accessible and inclusive for all who want to be involved, which I will further describe in the following section. But such discussions did actually produce changes over time with the revision of Constitutional documents and policy statements, the inclusion of non-class based writing groups, the addition of more women, black, and immigrant Executive committee members, and the production of thematic anthologies around these identities.

Challenging the Margins

Identity struggles continued to plague the *FWWCP*. While some debates emerged specifically around racism and sexism, others drew attention to issues of class privilege, social standing, and persecution based on national identity. The increased attention to race and gender also caused tensions for the white (read: English) working-class *FWWCP* members and put them in a difficult but necessary rhetorical space to respond. To be sure, there are many ways to see how Jimmy McGovern and those in Scotland Roads '83 might be exclusive in their rhetoric. But they also acknowledge the benefits of feminism outside of a class-based group and draw attention to the power of identity politics beyond working-class movements. We must dig deeper into this controversy to understand the stakes of class discussions. That is, while there is certainly a feminist critique of such rhetoric, I'm also interested in the motivations for these statements—the motivations, that is, to defend class as the single most important identity. These tensions were arising at the same time there were implicit and explicit moves toward the erasure of class identity (or working-class identity, to be specific). With the rhetoric of multiculturalism coming up in the educational system, public policy statements, and political agendas, the question soon became: where does the working-class fit? And how is working-class culture

represented (if you even admit there is such a class culture)? Among these conversations, more questions arose in relation to what “working-class” meant and who a “worker” was. In fact, while common class background allowed the original conversations of the *FWWCP* to have a basic foundation with class identity, this original consensus collapsed through attention to multiple cultural identities (beyond class), as well as class identities that included a middle class population.

As a response to the “Equal Opportunities Statement” and subsequent discussions, the Executive committee organized a Writing Festival event in 1993 called “Writing From the Margins.” In theory, the phrasing of this title was meant to evoke a sense of solidarity and empowerment through writing that emerges “from the margins” or from those in the working-class, rather than from a position of privilege. But the very members themselves soon challenged “margin” and “privilege”. Some members felt as if the naming of this Festival proved contradictory to what was actually happening within the organization—most notably, what one member, Alan Scanlan, describes as the rise of a “middle class hierarchy.” In an open letter to the *FWWCP* Executive board, Scanlan describes how class distinctions within the *FWWCP* have become a mechanism to reify the marginalization many working-class people already felt—the marginalization the *FWWCP* originally intended to combat.

Throughout his letter, Scanlan draws attention to distinctions of class, access to education, national identity and social stigma, and, by doing so, he illustrates how the “Equal Opportunities Statement” as a policy is not always beneficial for all members when put into practice. Scanlan writes:

I see it as necessary for me to have to remind the *FWWCP* hierarchy of exactly who ‘the marginalized’ are... What is the criteria for being Marginalized? Call me old fashioned, but how about ‘poverty’ for starters? Too radical? Ok how about being educationally disadvantaged? How about being disabled? Mentally ill?

How about being one of the above and also being Irish, black, Asian? And a gay woman in to the bargain? ... I am talking about the fundamentals of deprivation, vulnerability to exploitation. A genuine-real life underclass minority, majority call it what you like, but IT IS THERE, and yeah it is 'writing from the margins'. (2)

Here and throughout, Scanlan argues that the original intentions of the *FWWCP* to provide access to writing and publishing opportunities for *all* working-class people have been co-opted by middle-class members who are taking needed resources from truly “marginalized” or “disadvantaged” working-class participants.

To support his claim that the “Equal Opportunities Statement” as a policy contradicts many of the practices of the *FWWCP*, Scanlan describes two people who would seem to have “equal” access and publishing opportunities from attending the same writing group. As Scanlan tracks the two people and the process through which they might publish their work, he explains significant differences that emerge between them. First, he notes that “Person A” is an Oxbridge graduate who is capable of using “DTP” or Desk Top Publishing and computers, arguing that these factors give Person A social capital and the chance to gain resources that others cannot. In this way, Person A has educational resources (coming from a university background), technological competency and resources for publishing and writing assistance, as well as social standing that can impact the access he has to succeed. On the other hand, Person B, Scanlan notes, does not have the same technological, social, or educational resources. Instead, Person B is a part-time, “semi skilled worker,” who left school at 14. He is also unable to use computers and is an immigrant from Ireland, “a politically persecuted minority” in England at this time (4-6). Scanlan notes that while Person A’s publication idea in the *FWWCP* writing group was indeed realized through its successful publication, Person B’s was not, due to the combination of these factors and various difficulties. Later in the letter, Scanlan self-identifies as Person B, an

Irish immigrant who does not have Desk Top Publishing capabilities nor the needed social skills and capital that have allowed Person A to succeed.

While both of these people might have “Equal Opportunities” as part of the *FWWCP*, Scanlan argues that their positions are clearly different and favor Person A in ways that actually take resources away from the marginalized members who need the resources most. He poses questions to the Executive Board asking, “What constitutes equality in opportunity for access to publication? What do you really mean or understand by ‘Access for all’ and ‘writing from the margins’” (8)? Here, Scanlan distinguishes between the original working-class ethos that formed the *FWWCP*’s foundation as a collectively marginalized population with the more current group, who accepts members with university degrees, from various social standings, and whom have multiple technological capabilities. While some might view this letter, which Scanlan wanted circulated, as a divisive letter that creates a binary between working and middle class people, Scanlan shows the nuances even within groups of working-class members (such as their capacity for technology, national background, social standing, type of education, and job status). In effect, Scanlan advocates for a continued focus on the marginalized working-class and increased transparency with resources for writing and publishing, especially before the *FWWCP* branches out to include groups of people beyond Britain (something the Executive Committee was interested in pursuing through global connections). While McGovern and Scotland Roads ‘83 took issue with umbrella groups, Scanlan recognized the intersections of identity positions among marginalized populations.

So, how might we read Scanlan’s letter in its context? First, he draws attention to what he considers the “fundamentals of deprivation, [and] vulnerability to exploitation” (2). He names such vulnerable people as those who might be viewed as “educationally disadvantaged,”

“disabled,” or “mentally ill,” while also considering how these experiences may also be compounded through other identities, such as “being Irish, black, Asian.” All of these identities contribute to a further marginalization of a working-class person, Scanlan argues. To add more to educational, physical, mental, national, and raced identities, Scanlan asks too, what it would mean to think about sexuality and gender by being “a gay woman” as well? This question acknowledges the multiple forms of discrimination that occur simultaneously within the working class and how these are compounding positions each needing consideration. Unlike McGovern and Scotland Roads writers, Scanlan admits that working-class oppression is felt across boundaries. Importantly, though, class provides the lens for these questions. Even while acknowledging each of these positions and their relation to the “margins,” Scanlan’s main purpose is to make a statement about class identity by juxtaposing how working-class and middle-class differences manifest. Ultimately, Scanlan argues that opportunities between classes are not equal, offering a scathing critique of the *FWWCP*’s practices. He concludes, “It is very easy (and hip) to talk *equal opportunities* and draft ‘lovely’ policy but implementation (especially if it interferes with your own ambitions) is another thing altogether” (10, emphasis mine). Through this example, we see there were debates about what was best for the group and how the *FWWCP* should use their resources. Scanlan’s attention to class, on the one hand, corresponds to the argument Scotland Roads ‘83 made, in that class identity is the main factor of marginalization and solidarity and should be a unifying principle for the *FWWCP*; conversely, though, Scanlan sees himself as part of an enterprise for combatting multiple oppressions felt by the working class within the complex framework of identities. He more accurately describes the positionalities (gendered, raced, educational, mental and physical ability, sexuality, national

origin, etc) that play a role in within class oppression, thereby prompting a generous reading of his ethos and goals.

These debates—with McGovern, Scotland Roads '83, Women and Words, and Scanlan—share a commonality: they are moments of the working class attempting to understand its place in a rapidly changing and even unstable political environment, morphed through competing interests of high levels of immigration, deindustrialization, identity-politics, changing educational policy, and the use of nationalistic rhetoric prompted by a government trying to fracture working-class solidarity. They are moments that arise from competing motivations within these trying times. The *FWWCP* saw the rise of a Conservative political structure under Thatcher and the additional ascent of far-right wing political groups (such as the BNP, National Front, and later the United Kingdom's Independence Party) as fundamentally opposed to their class-based struggles. And they created an organization that was by all accounts supposed to highlight the working class through a socialist and working-class enterprise. What they failed to account for, though, on a larger scale was how individuals and groups might want to think about class, and how these interests might mold the organization in ways that evolve (with varying effects) their conceptions of class struggle.

Each of the above debates provoked dialogue that dramatically shaped the nature of the *FWWCP*. In the following section, I will describe the challenges and benefits of inclusive identity-politics with an emphasis on the negotiation of gendered identity, specifically women writers in the *FWWCP*. By focusing on women writers, I am not conflating all women's experience to be the same; rather, I am attempting to show how the collective organization of the *FWWCP* functioned in different ways for different people, and how some women in particular

responded to these occurrences and identified a need to change how working-class women fit into this environment.

Part Three: Embodied Writing with a Feminist Rhetorical Lens

FWWCP archival documents, in genres such as the Constitution and policy statements, fail to represent the role of embodied work. We only get partial and limited views of how an organization dealt complexly with lived experiences. That is, beyond the formal genres, there are additional embodied moments that shape the stories. Therefore, my goal in this final section is to highlight voices from within the *FWWCP Archive* of women who were actively involved in the *FWWCP* during these discussions of Equal Opportunities, multiculturalism, and Anti Racist and Sexism Statements. At a complex time when multiculturalism was impacting public debate and far right-wing politics limited the working class, women navigated this terrain by using literacy as a means to position themselves rhetorically as writers, authors, and people worthy of a voice through their publications. I argue that women's participation in the *FWWCP* expanded gendered space even within an already complex space. Women in the *FWWCP* were advocates of institutional change, engaging in and expanding their own writing networks, often in conditions that might be hostile or indifferent to their literary production.

The role that women and their writing played in the *FWWCP* is neither singular nor easily definable. Still, there are many moments throughout the organization that evince the complicated scope of women's involvement. Notably, in *The Republic of Letters*, Sara Richardson describes how gender sometimes limited access: "many women writers in the Fed were never published. Some were performance poets. Others were not fortunate enough to attend groups where funding was available for publications" (Maguire et al. 2006). Even 20 years into the *FWWCP*'s tenure, in 1996, there is an acknowledgment that *Working Press*, a notable

FWWCP group, “had published no books about working-class women writers and was anxious to do so” (“*Writing on the Line*” 3). Based off of Richardson’s statement about lacking opportunities and McGovern’s dismissal of feminist and women’s groups, there is certainly a feminist critique of what the *FWWCP* constrained. However, the *FWWCP* as a whole has also enabled women to publish many texts and has supported their work along the way.

To analyze the work of the *FWWCP* within the context of literacy practices, specifically from populations who have rarely been studied, it is helpful to use Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s questions in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*. They ask, “How do we include—and value—ordinary women’s rhetorical activities, activities that have often been called mundane, not noteworthy, or extracurricular?” (36). The *FWWCP* represents such a site where “ordinary women” have taken part in rhetorical activities and literate acts in important ways, especially considering theorist Raymond Williams’ argument that “culture is ordinary”, as it is constructed through the “ordinary processes of human societies and human minds” (93). The questions that Royster and Kirsch ask open up the possibilities for understanding our personal connections as a method of archival work:

When we study women of the past, especially those whose voices have rarely been heard or studied by rhetoricians, how do we render their work and lives meaningful? How do we honor their traditions? How do we transport ourselves back to the time and context in which they lived, knowing full well that is not possible to see things from their vantage point? How did they frame (rather than we frame) the questions by which they navigated their own lives? (20)

To answer these questions, Royster and Kirsch deploy “critical imagination” as a tool for reflective listening and discovery, as well as a method for bringing ourselves as researchers in conversation with the texts we study. They argue critical imagination is a way to “illuminate some important questions designed to clarify the scope, nature, and principles of our work” (20). Using critical imagination, in this way, asks scholars to further recovery work by asking

questions, going back to the sources we have, and developing connections through the best of our abilities as ethical researchers. Adding an explicitly feminist lens to this discussion enables us to see how feminist rhetorics operate in these texts in complex ways, highlighting how “ordinary” women participate in literate networks and how these women “composed themselves” to harken back to Lunsford’s quotation at the beginning of this chapter. The *FWWCP* foregrounded deliberative dialogue of working-class women writers alongside the very same conversations dismissing such work. In this way, I argue the *FWWCP* network was empowering for many women because they were able to shape it and be part of the structural and ideological changes themselves. Luckily, because some of the *FWWCP* members are still alive, we have access to some of their personal perspectives and views to render their own work meaningful.

In each of the examples I discuss, women are working from multiple identities— weaving their discussions of gender, race, class, nationality, and language throughout their writing. Take for instance, these two women: Sally Flood, who (as told in Chapter Two) was an embroidery machinist, with a Jewish and Russian immigrant father. She lived in the East End area of London, diminished for its working-class and immigrant population. Sally spoke in an ostracized dialect. And she was a woman with little formal education. Florence Agbah, who I will also discuss in Chapter Four, was born in Ghana and became a British immigrant. She described herself as illiterate²⁹ until her 40s and worked in a janitorial position. Florence was unable to speak British English when she began working, so she had to negotiate ways of being a working-class, black, immigrant, woman without having many skills to communicate with her employers. Indeed, taken together, these women combatted oppressions felt through their

²⁹ Although Florence describes herself as illiterate, I believe she is discounting her storytelling abilities and the many literacies that she carries with her beyond reading and writing.

gendered, socio-economic, linguistic, geographical, religious, cultural, and educational identities. But, through their work, we also see how they were active agents in a public sphere despite oppressions felt from their non-normative positions. They shaped the *FWWCP* through individual and collaborative structures including: through their own personal histories and publication, individual writing groups, the Executive structure of the organization (serving on the *FWWCP* Executive Board), the creation of workshops, and publishing anthologies committed to women's writing.

There is a collective sense of identity—of being part of something bigger than yourself—and the responsibility for fostering the legacy for generations to come that motivated Sally, Florence, and others in ways that also empowered them to become agents to enact structural change. Such work was done understanding working-class oppression from multiple lenses. Other *FWWCP* members also took up an intersectional view of identity. For example, *FWWCP* member Tricia, in 1986 describes this view writing,

I have attempted to put forward my views that there should be space for women and black members to get together within the Federation and that this will strengthen the Federation's working class base if done correctly. I hope you don't mind but I am attempting to weave together my personal experience with my political views as I don't think the two can be separated... At the age of sixteen I was very aware of three specific oppressions. The first oppression was my class, the second was my sex, and the third was of ethnic oppression. ("Different Backgrounds")

Tricia's statement highlights what was missing from the Scotland Roads '83 argument. That is, she explains the interwoven nature of personal and political events, through the intersectionality of class, sex, and ethnic identities.³⁰ Tricia's statement was combined with the stories of other

³⁰ Intersectionality as I use it here comes from my understanding of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's use of gender, race, and class as intersecting forms of systematic oppressions. However, throughout this chapter, I am also attempting to use the voices of *FWWCP* members *as they describe themselves*, which sometimes contradicts academic descriptions. Therefore, while I acknowledge the legacy of feminist definitions and terminologies, the purpose of this chapter is to explore how the *FWWCP* composes themselves in their own language. As I move toward a book project, I want to consider

members of the *FWWCP* and presented to the Executive Committee as part of the push for an Equal Opportunities Statement and then continued discussions of revising their constitutional documents. That is, statements such as these productively reframed the goals of the *FWWCP* and impacted future structures for the organization. Beyond these structural changes, which included the production of Women's Anthologies and Workshops, and the inclusion of writing groups focused on racial, gendered, sexual identity, there were also attempts to promote more inclusive ideologies as well.

One way the *FWWCP* built on their views of accessibility and opportunities for all was through the creation of specific themed workshops, festivals, and publications, and the explicit goal of expanding their writing groups beyond England. We see these discussions throughout the meeting minutes. In 1986, for example, the Executive Committee writes in the meeting minutes,

If any members of the Federation wanted to get together they should be allowed to and even helped to do so by the Federation. Bringing interest groups together would actually give women and black people inspiration/confidence to go back into mainstream groups... Black people, gays, and women were part of the working class but often the most oppressed sections and it was naïve to assume that all are equal within the one workshop and can function on same basis. ("Agenda and Minutes")

Here, there is an admission of the multiple oppressions felt by working-class people, similar to those Tricia described in her letter. These admissions are followed with the idea that there must be a separate rhetorical space permitted for working-class people also marginalized by other identities. Subsequently, in the years after the Scotland Roads '83 debate, the *FWWCP* took steps to ensure new rhetorical opportunities for all members. A few examples of these changes include: A Black Writers' Day (1987); an anthology for women: *Move Over Adam* (1990); the

how I might represent these tensions of naming and how I can position my own work, which draws heavily from feminist scholars. Yet, in doing collaborative projects, I also want to be cognizant of the naming I use. For instance, while I am informed by feminist work, the *FWWCP* and *FED* have a strained relationship with this term, and I want to be ethical in how I represent my collective work with these groups.

inclusion of new member groups that expanded the scope of the *FWWCP* internationally. One group Buchu Books was located in South Africa and joined the *FWWCP* in 1991. Another group CREAFI was located in France. Additionally, a group from 1992 called the *Ethnic Oral History Project*, located in London, was devoted to telling the history of British immigrants through multiple languages. The geographic spread of the *FWWCP* was also complemented through a transformation in publications, now with varying themes, such as the creation of a special Women's Issue for *FEDeration Magazine* in 1996. There is an explicit move in each of these moments to expand the *FWWCP*'s understanding of working-class identity.

The *FWWCP* Executive Committee had an idea that "Bringing interest groups together would actually give women and black people inspiration/confidence to go back into mainstream groups" ("Agenda and Minutes"). It is difficult to prove a cause and effect relationship here, but I want to pick up on the ways that women gained confidence through *FWWCP*, which did lead to their increased participation in the organization as a whole. Throughout her time in the *FWWCP*, Sally Flood was an advocate for women's writing as both a personal and collaborative enterprise. Indeed, her work functioned in ways that she describes as personally empowering but also structurally important to entire network. For instance, Sally was part of the founding group in 1976, she has been a constant part of the Executive Board throughout her 30 plus year tenure, and she organized and edited the first Women's Anthology in 1990, *Move Over Adam*. In the *FWWCP*'s early years, Sally Flood wrote "Working Together Alone", a piece in which she notes the importance for working-class women writers to "tak[e] history back where it belongs—with the people" (12). Here, she describes the cultural significance of the *FWWCP* creating a "working-class structure":

Most people in the Federation stick to material they know and understand, and so a working class structure is formed. Established literary groups when approached

poo-pooed the idea that writing coming from the lower classes could be relevant to 'Literature'. It has since become clear that working class writing is not only relevant to the times we live in, but is culture at its very roots... (12)

Further, she notes that her own participation with the *FWWCP* has influenced her identity as a woman:

We hope that women's participation will become even stronger in the future. This is not detrimental to men, as we plan an even balance. I would like to say here that since becoming part of the Federation I have enjoyed a freedom I never had before. I travel to parts of the country that were once only names on the map (with my husband's approval). I know several other women who feel the same. (12)

While there is an interesting nod to her husband's approval here, Sally describes a positive sense of women's participation in the *FWWCP*. Even more, she built on these views over the years – even into her 90s! – to continue her writing, recruit new members, and change the structure of the *FWWCP* to be more welcoming for women.

Sally has advocated for the inclusion of working-class women and has been an agent of change through her personal publications as well as the group efforts that she has led. For instance, she took a lead role in the creation and organization of *Move Over Adam: A Women's Anthology*. This was a significant book within the *FWWCP* that circulated and received positive responses. In the book's introduction, the editors note,

This anthology is the result of a project embarked upon by a collective of women in the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. The idea arose from a successful women's day on women's writing, organized by the *FWWCP*. Women were asked to submit scripts. The response was good and the final selection, published here, we hope reflects the rich variety of the Federation's membership. (Women of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers 4)

To be sure, *Move Over Adam* was a collaborative effort that only existed because women participated in a variety of stages (from Sally and others wanting to create the anthology, to the entire *FWWCP* Executive committee organizing a women's day, all the participants attending the

workshop, and then women actually submitting their work to be published). Ultimately, through these steps, we see how women's involvement and the support of this participation impacted the *FWWCP* and its history of publications. Moreover, this legacy slowly changed the ethos of the *FWWCP* to be more welcoming to women writers, compared to the prior decade.

Through the *FWWCP* community, Sally gained confidence about her literacy because she saw herself as a writer, literacy user, as someone who had valid stories to tell. This began with her membership as part of the *Basement Writers* and continues even today. Sally's personal account of the *FWWCP* is a life-altering sense of community that enabled her texts to be published, but her poetry often invokes a solemn tone, as she grapples with being overwhelmed as a mother, scared by all the crime in her neighborhood, and exploited as a factory worker. This confidence allowed her to bring this history forward and to put it into words that circulated beyond her own mind. This confidence translated into changing material conditions as well. Sally describes how her participation enabled her to quit her factory job and continue writing as a means of work:

I must tell you I went through a phase, and I didn't realize it, where I was teaching because I was writing and eventually had to give up being a machinist and had to become...you know...teaching creative writing, reminiscence and that type of thing and then I did arts and crafts, so I didn't need to sit behind a machine. And that was in later life. And that would never have happened without the Federation behind me cause I wouldn't have the confidence. But, yes, they have given me a lot of confidence. (Flood "Interview at Fed Festival")

Confidence, here, represents inclusion in a community that changes how Sally participates in the world around her. Leaving school at 14 did not deter Sally from succeeding in the *FWWCP* and building her network beyond to become a teacher of writing for other groups, a published author, and an advocate for working-class writers.

In the same way that Sally talks about gaining confidence and changing her material conditions so, too, do other *FWWCP* women members. Florence Agbah, an *FWWCP* Executive committee member and Director of *FWWCP* member-group Pecket Well College, describes similar feelings. In fact, the collaborative sponsorship of community writing groups such as the Chapeltown Community Centre and Pecket enabled Florence to write her very first life history that otherwise would not have been produced. In the introduction to her autobiographical text, *The Survivor*, Florence admits how her work was made possible through Pecket's member groups: "I always wanted to write a book but I couldn't read and write. So I joined the group at Chapel town Community Centre... Without them my story would have never been told" (no page).

The story Florence begins with is about her childhood in Ghana. She describes growing up and always wanting to go to school, but she had to stay home because she was too young. However, after following her siblings to school day after day, the teacher finally let her attend the classes as well. One day, there was a horrible accident, as she and her siblings were crossing the road to get some water. Her younger brother got scared as he saw a timber truck and stayed in the middle of the road, causing her older sister to attempt to drag him to safety. Devastatingly, they both ended up being hit and killed, causing Florence's entire family to fall apart in many ways—her father tried to hang himself and some blamed Florence. She writes:

I felt that it was my fault that they got killed because if I was not determined to go to school, none of that would have happened...I've also felt I've been punished because by going to school, I was being selfish, thinking about myself, nobody else...if I hadn't involved my baby brother in the school, he would have been alive today. That guilt was at the back of my head...So when my mother started hating me, I felt 'it's OK, because I am the one to blame.' (15-20)

In this intense and heart-felt admission, Florence puts into words what she said she had often kept inside, never wanting to share with anybody. She even connects this guilt and punishment to

her not being able to read: “Up till now, when I think about it, I still think I am the one to blame. And sometimes when I’m trying to read, I’ve felt, perhaps, I’ve been punished by God or something. Maybe that’s why I can’t read still. Because since everything happened I haven’t tried to read” (21-23). Florence, in her younger years, saw education as the most important thing in her life. But, after the accident, Florence connected education with selfishness and trauma. The material conditions of her family life seemed to reify these beliefs as she explains how life changed after the accident. Her family had to move multiple times, never enabling her to find a place to go to school. Finally, it was too late and her parents said she was “too old” for an education (23). Florence doesn’t talk about the years in between, but in her next book, *Ways of Learning*, we see that she has moved on to England and is a grown woman, still illiterate. But this time, she doesn’t even speak the language of where she is living. After moving to England in 1966, Florence received a janitorial job at the local YMCA. She barely spoke British English at this time, and she was struggled to fit in, worrying she would lose her job. Even more, she felt burdened by her past’s effect on her education.

Writing groups like Chapletown Community Centre and Pecket changed Florence’s views on writing and education. Whereas she originally saw her illiteracy as a punishment, she switches to understanding it as something meaningful and even healing: “But of course now I am determined to read and write. I want to put everything that happened behind me because I’ve suffered enough... So, I am a survivor and I think I would like to call this story ‘The...The Survivor’” (24-25). Here, and in Florence’s interview on the Pecket website, she discusses the importance of reading and writing to her now and what it means to her on a daily basis. Florence describes not being able to understand how to get money in or out of the bank because she couldn’t write or read the prompts. Then, when banks switched to ATMs, she couldn’t

understand the machines and it swallowed her card, leaving her embarrassed at the need to ask for help (Agbah “The Hole”). Rather than keep this story a secret, Florence shares these things because she sees what the communities at Chapletown Community Centre and Pecket have enabled her to do and how they have encouraged her to take matters into her own hands with her education. Similarly to Sally, Florence’s personal story has a larger scope of impact. Indeed, she eventually used her individual connection to writing to change structures within the organization of the *FWWCP* and Pecket. She participated in and advocated for the representation of black women writers in the *FWWCP*. Florence also became one of the Directors at Pecket, a completely user-led college for adult basic education, their first paid outreach worker, and participated in the *FWWCP* Executive Committee. She held these positions, still being in the process of learning how to read and write.

The literacies encouraged by the *FWWCP* for Florence also enabled her to change her material conditions, moving from a janitorial job to the paid outreach position where she was advocating for people like herself with difficulties in learning. Although this is not a large part of the discussion, Florence notes that she was also one of the only black women at Pecket at the time, and she felt empowered through this and her ability to connect with others rather than to be seen as someone completely different. Florence’s life story represents multiple instances of increasing her rhetorical and literate activities that have subsequently led to more agentive positions as a writer, an author and publisher, an outreach worker, and a director.

The mix of selves represented in the work of Sally Flood and Florence Agbah show us how these women deployed rhetoric and engaged in the production of writing that they circulated as a vehicle for personal agency and public consumption. Through their leadership roles, they created communal spaces for women and other minorities to participate in the *FWWCP*. The

communities they came into, and helped maintain, provided them each with a vehicle to deploy their own rhetoric on life experiences, while also advocating for institutional change.

Learning from the *FWWCP*'s Response to Multiculturalism, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunities

The *FWWCP* archival documents allow us to track how the Federation developed as a working-class collective within an unstable political environment and then adapt to a changing membership base from a predominantly English, white, male group of writers to a transnational and multicultural group that highlighted diverse languages, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, and cultures. This process involved plenty of conflict, invoked through power relations between identity politics, rhetorics of multiculturalism, and the enactment of equal opportunities. As we see from the revisions of the Constitution and other policy documents, there was tension concerning how to negotiate working-class identity from a variety of racial, cultural, gendered, and educational backgrounds. In other instances, the *FWWCP* had to think about how groups dedicated to women's rights, black writers' identity, gay writers, or mental health awareness would fit in without altering the founding mission of the group. In effect, with the inclusion of each group, the *FWWCP* both gained examples about working-class narratives and widened the scope of its reach in meaningful but complicating ways. From this context, questions emerged with both pragmatically and ideologically driven perspectives, having to do with what it means to be working-class, and how this identity might change when we consider the gendered/raced/sexualized embodiment of members.

What we learn is this: the *FWWCP* was complex, diverse, and expansive. It was a network of community writers that evolved across geopolitical spaces, from within working-class identities, and among decades of social change in ways that complicate notions of literacy, community histories, and community work. And it was a working-class organization that had

problems negotiating its own identity. But when the political landscape favored others, the *FWWCP* created avenues to self-sponsor their writing, furthering an evolving sense of working-class communities. Within the collective, which was itself an alternative structure, we also see how sub groups arise, challenge, and change this structure. We see, for instance, how women deploy rhetoric in complex ways that enable them to have a sense of agency, authorial voice and/or writerly ethos, to develop community structures around literacy. The *FWWCP* created spaces for them to share their stories and find confidence and a public voice through their own life histories and poetry, which also combated the hegemonic structures.

When many people and institutions discounted the working class, the *FWWCP* “composed themselves” in a way that challenged traditional forms of bureaucracy and intellectualism, by negotiating working-class discourses, ideologies, and social activity for themselves. As we move forward in Writing Studies, these women and the intricate network in place through the *FWWCP* groups provide examples of how self-sponsored groups create rhetorical space and can make structural changes to challenge dominant views of literacy and identity. I’ve shown how the *FWWCP* created and revised their own working-class cultural space to support their own needs and values on the level of the *Federation* as a whole, but in the following chapter I will explain how this national framework was enacted on a local level, by one member-group (Pecket Well College).

Chapter Four: “Biscit” Politics: Building Working-Class Educational Spaces From the Ground Up

Imagine a moment in 1984, when a group of about ten British, working-class, adult learners, most of whom had severe difficulties with reading and writing, were banned from the premises of their adult education center, Horton House, for a spelling error on a poster: “biscits.” After experiencing years of social and educational marginalization, these working-class adult learners were ironically dismissed from the very structure meant to enable their learning because of this misspelled word. The funding and support for their weekly magazine group was cut off,

and they were unable to be at Horton House without a tutor present. Although these events could have been devastating, the “biscits incident,” as it became known, represents a pivotal moment of collective organizing in support of these learners’ intellectual and political vision about themselves as citizens and literacy users—a moment of “powerful literacies,” that illustrates how these learners decided to “ac[t] back against the forces that limit their lives” (Tett et al. 5).

The “biscits incident” set many events into motion. First, the adult learners within the magazine group at Horton House went to the town hall in order to try and save their group. They were given a one-year reprieve at this time; however, this still meant that the adult learners would be out of a working space and support soon enough. The adult learners and their tutor were unhappy with this situation and wanted to find a different structure for their work over the next few months and for their long-term educational ambitions. The desire for change, particularly in the form of increased agency and decision making, led the learners and their tutor to brainstorm how they might create a new learning environment. These changes took multiple forms over the next few years: the group held meetings in people’s houses as they planned how they could support their own education; they raised funds through jumble sales; and, they made connections with local organizations in order to acquire a more permanent space to meet. Through these practical steps, they also began to establish a community that valued collaborative learning and challenged power dynamics that privileged only some learners. In fact, these values prompted the learners to form activist networks, advocate for an expanded sense of agency for their marginalized community, and ultimately create Britain’s first user-led residential college for adult learners: Pecket Well College (hereafter, Pecket³¹).

³¹ The use of “Pecket” illustrates how members choose to name and represent themselves as a collective. In most examples that I will use, Pecket has decided to write in a collective voice rather than be acknowledged individually.

Pecket was both an individual organization, with policies unique to itself, as well as member group within the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* network from 1991 through 2007 and the part of the new formation of the FED until 2014. While the previous chapters focused on how the *FWWCP* organized a national working-class space, this chapter turns to this local group in West Yorkshire, England, trying to do similar work. In Chapter Three, I explored how the *FWWCP* crafted a working-class identity through its formation and through the creation and revision of its own administrative documents. We saw the frictions of class identity and the subsequent responses of the group. Pecket emerges within these discussions as a group firmly rooted by working-class ideals but also deeply influenced by their identity as adults in basic education, or learners with difficulty in numbers and letters. If Chapter Three shows us the formation and subsequent division or layering of a class-based network (into women's groups, black writers groups, gay writers groups, immigrant writers groups), this chapter situates Pecket as a subgroup under the *FWWCP* umbrella, committed to adult basic education.

Pecket is localized example of a member group that self-built an organization and curriculum, showing us even more new forms of literacy in relation to the *FWWCP*. Most notable about Pecket's development was that it was a college where members with various literacy levels and educational experiences were the founders, as well as leaders for the facilitation, teaching, management, and direction of the organization. Said another way, people who had difficulties with reading and writing, some of whom were even illiterate,³² created this residential college and kept it going for nearly 30 years. And they did so in a the same political

³² Most members dislike the term "literacy" because they were often framed negatively as being "illiterate," as I indicate here. However, I use these terms in order to describe the affordances of the group's work, their capabilities, and to show how Pecket breaks this binary of il/literacy.

environment previously discussed, led by Margaret Thatcher, which was actively destroying many working-class institutions in the name of neoliberalism. In this way, the very creation of Pecket can be seen as a form of working-class collective politics. Pecket was indeed a member group of the *FWWCP*, but it is also distinct within the network because of its structure as a residential college, which I'll describe here.

Pecket demands our attention, then, as it represents the type of history that too often rests at the outskirts of our field's discussions of community literacy and disciplinary histories. Indeed, Pecket shows us how a group of working-class, adult learners formed an educational community that functioned through collective organizing, peer learning, and a belief in equal participation. It demonstrates how such beliefs enabled them to use writing in ways that were useful for their own rhetorical purposes and social needs, including the creation of written products, educational workshops, and courses. Pecket demonstrates how people in marginalized positions have collectively developed literate and rhetorical skills to combat an educational system that excluded them for years and to resist a political moment that was working to dismantle collective organizing by the working class. As such, Pecket's self-directed model of literacy challenges traditional notions of expertise, redefines who participates in intellectual and knowledge-creation work, and re-envision pedagogical tools and curriculum based on community desires, abilities, and agency.

Locating Literacy Education in Working-Class Spaces

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, there are many examples of scholars tackling revisionist histories, aimed at uncovering people, identities, and communities that have been disregarded within our disciplinary focus. For instance, David Gold discusses how the field has productively expanded to include "alternative rhetorical traditions and sites of instruction and

production” through historiography and archival work that challenges dominant ideologies and historical constructions of the discipline (16). In recent years, scholars have used historiographic methodologies in ways that transcend disciplinary, gendered, racial, and sexual borders, by reclaiming writing done from marginalized gendered identities (Glenn and Enoch; Jarratt; Rawson) and positioning historiography at the intersection of gender and race (Enoch; Royster). Less prevalent within these revisionist discussions, though, is the focus on sustained grassroots literacy sites and communities that were initiated without university assistance, particularly with a majority of adults who struggled with reading and writing.

Indeed, currently the dominant examples of such grassroots organizing for educational purposes are the Highlander Folk School and the subsequent emergence of the Sea Island Citizenship Schools. Myles Horton co-founded Highlander to connect education with social change in Appalachia to “help the disadvantaged of all races help themselves, to challenge the status quo in the name of democracy and brotherhood” (Jacobs 4); this idea of education later prompted the Sea Island Citizenship Schools, which provided assistance for African Americans to develop the literacy skills needed to vote, as well as prompted community-organized education. These examples provide clear articulations for how self-motivated and self-directed groups might be founded on the concept of literacy instruction that is disconnected from formal institutions (Branch; Kates; Lathan; Schneider) and aligns instead with more informal spaces of writing development. These examples highlight organic approaches toward literacy because these communities had to respond to the exigencies around them and develop skills that fit their needs within a given moment. In effect, they used literacy rhetorically to achieve a particular social purpose, such as to vote or to create different educational spaces.

Yet, beyond such examples, our field knows little of such work, despite its potential importance. Just to remind: Susan Kates argues that scholars must still do more to explore the origins of literacy practices beyond the university, particularly in regard to “the ways in which individuals who were pushed to the margins of our educational system, in various historical moments, learned to read and write” (500). Kates suggests the importance of community literacy practices centers on “understanding how individuals learned to read and write within the context of larger political and social goals” (500). Indeed, a model that we haven’t looked at enough is how alternative forms of literacy and education have grown from largely self-organized and self-sustained collective efforts. And, too often, this failure comes at the expense of recognizing the bodies and populations that are still being marginalized in our classrooms and our scholarship—particularly, the working class.

This chapter demonstrates how Pecket aligns with stories of working-class exclusion and resistance—of literacies and people that have been at the margins and have sustained themselves. Class, as we saw with the *FWWCP* in Chapter three, is deeply embedded within power structures and other identity factors. But class is also difficult to understand in many cases – it is a felt experience, often easily hid or glossed over. Pecket provides us with a context in which to expand community literacy to include people from working-class backgrounds that negotiate and enact literacy beyond traditional educational spaces in order to bring working-class experience to the forefront. The history and model of Pecket allows us to expand notions of disciplinary histories and community literacy, by demonstrating how a working-class community, with difficulties reading and writing, developed their own grassroots writing, literacy, and educational efforts.

An Ethos of Class Collectivity: From Sponsored to Sponsors

Pecket's "origin" story is both interesting and complex, since many would locate the group's beginning in different moments between 1982 and 1992, with multiple informative moments dating back to the 1970s. These dates trace the beginning of Pecket from the small group meetings (emerging from the Horton House magazine group) through its eventual transformation into the user-led and directed Pecket Well College. At the heart of these moments was the democratic ideal and hope for "more inclusive education," especially for people who had limited access to education or were "tackling difficulties with the written word and/or numbers" (Ross 3). These learners fought for the rights to expand their education and, in turn, structured a learning community, with *their* interests at the forefront. On their website, Pecket writes, "most of us are working class adults who missed out on education and have difficulties with reading, writing and/or numbers. Some of us have improved our skills but others still find these a real struggle. This reality has affected every area of our lives—social, education, financial and our health (physical and emotional)" (Pecket Learning Community).

It would be easy to frame Pecket with a romanticized view of its heroic efforts against educational marginalization; however, the struggles they faced are part of an ongoing public battle between educational access and social realities for many working-class learners. Just as the larger *FWWCP* network faced what Jones calls "an all-out assault on the pillars of working-class Britain," Pecket and its members were struggling with these changes in a particular geographic area that was reliant on the very industries being dismantled – such as coal mining and manufacturing (10). Although I'll describe multiple locations for Pecket, they were all within the Yorkshire region. Between the late 1970s and 1990s, the main years of the *FWWCP*, Yorkshire experienced an extensive amount of industrial change that would affect the social environment for years to come in the predominantly working-class region. For instance, in the years after

1984, Yorkshire was plagued by coal mining pit closures that caused strikes across the nation and led to working-class political action. In “Imagined Communities and Imagined Mining Communities,” David Gilbert describes what the miners’ strike of 1984-5 meant to the industrial community:

For the left in Britain it marked a rediscovery of the potency of community-based collective action. The mining communities were seen as bastions against a Thatcherite capitalism in which the market destroyed not only jobs and industries, but also whole ways of life. The character of oppositional politics in the mining communities seemed to point to alternatives to traditional parliamentary and industrial strategies. (49)

While Gilbert focuses his essay on mining communities, his argument echoes initiatives that were taken up by the *FWWCP* and Pecket in relation to constructing cultural histories of the working class as more than “one-dimensional” (49). Within the *FWWCP*, groups from Yorkshire, took action through writing and protests against the mining pit closures. The Barnsley Miners’ Wives Action Group, for instance, published a book called *We Struggled to Laugh* in 1987, which documented the strikes from the perspective of miners and miners’ wives. In a time when neoliberal rhetorics and policies focused on individual responsibility, working-class people used writing to advocate for themselves by bringing their voices to the forefront.

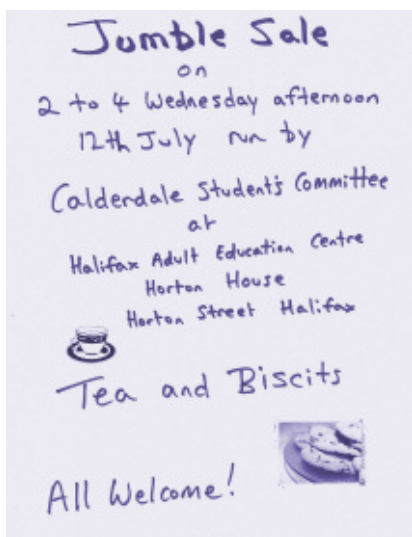
Tom Woodin addresses how this political landscape involved adult education and publishing efforts in the United Kingdom, noting the “On the Move” campaign that arose from a belief that learners could participate in their own literacy development, and even in the production of educational texts, to increase their sense of educational agency (“Building” 358). During the 1980s, this mission was advanced by organizations that were part of the adult basic education students’ movement and shared connections with Pecketwellians³³, such as Write First

³³ Pecketwellian is a term used to signal someone who has taken part in the Pecket Well community.

Time and Gatehouse (see: Woodin “A Beginner”). Each of these organizations attempted to provide opportunities for all learners, especially those regarded as requiring “remedial education,” to participate and experience writing workshops and other social activities focused on literacy such as in public writing or reading events, publications, and writing weekends (Ross 11). Pecket, then, grew out of a moment of conflicting social and economic concerns by working-class people, with the hopes of the community collectively advocating for their own agency as learners and civic participants. The external political and social exigencies compelled these learners, in the face of a radical destruction of working-class institutions, to create a space where working-class individuals would be able to take part in their own education through a profound restructuring of education as a user-led initiative.

For many Pecketwellians, the “biscits” story represents a seminal moment because it illustrates an ideological stand against the authorities; it represents a moment of educational agency. This moment also encapsulates many of their (and the general movement’s) values—particularly a belief in taking action through collective organizing, and the idea that everyone deserves a say in their education. Without this moment, Pecket might never have existed. Horton House had been a space where adults with reading and writing difficulties came together in a cooperative learning environment to publish a magazine, *Not Written Off*. The goals of this group were not only about improving literacy but also about providing a public component for adult education. Between 1982-1984, six issues were published, each issue crafted, edited, and formatted by the learners themselves with the help of an adult educator Gillian Frost who was also their tutor. This collaboration allowed the group to negotiate literacy development as a communal activity and gain confidence in their ability to participate in an educational project without being “written off,” as their title suggests.

Although Horton House participants were very positive about these experiences, a changing managerial structure in 1984, led to the pivotal “biscits” moment. Frost explains this incident in Pecket’s oral history, *Telling It*, noting that the adult learners hoped to raise money to purchase a tape recorder to make taking minutes easier. The events transpired into something much different, when the adult learners started advertising their jumble sale to raise money:



I got a phone call one day from the education shop worker... He said, what’s this, what happened, how come you’ve allowed out this poster with a spelling mistake in it? It was biscuits, it’s very easy to make a spelling mistake with biscuits, and leave out the silent ‘U.’ *I said it’s nothing to do with me actually, if they want me to correct it they know they can come and ask me and I’ll do it, but they haven’t done and I haven’t got authority over them.* I suggested that this was a good way of learning that, as with the fruit and veg stall holders labels in the market, it doesn’t have to be spelt perfectly to achieve its objective. This was too mind blowing for adult education. Here was a group in adult education...your job is to get it right. *But a tutor didn’t have authority over them....* (Ross 20-21, emphasis mine)³⁴

Figure 6: Biscits Poster
Photo credit: Pecket Learning Community

As we see from Frost’s retelling, the worker at Horton House believed that circulating posters with a misspelt word diminished the center’s value and would not sponsor it. Frost and the group, however, felt it was their right to use their own language, not as a mistake but as a rhetorical choice that still functioned adequately for the poster’s purpose.

It might seem like a foolish choice for Frost and the learners to reject correcting their mistake, simply for the sake of retaining Horton House’s sponsorship. However, as an advocate of democratic and reciprocal learning, in which each student gets a say in the group’s decisions, Frost saw herself as a supporter, not enforcer, of the group’s collective efforts. This view also

³⁴ Spelling choices made by Pecketwellians are kept throughout this chapter,

aligned with the ethos and agency the adult learners wanted for themselves. To be sure, this confrontation goes deeper than a simple spelling error. Rather, it points to the intersection of language standardization, authority, and the marginalization of working-class individuals.

This was a moment of resistance—a moment where people who had been marginalized for many years in their educational experiences decided to take control and renegotiate authority to their benefit, a moment when the *unauthorized* authorized themselves. Acting within the political milieu of the time, this self-authorization enabled the learners to negotiate sponsorship and promote their own agendas. To start, the learners enacted a form of “powerful literacies” by “deciding for themselves what is ‘really useful literacy’ [,] and using it to act...on their circumstances to take greater control over them” as Tett et al. describe (4). In doing so, these learners also enacted power over the standard of spelling (and the ideologies that went along with it) to show their ability to function successfully through their own ways of writing and communicating. For these people—some of whom grew up illiterate or had difficulties with learning and were subsequently marginalized from educational opportunities—standardization was their adversary, not their motivation. Consequently, this moment marked a shift in their collective desire to change the conditions surrounding their authority as learners. Peckettwellian Billy Breeze describes this confrontation stating, “I said to the Education Centre, yeah, because it’s the way we spell it. You can’t alter it” (Ross 21). Here, Breeze draws attention to a dialect difference between “the way we spell it” of the adult learners and the worker’s standard, which led to a sense of collective agency for the group, as well as an active attempt to change the hierarchical structure of their environment to one that privileged the learners.

This spelling dispute was the fuel that pushed Horton House participants to advocate for a learning environment where they could determine the rules. Moving away from Horton House

represents an evolving sense of sponsorship that departs from simply relying on the management. It also moves away from neoliberal ideas that focus on individual attainments and responsibilities. Instead, it frames Pecket's work within the possibilities of forming a collective in order to create and sustain a form of self-directed and user-led education—a collective self-sponsorship. This was the beginning of building Pecket—a group that defied a system based on social status and previous education and began working outside of an established educational paradigm toward one that respects learners' choices and rhetorical agency.³⁵

At this point, however, Pecket as an official establishment did not exist, but the individuals from Horton House's magazine group continued to meet and discuss how to improve their educational experiences. Reflecting on this time, Pecketwellian Michelle Baynes describes the group's dream of re-defining education to enable a student-led enterprise and create their own college:

We talked about our idea and asked if people thought it was feasible to run a college that was 'student led'—run by and for people who couldn't read and write—they said yes! Lots of other people thought it couldn't be done and some today probably wouldn't believe we did it but we had already had a taste that freedom and—we wanted that for other people like us. (Ross 24)

What emerged during these meetings (post-“biscits incident”) was a desire to generate a user-led environment through a collective community rather than an institutional partnership. This model complicates notions of literacy sponsorship, described by Deborah Brandt, because the community both actively denied Horton House's financial and educational sponsorship and then aggressively pursued a means to develop their own version of sponsorship as a community enterprise. Brandt notes that literacy sponsors “set the terms for access to literacy and wield

³⁵ This tension with language was also represented in the United States' college education policies and the struggle to not overturn the Students' Rights to Their Own Language, a resolution that encouraged teachers to seek to understand linguistic disparities and to make these differences a useful part of learning, rather than a means of deficit or exclusion.

powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty” (166). Sponsors, she writes, “are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes. Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners” (167). While Brandt’s examples here rely on the outside sponsor-as-authority, Pecket subverted this power structure and, instead, chose to form their own internal collective and oppositional sponsorship network based on “economies” (read non-neoliberal economies) that were relevant to and supportive of them.³⁶

To succeed, then, Pecket had to create a sponsorship network where they were the authority. Importantly, the adult learners of *Not Written Off* recognized there was a growing network that might support (and join) their efforts at gaining full agency of their education. Many of the founding members, including Ann Greenwood, Michael Callaghan, Portia Fincham, Joe Flanagan, Peter Goode, Betty Legg and Joan Keighley and Gillian Frost, were each involved in other educational opportunities that were looking to push the boundaries of Britain’s educational system.³⁷ The activist political climate of the time fed into their belief in an education pointed toward civic engagement where all learners were central. It was during this time, too, that they realized Pecket needed a physical presence in the community—a college building to call their own. This desire inspired them to apply for grants from the Yorkshire Arts Association, European Social Funds, the Rural Development Commission, the Lottery Fund, and a New Directions Programme through the University of Bradford Access Unit. Through these

³⁶ In *Literacy, Economy, and Power: Writing and Research after Literacy in American Lives*, scholars have complicated Brandt’s work to explore “how the concept of sponsorship been appropriated and used” (3). This work touches on the need for universities to undergo ideological shifts, but Pecket pushes on these examples, thinking about sponsorship that is self-directed by the community.

³⁷ See Ross for additional Pecket members.

initiatives, members acquired enough money to fund and remodel a building in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, which would become the physical structure of Pecket. This work was done through what I will later refer to as “the humbling of traditional intellectuals”—that is, while using financial, physical, and intellectual resources from multiple supporters, Pecketwellians retained power over their vision.

Pecket’s Archive Project Director, Pol Nugent (the same woman who took me in on my first visit to England) explains how the group accomplished significant work as a result of this self-directed environment. They worked tirelessly to raise funds for modifying the building, accommodating wheelchair needs, and sustaining their unique learning practices. Such direction, Nugent says, led to the physical creation of new and inclusive learning spaces, which provided the “courage and support to help learners begin writing and reading again” in their adult years. And, in effect, many Pecketwellians left with “a sense of confidence” gained from these interactions—confidence that cannot be discounted, as it also transferred in material ways to people traveling for the first time beyond West Yorkshire, managing budgets, having director roles, and sharing their skills (Nugent). This sense of felt confidence that led to personal and structural changes parallels the confidence discussed by *FWWCP* member Sally Flood in previous chapters and *FWWCP* member and Pecketwellian Florence Agbah.



Figure 7: The original Pecket Well College
(photo credits: Pecket Learning Community)

Figure 8: Opening Day 1992, Pecket Well College

These accomplishments officially manifested in 1992, when Pecket consisted of a user-led learning community housed within a physical building. Over 400 people celebrated Pecket Well College's opening as Britain's first residential college for Basic Education (Pecket Well College, *Opening*). Pecketwellian Corrine John evinces both the struggles and joys of what this day represented for many community members. She describes the intense labors that went into establishing Pecket, as well as her shift from seeing literacy as "frightening" to something she could actively take a part in and develop with Pecket's educational model:

For seven long years a fight we've had/ with lots of troubles but now we are glad/
The openin day of Pecket Well/ Is here to stay so ring that bell/ We thank the
people who have fought/ For those in need of being taught./ Don't be shy and hide
in a cold corner/ Come and make friends its also warmer/ Learning can be hard
but please don't run/ At Pecket Well you are taught by fun/ Once you start
learning you'll want more/ So please do come and knock on the door/ Words that
look long and frightening too/ Soon learning comes easy for me and you/With
numbers and letters, reading and writing/ Not knowing where it might be leading/
Extending our skills Thirsting for knowledge./ You never know we could make it
to college. (Pecket Well College, *Opening*)

For many other members, as well, this opening was the defining moment in Pecket's legacy because it established a physical presence in the community, legitimating both a physical (the building) and discursive structure (user-led curriculum) premised on the interests and needs of the learners themselves. Pecket sustained this work from 1992 until about 2009³⁸, with thousands of people involved in Pecket's courses as "founder members, participants, Directors, volunteers, paid workers or partner organisations" (Ross 3).

Learning "The Pecket Way": Democratic Practices and Organic Intellectuals

³⁸ Although the physical structure of Pecket Well College was sold in 2009, the money from the building went on to preserve the legacy and community of Pecket through an oral history and archival project that continued through 2014.

After establishing the physical college space, Pecket was able to expand their collective approach to learning. “The Pecket Way” became a fluid set of pedagogical tools for learners to enact a democratic vision of participatory learning – a model that has implications both within and beyond traditional educational spaces because it introduces a unique sense of community-based power and agency.

Before discussing “The Pecket Way,” however, it should not be forgotten that many of Pecket’s members expressed severe difficulties reading and writing. For this reason, I argue Pecket—through their embodied work of developing their own curriculum/college—can be understood as exemplifying a version of what Antonio Gramsci calls *organic intellectuals*. He writes, “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals...” (9). Indeed, Gramsci notes how intellectuals are often categorized through their schooling and the vertical nature of moving up the grade scale; this represents the stratifying nature of traditional education and a version of sponsorship that relies on an authoritative institution and person (or group). However, as Gramsci notes, organic intellectuals materialize not in the “social function” of what jobs people do, but rather through their participation with the masses, through important collective organizational efforts to meet their real life needs (9). In effect, the foundation of organic intellectual work comes from groups, like Pecket, that actively engage with the needs of a community and produce structural change, like a residential college, though perhaps not the complete economic change Gramsci might have ultimately sought.

Gramsci’s discussion of traditional and organic intellectuals provides a valuable framework for understanding Pecket’s impact. The term “organic intellectuals” represents the

belief that all people have meaningful experiences, which could inform others and contribute to the organization's collective effort. Pecketwellian Joe Flannagan writes:

The first thing people want to know is 'who's in charge,' but we have to make it clear, we all are. I'm responsible for what I'm doing. The help is there if I need it. We are not here as students or tutors. We are all here to work together and to learn from each other. Those labels have gone out the door. (Pecket Well College "Forging" 229)

In essence, what made Pecket distinctive was that a group of community members self-organized, identified their goals and needs, and created a learning environment that focused on the assets that all members bring. They were organic intellectuals who saw the affordances of social organizing in order to build a collective educational structure that would benefit adults who had been unjustly located in a stratum of society based on their working-class identity and educational difficulties. For the remainder of this section, I will draw on Gramsci's work to articulate three strategies that were central to Pecket's success: 1. Recognizing organic intellectuals; 2. Humbling traditional intellectuals; 3. Building a new Common Sense Curriculum.

Recognizing Organic Intellectuals

Most Pecketwellians were working from severely disadvantaged economic conditions, as well as challenged educational and personal backgrounds. But Pecket operated under "a belief that everyone had skills" (Ross 47), which meant the courses were most often led and directed by individuals who were working on their writing and reading. Therefore, they were able to take the idea of organic intellectuals, and organize and build on that through their peer learning strategies, to dispel the idea that only certain people have the expertise to teach. In effect, the awareness and belief in their own abilities allowed Pecket to operate on an asset-based model of learning. This ideal was represented in the structure, naming, and daily activities of the organization.

One way Pecket distributed learning instruction was through the use of tools aimed at inclusion. Because many learners had different needs, Pecketwellians were devoted to discovering ways of enabling productive learning environments. One such tool was a “writing hand” or a scribe that volunteered to write down the words of someone who may not have been able to write or wanted someone else to assist in this process (Ross 49). A writing hand was not meant to standardize or diminish the person speaking but rather to provide a method for support that allowed everyone a chance to get their speaking into writing. The role of a writing hand required a professional and caring relationship with the learner, formed out of mutual respect. As described by Pol Nugent, the writing hand was important in helping learners find their own confidence in their education: “there was a very acute awareness of how people’s confidence had been knocked down by educational institutions and other life experiences. The Pecket Way of working was about not making those situations worse” (qtd. in Ross 50). Here, the writing hand was a rhetorical approach—a response to the needs of the learners, in order to allow everyone to participate in learning, especially by recognizing that learning and rhetorical work can happen through variations of orality, writing, and collaboration.

Pecket also used other teaching techniques to encourage each learner to interact and make meaning. “Journey sticks,” for instance, were used as a physical reminder for learners when they went on group walks (Ross 50). Members could pick up a stick (or other objects), bring them back to the building, and use them for memory aides when sharing their stories. For instance, members would attach objects to their stick that represented key moments along the way. The goal was to use the objects as a physical reminder of their embodied learning experience and to encourage personal reflection and emotions in their own learning development—something few Pecketwellians ever experienced. That is, Pecketwellians often tried to make learning more

tangible through kinesthetic activities, such as creating posters, magazines, quilts, and banners, which allowed learners to express ideas with multiple materials and moved beyond a solely text-based method of learning.

Pecket also believed in the benefits of “Life Stories,” where learners would narrate their intellectual and personal histories. These written productions functioned as a form of testimony of working-class experience and education, representing, for many, the first time they were ever asked to talk about “what mattered to them” (Nugent). Indeed, Life Stories were the first opportunity in their educational history that gave Pecketwellians a chance describe their difficulties in a safe environment and contribute to something on their own, showing that their life experiences mattered. Eventually, Life Stories became a way for Pecket to publish and circulate their writing as a collaborative endeavor and represented the first significant written work many of these learners had ever accomplished in their life.³⁹ The pedagogical aim was to enable people to discuss and reflect on their experiences and learn from each other. Such methods emphasized that everybody is an active participant, an organic intellectual, as they worked together as co-creators of knowledge.

Notably, these learning practices often transformed lives in both material and ideological ways, prompting opportunities for Pecketwellians that were not possible before. As mentioned in Chapter three, Florence Agbah became associated with Pecket after she immigrated to Britain from Ghana. At Pecket, Agbah took classes where she worked with “writing hands” and published two life histories about family struggles as well as her working-life as an immigrant janitor who could not read, write, or speak much British English. Agbah’s Life Stories *The Survivor* and *Ways of Learning* detail moments of personal trauma, social stigma, financial

³⁹ See <http://pecket.org/journey-sticks/first-published-life-story/>

constraints, and shifting geographic locations as she describes how such factors affected her educational development. While Agbah is the first to admit that her reading and writing did not always progress as quickly as she would like, her experiences represent the rhetorical literacy skills she acquired throughout her years at Pecket. For example, the process of collaboratively talking about, creating, revising, and publishing these stories enabled her to share her testimony with a broader group of people. These developing communication skills spurred material results (the production of her work in two publications and a job) as well as an ideological shift in her own confidence, ability, and agency.

Eventually, Agbah became a Director at Pecket and began working with the *FWWCP* Executive Committee. She was also Pecket's first paid outreach worker because she understood the needs of adult learners. She described the importance of this position stating:

My job was working with people like myself. Finding them and bringing them to Pecket to work on their reading and writing. It wasn't easy... It is frightening to be going somewhere to work on your reading and writing because you always think you are the only one...I was treated equally – sometimes I forgot I couldn't read and write! I know what other participants feel like – I can relate to them. But if you are someone who has had a good education you can't do that. (qtd. in Ross 44)

In this way, Agbah's story represents how Pecket implicitly embodies organic intellectual work, by privileging Agbah's knowledge and ability to do outreach over that of a traditionally educated person. By paying her to do this work, Pecket illustrates a commitment to knowledges formed from life experiences and the recognition of intelligence beyond the social function of individuals.

Humbling Traditional Intellectuals

Since its emergence, Pecket has demonstrated a commitment to valuing all learners and building from their abilities to make the organization run effectively. For while working to

improve their own reading and writing, members maintained agency over decisions throughout the process of organizing Pecket's learning community. Pecketwellians designed the board of directors so that community members outnumbered traditional intellectuals. As stated in their constitution: "a majority of directors must have reading and writing difficulties themselves and other directors should be people who supported our aims and ways of working" (Ross 32).

Significant, here, is how forcefully Pecketwellians advocated for the dismantling of the hierarchy of traditional expertise. This does not mean that professional workers or scholars were not welcome. In fact, Pecket had members from universities that were involved in various ways. Rather, it represents a valuing of Pecket's agency. As one member expressed, even when there were traditional intellectuals around, "You didn't call them tutors, you called them on a first name basis and if they didn't like it they had to just lump it you know. [If] Anyone said I'm a tutor, ah—no, not going to call you tutor. We didn't want to be called students because we wasn't students, we was learners. So they were workers and learners—that was the language" (qtd. in Ross 47). Here, the change in discourse from "tutor" to "worker" and from "students" to "learners" signifies a deeper ideological valuing of all participants.

Instead of treating one person as the standard of knowledge, Pecket actively worked toward emphasizing every person's ability to share different knowledge and skills—a method that was put to test many times throughout its tenure. For instance, while looking into a charitable status, Pecket hired John Coles, later deemed "Uncle John," because the group needed someone to "put gobbledygook legal language into everyday language so that those of [us] who were going to be a director of Pecket would understand what were required of [them], what [they] had to do by law" (qtd. in Ross 30). Here, Pecketwellians asked the legal professional or "expert" to assist them in taking an active part in understanding all aspects of the organization. In

this way, there was a distinct attempt to negotiate authority so their desires would not be co-opted; said another way, although Pecket had multiple financial, educational, and professional sponsors, the goal was always for Pecket to maintain agency. Here again, Gramsci might usefully articulate the importance of such a strategy. Gramsci writes, “One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and conquer ‘ideologically’ the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals” (10). In this way, Gramsci describes how groups can better attain a dominant position by developing their own organic intellectuals and using that base as a means to convert “traditional intellectuals” to their cause. Such seems to be the case with Pecket.

For Pecket, the humbling of traditional intellectuals was about advocacy and access for members themselves. For instance, as Pecket developed courses and expanded their network, they were constantly reflecting on how to highlight their own strengths. In their policy document “What We Mean By ‘Access,’” Pecketwellians write, “What we are about is self-advocacy and self-organization. We work alongside carefully chosen professionals when we need their knowledge and advice... [W]e value our own knowledge and experience, and that of others like ourselves” (1). Advocacy, here, means that Pecket privileges the experiences and knowledges they know but build on this with the assistance of others. For those who might doubt the effectiveness of such a strategy, Pecket responds with their ability to network locally, nationally, and internationally, stating:

Don’t think this means that we are unable to work in a ‘professional’ way. We are organized and are spreading our ideas and ways of working locally, nationally, and internationally. By networking (making links with others to share ideas,

experience, contacts, and resources) we can get a clear picture of advances being made in adult basic and community education. (2)

Through this statement, Pecket confirms their ability to work with others in order to build on their own ideas and develop their organization in meaningful ways. One way that Pecket relied on their own knowledge is to develop accessible courses, based on members' own experiences and needs. For instance, one member of the Management Committee relied on wheelchair access and expressed the importance for those with physical disabilities to have a space where they can "be safe and able to find where everything is for ourselves" (1). That is, Pecket developed with the belief that access is about physical accommodations and, importantly, an ideology and practice of respect for different abilities: "Access is about...our attitudes, how we talk to and treat each other, decisions we make, and planning ahead" (1). Similar to how the *FWWCP* created their own ways to talk about class identity, Pecket developed inclusive rhetoric as well as practices to promote their views.

Finally, Mary Hamilton, Pauline Nugent, and Nick Pollard reference the choice of using the term "college" in order to challenge traditional perspectives of learning. They note Pecketwellians saying that Pecket is "not an ordinary college," and that learning "could take a lifetime," because everyone learns at different paces, which is why Pecket was about "every participant...having a say in their own learning" (Hamilton et al. 17). In effect, Pecketwellians were a part of organizing and negotiating their own methods of support, evincing the ability of working-class individuals to mobilize and create spaces of agency for their own learning. Therefore, we can see how Pecket adamantly pursued an expansive notion of *intellectuals*, even naming their learning community Pecket Well College, flipping the expectations associated with traditional educational structures.

Within this structure of highlighting organic intellectuals and humbling the power of traditional intellectuals, Pecket demonstrates a new model for collective self-sponsorship in which the community members have an expanded sense of agency. Each of these examples shows how Pecketwellians successfully navigated multiple positions in the growth and development of Pecket. Even more, these moments represent numerous rhetorical tactics Pecketwellians used in order to maintain their own sense of sponsorship. To be sure, Pecket did receive assistance from traditional intellectual and institutional sources of funding, but they did so while staying true to Pecket's values and structure. In fact, Pecket represents a model of partnership work that relied on the agency, organizing efforts, and rhetorically savvy skills of the learners themselves.

Building A New Common Sense Curriculum

Ultimately, Gramsci saw the need to reframe "common sense" values in working-class terms against hegemonic structures (199), and Pecket did this. Similar to his belief that individuals do not need to have the social role of an intellectual to *be* an intellectual, Gramsci's idea of common sense proposes a critique of hegemonic ruling structures and advocates a dismantling of the status quo to establish a new "common sense." This idea of a new "common sense" applies to Pecketwellians' need to separate themselves from the standard educational structures and create their own curriculum. It is this organizing piece, referenced by Gramsci as the organic intellectuals who come together to counter hegemonic notions of education and intellectualism, which separates Pecket from most traditional learning models during this time in the United Kingdom as well as the United States.

For Pecket, this came in the model of Residential Education courses, or a curriculum that emerged from the community. Pecket became part of a network of residential experiences, where

learners would stay at the college overnight or for multiple-day workshops as part of an immersive learning experience. In Pecket's history, they have participated and organized such residential events called "Sharing Dreams," "One World to Share," "As We See Ourselves" and others. These workshops were geared toward participant engagement with themes around identity, community, and understanding themselves in relation to the world around them.

"Sharing Dreams," for instance, was a weekend residential course in 1987 at Northern College in Barnsley. During this time, the participants co-facilitated workshops on topics ranging from "photography, poetry, life stories, what matters to you, art, sing out, Handicapped Awareness, Black writers, Young Writers, Women's writer groups" (Pecket Well College *Sharing*).

Subsequently, these workshops culminated in a publication entitled *Sharing Dreams*, which was then sold for £3 to help with fundraising efforts. Thus, the workshop's effects extended beyond the weekend, as the community publication gave Pecketwellians material to circulate and continue dialoguing about the importance of adult education. In this way, Residential Education offered sites of learning that moved beyond traditional educational spaces and into community spaces and activities; this model emerged from a sense of democratic sensibility that all participants can contribute to the learning at hand, thereby actively shaping the cultural conditions around them.

These attempts to support a new "common sense," a new curriculum, expanded as Pecket grew. Over time, local newspapers, the BBC, and even international organizations recognized Pecket's success as a new learning structure and activist organization for basic education. One of the main examples of Pecket's active intervention in the conservative educational system came in 1990, when Pecketwellians Corrine John and Peter Goode were invited to Holland for a literacy conference. Hosted by the Bossche School voor Volwassenen, this conference brought

together an international network of adult learners to discuss their experiences and highlight the ways adult learners across the world were breaking down barriers in their communities. This conference solidified Pecket's advocacy for adult basic education and represented an official moment where Pecket was not in a marginalized position but a valid and legitimate group to be honored and invited to share their learning techniques. In essence, this was a moment where traditional intellectuals realized that organic intellectuals like Pecketwellians were doing valuable work. To be sure, Pecketwellians already saw themselves as legitimate; this conference, however, represented a changing paradigm in international adult basic literacy views where traditionally defined intellectuals did as well.

As a result of their conference visit, Paulo Freire endorsed Pecket's work in a documentary called *Liberating Literacy*. And it is easy to see why, since Pecket's model highlighted the connection between democracy and liberation, what Freire calls, "that specifically human act of intervening in the world" (99). Freire's view of education is about changing a society—not only through our thinking but also through the material realities and challenges faced each day—to understand that economics and rights and access to education and healthcare or employment are all a part of the socially constructed world we live in. Moreover, Freire expresses the ability for education to have "a 'directive' vocation," which "addresses itself to dreams, ideals, utopias, objectives, to what [he has called] the 'political' nature of education" (100). Education, therefore, embodies not only material constraints and challenges but also the immense possibilities afforded through human interaction. Pecket adhered to a similar vision of activism focused on improving educational opportunities for adult learners—significant for learning development, occupational skill improvement, and community-literacy growth—and used those same skills to engage in daily civic participation. Intervening in the world, for Pecket,

was also equally about creating a self-sponsored community of learners that could (and did) experience personal and political change as part of this supportive educational environment.

Pecketwellian Corrine John explains the personal significance of Pecket on her life as well as the material changes it prompted. She states,

Oh [my life] changed a lot. I ended up getting a job after 12 years out of work. I ended up passing me driving test. And I got certificates for IT work. Pecket opened the door for me and it just kept opening, just kept moving to doors that opened...When you went to Pecket, we were all one. We were all the same...There was always something that someone else could help me. And we got the answer in the end. We didn't have anybody over you. You decided what you wanted to learn. (John)

Here, John notes just a few of the defining factors of Pecket's organizational structure and how this community model was central in providing her with confidence, a support structure for her learning, and ultimately a renewed sense of her learning abilities. First, it was built around a democratic view that represented the interests of all learners, regardless of their educational experiences or personal identity. Next, Pecket's solidarity and sense of collective ownership created a base for seeing literacy as a collaborative and reciprocal learning endeavor, as well as rhetorically contingent upon what the community wanted to accomplish. And, finally, each person who came to Pecket was met with the right that all people can and deserve to learn.

Pecket, as a community of learners, helped John push past the stigma of literacy difficulties and enabled her to get a job and a license, become a peer-learner and leader within Pecket's workshops, and attend an international literacy conference as an invited guest. Similar to John's explanation of what Pecket provided for her, one founding member described Pecket as such:

“It's meant the privilege of witnessing and of experiencing myself the transformation, and for me Pecket was a little utopia, it was how society should be. It was how people should relate to each

other. It was power used together and for something, rather than power used over above and against” (qtd. in Ross 94).

Implications for Working-Class Literacies and Alternative Histories

I want to reflect on Susan Kates’ claim that “we still know very little about the ways in which individuals who were pushed to the margins of our educational system... learned to read and write” (500). Pecket’s story provides a version of such a history of individuals pushed to the margins of education, focusing on working-class British adult learners who were, indeed, consistently “pushed to the margins” because of their class status and educational experiences. And I would argue that by exploring how Pecket generated a new vision of agency and organic intellectuals, the work of these writers reorients what histories we include in our field, as well as provides an expanded sense of how we understand community literacy efforts within working-class communities. Indeed, through Pecket, we see valuable examples of how working-class communities develop literate skills in highly rhetorical ways—by creating a unique and democratic model of education, by recognizing themselves as organic intellectuals, humbling the authority traditional intellectuals had over their organization, and by building a curriculum for themselves.

Pecket also expands our sense of community literacy practices. That is, it provides an important self-generated example of literacy practices of non-experts creating an alternative educational space with new criteria for literacy and education that are often not recognized in our scholarship: organizational, vernacular, and pedagogical literacies.

- We can see *organizational literacy* in the examples where members consistently organized as a group in order to learn how to build and manage their own college. Here, they were able to establish ways to fundraise, provide outreach, and ultimately develop from a small magazine group into a residential college under their own leadership.

- We can see *vernacular literacies* represented from the earliest moments of the biscuits incident, where members advocated for writing and language that was representative of their dialects and experiences, even if that went against standardized language rules. On a larger scale, though, vernacular literacies are represented through Pecket's collaborative publishing of "Life Stories," which focus on each writer's personal testimony. This work was also expanded through collaborative publications created after residential sessions. Each of these publications focused on celebrating the language of the learners in their own right and often provided an outlet to discuss important social and political issues.
- Finally, we can see Pecket's *pedagogical literacies* developed through years of creating their own curriculum and teaching "The Pecket Way" in residential courses through the use of learning tools such as Journey Sticks, Writing Hands, and other collaborative techniques that enable learners to engage in knowledge-production in multiple ways.

To be sure, these examples of organizational, vernacular, and pedagogical literacies create an expansive understanding of literacy that might even gain criticism as being sweeping statements about the term. My goal, however, is not to generalize literacy to mean everything, but rather use these categories as examples for how we might change *where* we look when we think about literacy, *how* we look for examples, and *who* we include in literacy discussions. If we understand Pecket in this way, we see a community located at the margins, which challenges traditional models of agency that often rely on university sponsorship and authority, as well as redefines who can be intellectuals by embodying organic intellectuals themselves. This provides an expanded sense of agency that we don't often see in moments of community partnership, where the community is in charge and has the ability to negotiate their wants, needs, values, and skills.

In doing so, Pecket also demonstrates a working model of how communities can create new strategic spaces that interrupt our usual stories about community partnerships. While many scholars have already troubled the idea of partnership work,⁴⁰ arguing that we need approaches

⁴⁰ Scholars have written about the intersections between university and community structures via the *public turn* and community engagement projects, particularly thinking through the ethical and logistic questions of working with communities (Deans et al.; Goldblatt; Mathieu; Parks; Restaino and Cella). These projects show us multiple models for conceptualizing community work,

that focus on community needs rather than university interests, none of these models emerged organically from the community. Often we “trouble” university-directed efforts – humbling our goals but not our intellectual dominance. From our current day disciplinary viewpoint, Pecket’s model reminds us of the importance of community-generated values and curriculum, meaning scholarly interests taking a backseat to community interests and desires; it demands that the community hold the power. Pecket’s model emerges from the learners themselves. With Pecket, we see how communities can and do organically create their own model of collective self-sponsored learning, as well as some challenges they face along the way. A strong belief in the agency of a collective organization gave Pecket power to dictate what they want, thereby flipping the model of interaction to fit their needs. At the heart of the biscuits incident was an understanding that working-class, adult learners have rhetorical agency that does not have to adhere to standardized or traditional notions or expectations with education. In community literacy work, we can continue to expand our understanding of literacy by highlighting people, literacies, and the knowledges that circulate within communities but are continually pushed aside—particularly that of the working class. Rather than thinking of this as a hierarchy of knowledge, a community organization model such as Pecket shows us how they reframed legal, tutoring, and funding expertise (among other things), in order to be of use *to* the community. This moves beyond seeing communities as lacking, as Pecket shows what is possible with an entire population of learners who were systematically described in negative ways based on their

but they provide a vision of literacy and sponsorship that relies on institutional support more so than self-directed work like Pecket’s.

educational abilities and socio-economic status, and rather seeks to reframe or negotiate a model that pulls from all the available means of collaborative enterprises.

Many times, we might see ourselves as bringing in a curriculum, but Pecket built their own. We might see ourselves as being leaders, but Pecket directed themselves. And we might see ourselves as dispelling hierarchies of education, but Pecket already built a college to do that. In effect, to promote more sustainable environments, it might first take a shift in what histories we explore and how we understand our role within the community in relation to the agency that they have already created.

Following on these insights about Pecket, the following chapter will discuss the negotiation of community and university partnerships that account for community agency in digital preservation projects. Before Pecket officially ended, they gained enough money to create their own digital archive, which houses interviews, oral histories, publications, images, and curriculum tools. In effect, the *vernacular*, *organizational*, and *pedagogical* literacies Pecket used can now be circulated through their digital creation. The goal of this archive was the preservation of their legacy and the continued circulation, use, and improvement of their learning tools. Pecket hired someone who could do the technical web work, but Pecketwellians were involved at every stage, deciding how they wanted to be represented digitally. In fact, during my first visit to Pecket, I sat in on meetings where they discussed the accessibility of the website, thinking about how the text might be enlarged for people with trouble seeing. This process of community-input and vision parallels the digital archival work I continue to do with the *FWWCP*'s digital collection – such work that builds on the collaborative methodologies of Chapter two and the visions of *FWWCP* members, while also exploring new strategies for partnership work within the preservation of working-class histories.

Chapter 5: Re-animating the *FWWCP* through a Digital Collection

Perhaps little within this dissertation centered on working-class writing in England signals a direct link to conversations in the digital humanities. In fact, the very types of writing I discussed in connection with the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* were premised on low tech and low cost forms of writing and printing; this writing was meant to be

accessible to the *FWWCP* and other working-class people. In their purest form, the content of the publications, as well as the labor and technology that went into producing them represented a radical form of democratic publishing. Publishing under these material conditions during the 1970s was an active response to the very conditions that shaped the working class at the time. These same conditions, however, created a problem for the *FWWCP* years later when they wanted to make their work accessible to a larger audience and preserve it for future use: as the group saw a decline in membership, they remained hopeful that its impact might continue and spread through the produced materials. But, as I described in previous chapters, material conditions—shaped by finances, members' health, lack of technological resources—proved less promising. The first step toward remedying this problem was the creation of printed archives at London Metropolitan University and Syracuse University. The allocation of a physical archival space at London Metropolitan University's *Trades Union Congress* Library certainly lays the foundation for the preservation of these texts. Yet, this physical preservation still presents complications for accessibility and circulation being located in London with only one printed version of each text.

The *FWWCP* archive is dependent upon the physical movement of people to its site at LMU – something not always possible. A second form of circulation, then, became the representation of the *FWWCP* in a digital format, which would provide the means to catalogue and circulate information, accessible to people across the globe at no cost for users.

Enter, the digital humanities. In 2015, we began the creation of the *FWWCP Digital Collection* (see: *FWWCP Digital Collection*), a website which consists of background information about the *FWWCP* Archive at London Metropolitan University, and, most importantly, a searchable database of *FWWCP* texts by various production elements (author,

title, publisher, region, medium) and thematic qualities (gender, class, migration, conflict, basic education). In some ways, the creation of the *FWWCP Digital Collection* provides answers to many of the problems of the *FWWCP*'s legacy: a digital format affords the potential circulation of the *FWWCP*'s work among scholars, teachers, *FWWCP* members, and community organizations. At least for the foreseeable future, there will also be a record of events and publications about the *FWWCP*— a record that might otherwise be unknown or inaccessible if someone cannot physically get to London Metropolitan University or Syracuse University.

Digitization enables the sharing of resources and the circulation of works published by the *FWWCP* through a simple web search accessible to audiences across continents. This move toward digitization creates a central location for the *FWWCP* information while providing a mechanism for securing a version of these documents in a moment of uncertainty within universities themselves undergoing budget cuts and threats to the humanities. Yet, digitization is not a wholesale answer to the needs of the organization. Just as creating the physical archive necessitated flexibility in archival methods to account for materiality and collaboration across communities, so too does the creation of a digital archive. While digital archival methods take collaborative methods into account, I want to consider how the *FWWCP Digital Collection* expands our methods and community partnerships. Because the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is still in its early stages, I see this chapter as a means to think through what's at stake with the transition of print to digital texts on a theoretical and methodological level, as well as within the context of the material conditions of this specific project.

This chapter, then, intervenes in questions of accessibility and circulation of lesser-known literacies through digital archives. In this chapter, I first present an overview of and digital archival terminology to show the interdisciplinary nature of this work. Then, I explain

five models of digital projects specific to Writing Studies, illustrating the theoretical and methodological importance of such work but its continued need for circulation. Next, I describe community-based models of digital archival collaboration using Pecket as an example. Finally, I situate the *FWWCP Digital Collection* project within this framework, showing the hopes of collaboratively building this site with community members within our specific material conditions. Ultimately, I argue that collaboration, connectivity, and inclusivity of multiple people and knowledges must shape the digital work we do, in order to make our methods and methodologies responsive to the communities with whom we work.

Overview of (Digital) Archives: What are they? And what might they be used for?

Under the framework of the digital humanities, there are many scholars thinking about the naming, use, and scope of digital archives (see: Owens; Price; Ridolfo et al.; Theimer). In this section, I'll provide a brief overview of this work to situate the *FWWCP* within it so that I can later explore how the *FWWCP* provides a new model. One of the main tensions under the purview of digital humanities and archival work rests in the naming and categorization of activities. Terminology can evolve over time due to changes in technologies, or can be shaped by the communities that use terms uniquely. These discursive negotiations are sometimes pragmatic, but they can also signify ideological or disciplinary shifts. A large portion of digital archival work, then, rests in contextualization – of the project, the content, the people involved in the project and their backgrounds (disciplinary or otherwise), and the goals of the digital representation. Trevor Owens, a Digital Archivist at the Library of Congress talks about the challenges of using the term “archive” in his blog “What Do you Mean by Archive? Genres of Usage for Digital Preservers.” Owens argues that the archive is the “most fraught term in digital preservation” because of the varying ways people across disciplines use it to mean different

things, including: record management; web archive; the papers of a person, or organization; a collection of digital artifacts (1). Rather than arguing for one proper usage of the term, Owens delineates varying usages and believes in an expansive view of archives, as long as we contextualize them.

Kate Theimer, archivist and author of the popular blog *ArchivesNext*, also takes interest in the disconnect between how digital humanists and archivists use the term “archives,” in her piece “Archives in Context and as Context.” Similar to Owens, Theimer stresses the impact of contextualization: “What concerns me is that in the broadening of ‘archives’ to extend to any digital collection of surrogates there is the potential for a loss of understanding and appreciation of the historical context that archives preserve in their collections, and the unique role that archives play as custodians of materials in this context” (6). These conversations intersect with each part of my dissertation, as I think through the complexities of creating a digital representation of the *FWWCP*, given both the historical struggles of network’s formation and the circumstances throughout the printed archive’s creation.

Naming formations carry with them ideological connotations and practical constraints. Part of this chapter, then, is to understand these im/explicit nuances and consider how the *FWWCP* is portrayed digitally to diverse audiences. In the article “Edition, Project, Database, Archive, Thematic Research Collection: What’s in a Name?,” Kenneth Price discusses how each of the terms in his title carry over from past work in textual studies but also shape the future of digital scholarship. Naming of projects, while necessary, presents pragmatic concerns about description and understanding for potential users of a body of work. Beyond pragmatics, though, the terminology we use also represents categories that hold trails of association from how other people (and disciplines) use them, or differentiate their work. Still, Price determines that the

terms most available to us do not provide much help, noting: “*Project* is amorphous; *archive* and *edition* are heavy with associations carried over from print culture; *database* is both too limiting and too misleading in its connotations; and *digital thematic research collection* lacks a memorable ring and pithiness” (1). Ultimately, Price proposes the addition of the term *arsenal* to the lexicon of digital scholarship because of its focus as a “house of manufacture, workshop” (10). Describing digital sites as places for workshopping and building, as Price does, seems to project possibilities for collaborative archival processes. While I appreciate Price’s new naming attempts, my work with the *FWWCP* incorporates various uses of *project*, *archive*, and *collection*.

As we (myself, Steve Parks, LMU Librarian Jeff Howarth, and the FED Executive Committee) came together to think of the digital representation of the *FWWCP*, we were faced with decisions about what to call it, along the lines of what Kenneth Price notes. In some ways, the digital representation forced us to reflect (and even challenge) the naming of the printed materials, which from the early years of the *FWWCP*’s tenure was deemed an *archive*. (When the *FWWCP* had an official location and office workers in Stoke-on-Trent, it was standard for groups to send one copy of their work here to house in the *FWWCP*’s office for a future archive project). Despite this history, the naming of the *FWWCP*’s print archive at the *Trades Union Congress* Library is complex. We were negotiating across disciplines and audiences, including Writing Studies scholars, librarians, and community members. And, we were also contending with international differences. For scholars in Writing Studies, the use of *archives* has typically been expansive, representing a found box of letters under a bed, to a collection of student texts, to documents in a formal archival site. The inclusivity of these examples presents a minor challenge for the printed and digital representation of such work across audiences, especially

with disciplines more strictly interpreting the usage. On their website, the Society of American Archivists describes the term *archives*:

The word *archives* (usually written with a lower case *a* and sometimes referred to in the singular, as *archive*) refers to the permanently valuable records—such as letters, reports, accounts, minute books, draft and final manuscripts, and photographs—of people, businesses, and government. These records are kept because they have continuing value to the creating agency and to other potential users. They are the documentary evidence of past events. They are the facts we use to interpret and understand history. (“What Are Archives?”)

The materials I used throughout this dissertation included letters, reports, financial accounts, minutes, and manuscripts used within and created by *FWWCP* members. In this way, the above definition is true for the *FWWCP* materials to be named *an archive*. However, administrative documents and correspondence comprise only a fraction of the full *FWWCP* printed materials, with the majority being the *FWWCP* publications in the form of poetry, chapbooks, life histories, autobiographies, and anthologies. Moreover, at the beginning of the negotiations with the *TUC* Library, librarian Jeff Howarth was more interested in the publications, as opposed to the administrative documents, because the publications represent the heart of the *FWWCP* with its alternative community publishing. That is, as a librarian, he was distinguishing between the administrative documents as *archival* material and the publications as a *collection* outside of that terminology. After my own sorting of hundreds of administrative papers, however, it became clear that there was also rich material couched in these administrative documents, correspondence about meetings, letters between member groups, and within the application files. For these reasons, the *TUC* Library agreed to house the entirety of these documents and publications, but the naming is still full of debate.

That is, while the *FWWCP* printed archive does, indeed, represent an archive for the *FED* Executive Committee and scholars like myself in Writing Studies, it is also distinguishable

within the context of the other collections at the *TUC* Library, thus creating the formal designation of the *FWWCP Collection* and the colloquial use (by the *FED* Executive Committee and *FWWCP* members themselves) as the *FWWCP Archive*. The naming falls in line with Trevor Owens' distinction of "Collection," which "clearly implies materials that have been assembled and intentionally brought together" (5). Owens also notes that "the purpose of an archives as traditionally defined is to preserve materials in their original context (or at least 'the organizational, functional, and operational circumstances surrounding materials' creation, receipt, storage, or use, and its relationship to other materials)" but that archivists clearly recognize that this is one way materials can be interpreted and not the only way (5). Given the lineage of the *FWWCP*'s materials and its subsequent arrangement with the *TUC*, the naming of the *FWWCP*'s digital representation required some reflection and negotiation to think about stakeholders across the project. Ultimately, *collection* represents a broader naming that reaches across disciplinary purposes and was agreed on by the parties involved. Because the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is an interdisciplinary project with an array of sponsors and participants, I wanted to situate this project within conversations about digital humanities, archival work, and then connect this work to writing studies.

Digital Archives in Writing Studies

Digital archives are beginning to define the disciplinary work we do. As knowledge making increasingly relies on digital archives, scholars need to understand the troubled and troubling roots of archives if they're to understand the instrumental, historical and cultural significance of the pieces therein.

– Cushman, "Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive"

Archival work, as Ellen Cushman explains, pushes us to think not only about the historical and cultural lineage of the texts we use but also the materiality such work represents. Materiality of archival digital spaces affords the opportunity to circulate lesser-known histories.

For the *FWWCP*, this focus on materiality is imperative to their cultural legacy. A fear embedded within their archival work (both print and digital) is that the histories of the *FWWCP* must continue to be circulated or risk being lost. This fear and the possibilities for combatting it rely extensively on the use of digital technologies and methods.

Jim Ridolfo and William Hart Davidson note in their 2015 collection *Rhetoric and the Digital Humanities* the term *digital humanities* has not had much exposure in the field, until recently. Now, *digital humanities* provides for the intersection of disciplinary interests including writing with digital publishing, software studies, automated text analysis, user-centered web design, and digital archives, to name a few. I'm particularly interested in how digital humanities work, via digital archives, has been taken up in the field. While I am unaware of Writing Studies scholars who have built printed archives to the extent of the *FWWCP Archive* at the *Trades Union Congress* Library focusing on community literacy projects, there are a handful of scholars in Writing Studies digitizing texts and forming versions of digital collections, focused on the creation/curation of archival documents.

A strong aim of this digital creation/curation work involves the preservation of histories that might not otherwise be salvaged. In their chapter, "In, Through, and About the Archive: What Digitization (Dis)Allows," Tarez Samra Graban, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne and Whitney Myers explore the benefits of digital projects for historical recovery. In particular, Graban et al. use this chapter to articulate a methodology about the possibilities (and challenges) of digitization that views "the archive as a critical rhetorical space," specifically aimed at "testing theories about how texts migrate among discourse communities and new practices come into being" (233). I will pull from their methodology later on to show how this as an example of what has been integrated through the building of the *FWWCP Digital Collection*, but this view of

digital archives provides a means to understand the circulation of texts within disciplinary publics and beyond. Recent years have provoked multiple digital archival projects, including the use of born-digital texts and, more traditionally, texts that have been digitized. Digital archival work has expanded the scope of the field extensively, with thematic texts ranging from transgender experience to civil rights history to local literacy movements in East Texas to the Samaritan community. Apart from these themes, Writing Studies scholars have also argued for the need to explore the decolonization of archival work (Cushman), the use of digital tools for feminist historiography (Enoch “Coalition Talk”), the ephemerality of pop-up archives (Rice and Rice), the use of multimodality to think across print/digital archival representations (Neal et al.), and the need for accessible user-center interfaces (Potts).

With the proliferation of digital and archival scholarship in Writing Studies, we must continue to explore methods of access and sustainability for collaborative projects. While digital archival work prioritizes preservation, the continued maintenance and circulation of artifacts is invariable affected by multiple components of funding, technological resources, sponsors, and, quite simply, the use or engagement of such artifacts. In Writing Studies, there have been numerous discussions and attempts at digital archival work, but I’m also concerned with the maintenance (financial, technological, and physical labor) and uptake of this research, particularly because our goal for the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is for it to be used in teaching, research, and community-run projects. Based on these hopes, I want to take stock of a few projects rooted in Writing Studies to give sense of the scope and possibilities for the future of the *FWWCP Digital Collection* within the discipline. Below, I provide a quick overview of five digital collection projects with varying audiences, aims, funding sources, and methods. I chose these five examples because they are some of the only digital projects in the field that intersect

with pieces of the *FWWCP Digital Collection*. These projects are exciting, and they have helped me think through the continued circulation of digital work as useful research and teaching tools.

1. *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* <http://daln.osu.edu>

Created by faculty at The Ohio State University (Cynthia Selfe and Ben McCorkle) and Georgia State University (Michael Harker) and hosted on the OSU domain, the *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* or *DALN* is an archive of digital literacy narratives across formats of texts, video, and audio. The archive welcomes participation from people across generations and backgrounds who would like to submit their own example of a literacy narrative. To participate, users must register with an email address and then they are permitted to use the archive and add to it as well (see: Selfe et al.). In this way, the *DALN* is participatory and accessible to audiences beyond the discipline and certainly beyond traditional “experts” in literacy, presenting an inclusive understanding of literacy through these features, rather than an archive only accessible within a university. Unlike most other digital examples that I found, the *DALN* creators have developed ways to engage with teaching and research connected to the archive. For instance, they have published *Stories that Speak to Us: Exhibits from the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (Ulman et al.) and “The Pedagogy of the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives: A Survey” (Cormer and Harker). Both of these publications illustrate examples for teaching with the archive, providing pedagogical tools to continue the use of the *DALN*.

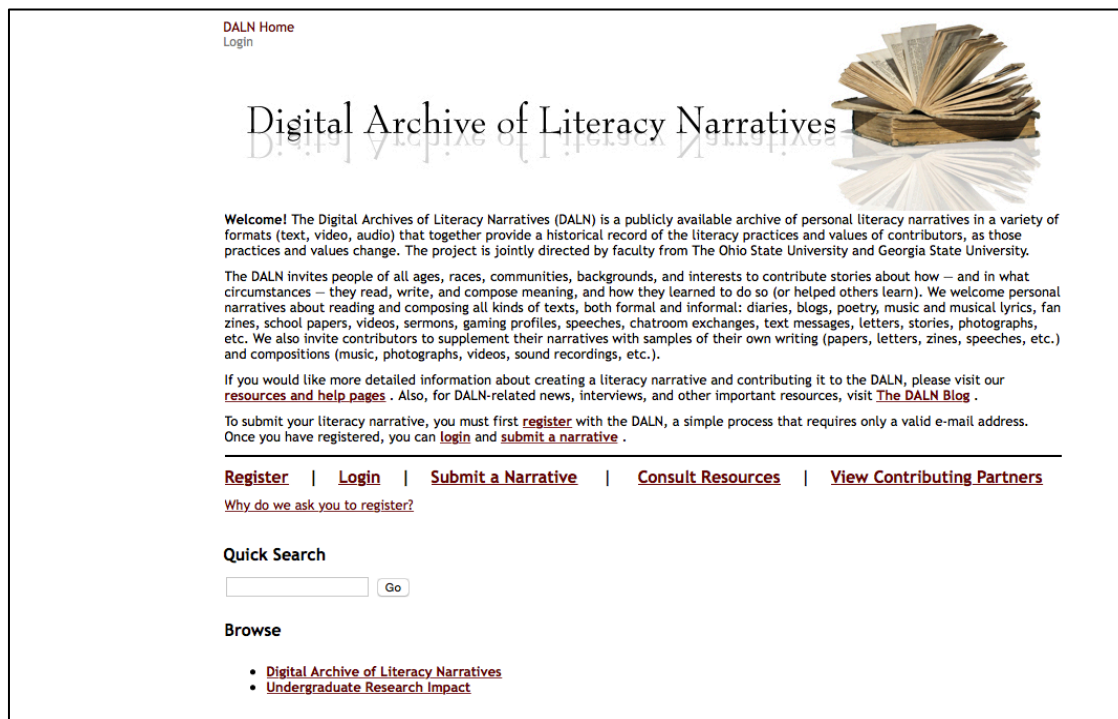


Figure 9. Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives Homepage.

2. *Digital Transgender Archive* <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net>

This archive is newly online this year, funded through a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship awarded to K.J. Rawson, and then additionally supported through the College of Holy Cross. As stated on the website, the purpose behind the *Transgender Digital Archive* is “to increase the accessibility of transgender history by providing an online hub for digitized historical materials, born-digital materials, and information on archival holdings throughout the world” (Rawson et al.). In effect, the *Transgender Digital Archive* pulls together material across geographic spaces to provide a central search feature for anyone researching transgender history prior, focusing on time periods before 2000. This site is the first of its kind to provide such history of transgender texts, as well as support a platform that engages traditional printed documents and digitally born texts. This site also engages users through a multifaceted search function that allows users to search via date, collection, topic, genre, creator, institution, location, and more.



Figure 10: Digital Transgender Archive Homepage

3. *Remixing Rural Texas* <http://faculty.tamuc.edu/rrt/>

Shannon Carter et al.'s *Remixing Rural Texas* is a digital humanities project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities through a \$24,966 Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant. This project functions similarly to an archive, while also providing “a visualization tool for archival research on the history of writing as expressed at multiple registers in local, underrepresented, understudied literacy scenes” (Carter et al.). Through this interface, users have the chance to take archival sources (such as a video or image) and remix these sources to create something new. Carter et al. use this site to show the interplay of local and global literacies that move from the focal point in rural East Texas to engage a global audience. This project initially operated within the Converging Literacies Center (CLiC), where researchers published journal articles about the site and developed space to “promote a better understanding of how texts and related literacy practices may develop, sustain, or even erode civic engagement across local

publics, especially among historically underrepresented groups” (Carter et al. “About”). The work of the CLiC, however, has become dormant in more recent years.



Figure 11: Remixing Rural Texas Homepage

4. *Pathways to Freedom: Mapping Civil Rights Oral Histories* (<http://beta.brooklynfreedom.org/about.html>)

Similar to *Remixing Rural Texas*, *Pathways to Freedom* emerged through a National Endowment of the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant that was awarded to Deb Mutnick for \$24,713. This project involved first-year college students at LIU Brooklyn going into the archives at the Brooklyn Historical Society to do archival research. Students conducted interviews, created audio and video files, and collected photos about civil rights histories in Brooklyn. The website offers a Google maps function that allows users to connect photographs with a particular physical space. Although Mutnick describes the archival project and the writing classes that she connects to *Pathways to Freedom* in her article “The Rhetorics of Race and Racism: Teaching Writing in an Age of Colorblindness,” this digital project is otherwise quite difficult to locate.

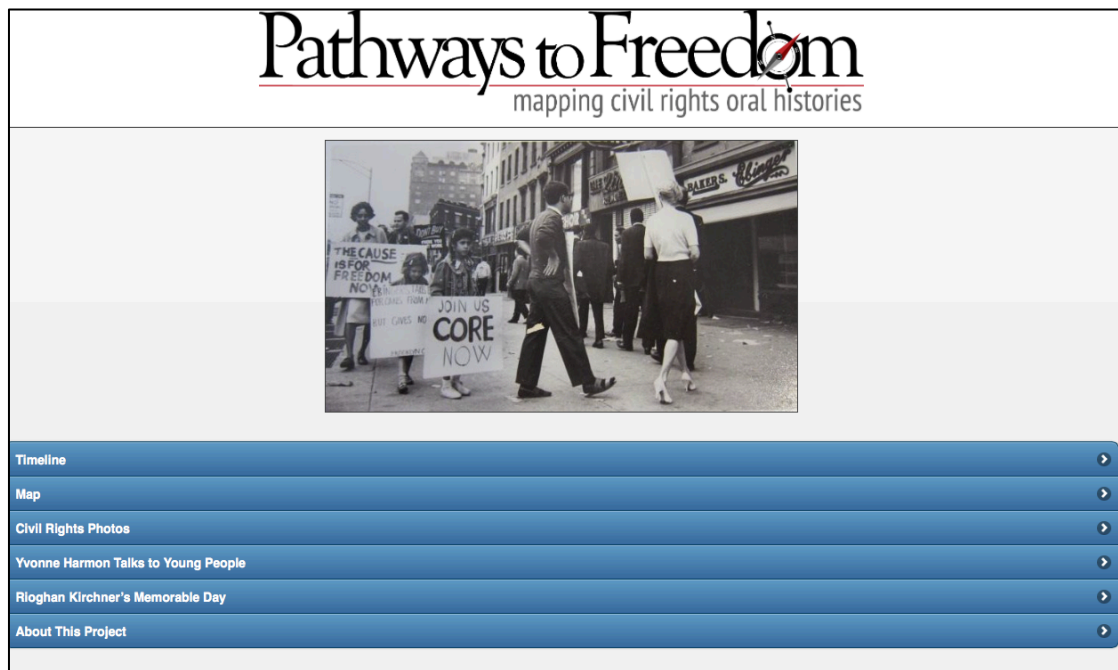


Figure 12: Pathways to Freedom Homepage.

5. Samaritan Archives

Jim Ridolfo's *Samaritan Archives* project represents the movement from print to digital texts, beginning with ancient, sacred Samaritan texts, which have then been digitized for their preservation and use. This project was possible through a National Endowment of the Humanities grant and a Fulbright Fellowship for Ridolfo, who describes the beginning stages of this project throughout his book *Digital Samaritans*. In a blog, hosted by Michigan State University's MATRIX center for digital humanities and social sciences, the center describes that "The goal of this project is not just to make an online repository of Samaritan texts for scholarly purposes, but to create a digital tool that current Samaritans can use to reconnect with their ancient texts and culture. This could eventually include things like Facebook tools, websites, and cell-phone applications" (MATRIX). However, the actual archive is either non-existent or difficult to access, as I only found information about it through blogs and articles but never through a link to the actual website itself.

These digital projects add exciting content and methodological uses to Writing Studies, as we consider their scope of their themes and the methods for creating and using such artifacts. Here, I will describe what I see as the affordances of such work as well some limitations within these projects, particularly related to the uptake of this work beyond the scholarly outputs. *Remixing Rural Texas*, *Samaritan Archive*, and *Pathways to Freedom* currently have a limited scope – thinking about a particular time and place, for a narrow population of users in the particular communities address (rural Texas, Brooklyn, and the Samaritan community). In their own local settings, these archives have been used as pedagogical resources and community-based engagement, but there is not much evidence of their use beyond these specific projects and communities. In contrast to these more specific audiences, the *Transgender Digital Archive* and *DALN* can be used as research and teaching tools across disciplines and audience with their search functions. The *DALN* also allows participants to add to the archive themselves. With a broad scope of transgender identity and literacy narratives, respectively, they provide multiple entry points for users. Participatory archives (while potentially problematic – think *Wikipedia*) are also incredibly powerful in the possibility of knowledge creation across users and disciplines.

Remixing Rural Texas and *Samaritans Archive* both provide ideas for future use, including the remixing of archival materials and the hope for increased digital applications (using Facebook, phones, and other websites), respectively. Aside the use of these digital projects by the creators or the communities specifically represented, though, their uptake is not easily apparent. For instance, it appears that *Remixing Rural Texas*, *Pathways to Freedom*, and *Samaritans Archive* circulated for use across a piece of the field but then seemed to be inactive.

Circulation, in some cases, is the biggest setback of digital projects. It is not a failed enterprise, however. In fact, other digital projects exist within the field, and are used extensively,

such as Jim Ridolfo's *Rhetmap*. *Rhetmap* provides a yearly archive of the academic job market in Rhetoric and Composition, where users can explore position announcements on a google map and spreadsheet, linked to the application systems for each position. Usage of this site, of course, is also connected to tracking available jobs and material conditions, but it still provides a model of an exigent and highly used archive – something sought after by most scholars. In the following section, I want to continue to think about what might make archives more accessible and useable, thereby emphasizing the sustained circulation of this work.

The Future of Archives 2.0 and Disciplinary Identity

Each of the examples listed above, I would argue, represent some of the best (but in some cases underutilized) features of *Archives 2.0*, described by Alexis E. Ramsey-Tobienne. In the article “Archives 2.0: Digital Archives and the Formation of New Research Methods,” Ramsey-Tobienne argues that within Writing Studies, “the difficulty with archival research and with viewing archives as potentially generative, transforming, and transformational places stems from the lack of discipline-specific scholarship devoted to archival methods and methodologies” (4). Ramsey-Tobienne uses this article to outline her understanding of Archives 2.0, which is at its foundation “grounded on the idea of collaboration within a digital space” (5) and is “more about a perceptual shift in the way that archives function than just about using the web” (6). In other words, Archives 2.0 prioritize involvement throughout the process of creating, expanding, and using the sites. I see access and inclusion as grounding principles within this formation—providing a digital space that promotes participation across discursive and geographic borders. Some features of Archives 2.0 utilized by the digital collections in Writing Studies include the participatory nature of adding content (*DALN*); connectivity amongst users, creators, or those affected by the history (all); searchable feature to serve as a database for multiple publics

(*DALN, Samaritans Archive, Transgender*); and the inclusion of diverse forms of expertise (all). Collaboration, connectivity, and inclusivity of different types of people, items, and knowledge guide each of these projects in exciting ways, and should continue to shape the digital work we do, if we want to create meaningful digital collaborations across communities.

As I discussed in chapter 2, our methods and methodologies must also consider the people whose archival texts we archive and study. James Purdy writes, “our pedagogy, scholarship, and disciplinary identity are inextricably bound up in the digital archives we use today and design for the future” (27). Disciplinary identity, though, I believe should concern more than just us in the discipline. Disciplinary identity is only one piece of the puzzle, when our archives involve the lived experiences and testimony of people outside of Writing Studies – especially given the knowledges held by the community members themselves. In “Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive,” Ellen Cushman considers the creation of a digital archive of stories from the Cherokee Nation. Cushman argues that a digital archive for the Cherokee Nation functions as a means of linguistic and cultural perseverance. With digital archival work, we must continue to build spaces and practices that encourage the cultural importance of collaboration and preservation, as many scholars suggest (Cushman; Enoch; Purdy; Ramsey-Tobienne; Ridolfo). Purdy links this work to archival design, by focusing on integration, customization, and accessibility of digital archives. He notes, “we must... consider carefully what texts we save, how we organize them, and to whom we make them available” (35). Such decisions for digital archives link to questions of ethics, in the same way that Glenn and Enoch note about traditional print archives. However, digital archives in particular allow us to think about how we can expand our processes for and “sites of knowledge making” (Cushman 116), as well as “recente[r] cultural stakeholders” (Ridolfo et al). Said another way, as digital

archival work continues, we must find ways to prioritize those we work with and their knowledges and histories. In doing so, we will not only bring forward new projects into Writing Studies but also find connections that extend our pedagogy beyond the classroom.

Community-Led Models

Now that I've explained the hopes of the field to continue developing digital archival spaces with a strong focus on collaboration with users and scholars alike, I will consider how community models from the *FWWCP* have been and are being developed. At the beginning stages of my work with the *FWWCP* project, the intention of the *FWWCP/FED* members, myself, and Steve Parks was always to create a digital version of the *FWWCP* histories. In the earliest stages, this took the form of a WordPress site, with a simple history of the *FWWCP* and a few uploaded PDF copies of publications. However, this site was quickly eclipsed by a desire to curate the site in more useable ways. After a visit to England with *FWWCP* member group Pecket, I was also able to see the possibilities of a multimodal digital archive designed by participants themselves – insights we hope to extend to the *FWWCP Digital Collection*.

Pecket!
the oral history and archive of our extraordinary community college

Font Size: A A A
Background:

Tell it!
an oral history of Pecket Well College

journeysticks
a Pecket Well College timeline

through the green door
personal stories from Pecketwellians

Pecket and beyond
about this project, resources and links

the store room

The Store Room is our archive. This is where we have collected everything from Pecket Well College. In the Store Room you can...

- look at photographs
- watch short videos
- listen to sound recordings
- look at PDFs
- read documents

You'll find photos of college events and activities, our

Welcome to our website which is an important part of our legacy. There are lots of resources on the site please use any content free of charge but we ask that you credit the source as Pecket Learning Community (previously Pecket Well College) at www.pecket.org. If you show other people films produced by external film makers remember to credit them too.

For more information contact: Nick Pollard who was our Chairperson throughout the Oral History and Archive Project (2011 to 2014) and skillfully steered us to our closing date of 31st May 2014.

Figure 13: Pecket! Homepage

While Pecketwellians could not do the technical web designing, it was their input, knowledge, and labor that provided such a dynamic site. For instance, on their website/digital archive, Pecket⁴¹ writes,

By 2011 we had the monies remaining from the sale of our building and in typical ‘Pecket’ fashion we wanted to achieve as much as possible to preserve our legacy. We decided to run: an archive project, our oral history project; and design a website *that we can understand and use*.

We had never done any of these things before and some of us hardly used computers before this project never mind ‘surf’ the internet! We have had to learn lots of new skills to put items and documents of various kinds and formats into our storeroom (digital archive): We have learnt how to scan all of our documents – all different sizes as we have always produced A3 large print versions of reports (Pecket Learning Community, emphasis mine).

Just as Pecketwellians created their own user-led college and developed a curriculum for basic adult learners, they were also the engines behind their digital legacy. Engagement in multiple modes is encouraged through the website’s features.

When Pecket didn’t know how to use digital tools, they were resourceful and reframed authority to work for their needs. For instance, one example of this is when Pecket wanted to make their website more accessible for people who are visually impaired, they worked with another community organization Kirklees Visual Impairment Network (KVIN). KVIN is “is a user-led organisation supporting people who are blind or partially sighted to use technology for independence and well being” (KVIN). That is, KVIN is run by and for people who are visually impaired. When I visited KVIN, two members, David and Martin, showed me examples of how they understand accessibility, and they demonstrated how they complete tasks of reading emails through sound software and how they converted audio files for Pecket into new formats. Without

⁴¹ As with Chapter Four, the invocation of “Pecket” in the collective sense is because Pecketwellians collaboratively designed and worded this site. They have authored this together and therefore do not distinguish between authors in many parts of their website, including the homepage.

physically being able to read through their emails, these men processed the information read to them with text recognition software at a pace that exceeded my reading capability. With the assistance of digital tools, their ears were trained to process emails quicker than I could understand them. I mention this because it provides an example for how KVIN uses digital tools to suit their needs and then reapplies these tools for other purposes. For example, KVIN partnered with Pecket to explore technologies at KVIN and through trips to the Apple store; by doing this, they partnered to convert all of Pecket's audio tapes into mp3 files, teach Pecketwellians how to edit some sound files, and begin instructing Pecketwellians how to use other assistive digital technologies.

A key feature of Pecket's website is accessibility, particularly to allow interactions among audiences with varying skills and abilities. Considering these values, Pecket developed a website with a means to enlarge font, change background colors, and have multiple modalities beyond written text for users to engage photos, audio files, PDFs, videos, and more. Each section of the site also provides a unique starting node along the way coming together to create a rich exhibit of Pecket. "Tell It" features a print version of Pecket's oral history, a shortened version of the oral history, and an audio version, read by Pecketwellians themselves. "Journeysticks" provides users a timeline feature, combined with photos and documents, to see important events and dates along Pecket's journey. "Through the Green Door" presents interviews, stories, and readings by Pecketwellians in audio and visual formats. When some members had difficulty reading their own work or disliked being in front of a camera, other Pecketwellians filled in to provide an embodied acknowledgment of the learner beyond their written word. "Pecket and Beyond" links the work within Pecket to projects with similar purposes or missions.

By emphasizing their own stories, Pecket constructs an archival site filled with their own knowledges and practices. Ellen Cushman argues for storytelling as a site of knowledge construction through her work with a digital archive to document the history of the Cherokee Nation. Cushman connects epistemology to the peoplehood of the Cherokee Nation, and in a similar way, Pecket's identity as a collective revolves around the necessity of stories. Most importantly, though, these stories are directly from those impacted, creating an ethos of expertise from such voices. Finally, crucial to the site is a searchable function that allows users to discover PDFs, images, videos, reports, workshop and curriculum materials, and more to use for purposes that extend beyond research to educational activities, creative workshops, and tools for learning. The site is interactive, encouraging a non-linear participation with the interface and Pecket's history.

While scholars in Writing Studies theorize interactive and participatory archives, Pecket created one that can be used by community members and scholars alike. There are curricular resources as well as historical information about Pecket, and they also recognize in the section "Pecket and Beyond" an audience that might connect this work to education, disability rights, oral history, literacy studies, and community activism. The site was collaboratively created and is built for accessibility through its multimodal features and user tools on each page.

What does this teach us? Working with the *FWWCP* on a Digital Collection

Trevor Owens describes the cultural importance of archives stating, "At the institutional level, discussions of 'the archive' are broadly useful for reflecting on the social roles that archives play in culture" (4). Print and digital archives represent the social in/exclusion of people/bodies/texts within a discipline as well as within the larger community. To be cognizant of these ideological tensions, those of us involved in the *FWWCP Digital Collection* (myself,

Steve Parks, Jeff Howarth, and the *FWWCP/FED* Executive committee) tried to respond in pragmatic ways. Although the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is still in early stages, I will give an overview of the site's features and explain a few key elements that have been impacted by the community-based ethos of the *FWWCP* and Pecket.



Figure 14: FWWCP Digital Collection homepage

Currently, the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is housed through an independent host in the United Kingdom called *Green Net*, with ongoing connections to both Syracuse University and London Metropolitan University. The website began with technical help from *Green Net* members through a modest £500 grant that Steve Parks received. Most of this money went toward purchasing a web domain and hiring *Green Net* to transfer an excel spreadsheet of nearly 2,000 indexed *FWWCP* texts into a searchable database function. Due to monetary constraints, the rest of the website is being created and revised by myself, Steve Parks, and Jeff Howarth. That is, the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is only able to continue through our own labor and technical skills. At present, the *FWWCP Digital Collection* consists of seven pages: Project

History; Collection Overview; Projects; Project Partners; Collection Database; Collection Samples; Contact. Most of these pages narrate the genesis of the *FWWCP* print archive at London Metropolitan University's *Trades Union Congress* Library, its project team, and our ongoing projects. However, as we transition into a digital collection, the features are aiming at future use. For instance, the "Collection Database" and "Collection Samples" of the archive include the searchable database of over 1,800 texts and provide sample PDFs of texts that have been digitized. Each stage of this work is dependent upon the material, technological, and physical resources of those involved. To digitize an *FWWCP* publication requires a scanner, computer and adobe program to create PDFs, time, and labor. Moreover, it also requires the time involved in uploading each individual file to the website and checking that the items are appropriately indexed. Currently, for instance, there are 25 texts that have been scanned into PDF form and uploaded on the site. There are also over 10 hours of audio interviews that are in the process of being edited for the site.

The searchable database and collection sample features are integral to the website because they promote circulation and use beyond the *FWWCP* community and those involved in the website.

Archive

The FWWCP Archive contains over 3,000 unique publications representing over 80 of the FWWCP membership group. As requested by the FWWCP members, the archive is arranged according to region, then nation, and ultimately, around key themes (such as mental health or economics).

Any book that appears here is available in the FWWCP Collection at the TUC Library at London Metropolitan University. (A smaller sub-set of texts are also available at Syracuse University. Use the contact form for additional information.)

Samples of FWWCP publications are available in PDF form on the Materials page of this website.

Region Theme

Empty/Vessels
 Publisher: Magnetic Press
 Dean Clough Writers
 Read more

A Couple from Manchester
 Publisher: Manchester Studies
 Read more

Figure 15: FWWCP Archive Search Page

These features parallel a collaborative ethos with the *FWWCP* specifically by highlighting community expertise and agency in the following ways:

Regional Representation of Texts: For the print archive at London Metropolitan University, the *FWWCP/FED* members wanted the texts to be sorted based on a regional participation. We have designed the database with this idea. The image below represents the main regions used within England, and then differentiates texts that come from countries outside of England. The designation of “International” is currently a place-marker for most of the texts that are written solely in languages other than English.

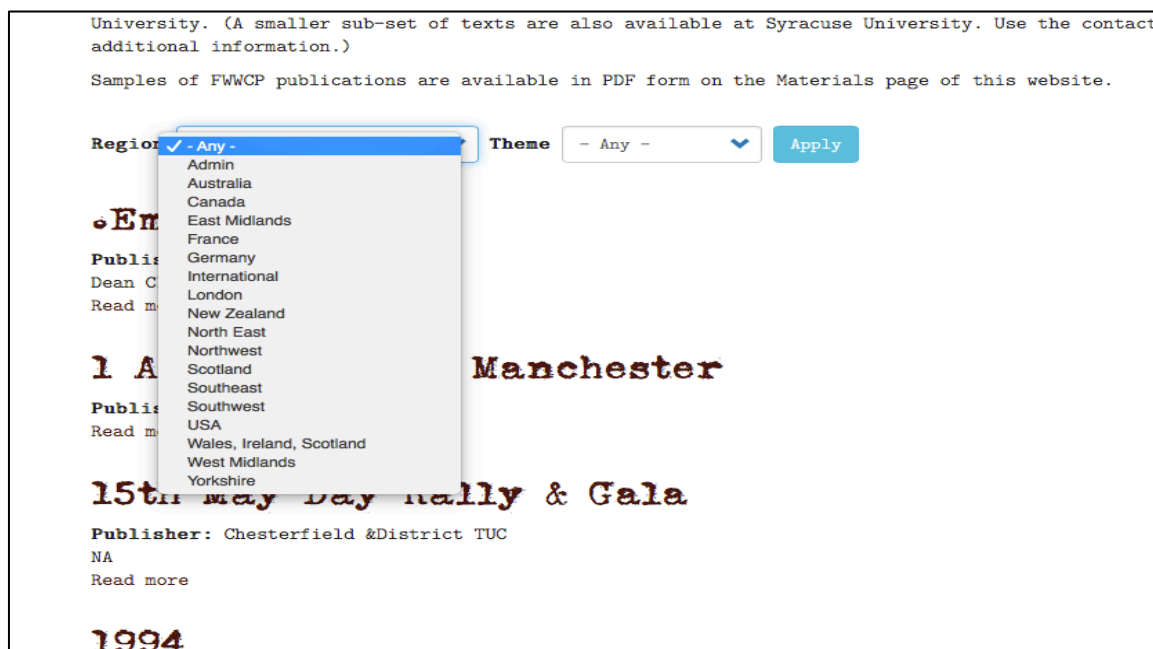


Figure 16: FWWCP Search Page with Regional Tags

Thematic Diversity: Beyond the regional distinctions desired by the *FWWCP/FED* members, there was also significant discussion about choosing themes that would represent an array of *FWWCP* material and insights. As such, community members were part of creating the taxonomies and categories that will be used by future database users. Usability was key, as we thought about hopes of use across disciplines and communities. Therefore, the themes highlight topics such as “activism”; “conflict”; “gender”; “health”; “immigration”; and “working-class” to name a few. The goal here is to provide multiple points of entry into the *FWWCP* materials so that audiences with varied interests can find this archive relevant and useful.

The screenshot shows the FWWCP Search Page. On the left, there is an 'Archive' section with introductory text and a 'Region' dropdown menu set to '- Any -'. Below this, three search results are listed: 'Empty/Vessels' by Magnetic Press, '1 A Couple from Mar...' by Manchester Studies, and '15th May Day Rally'. In the center, a vertical list of thematic tags is displayed, including activism, anarchy, art, autobiography, book reviews, business, childhood, class, community, conflict, crime, culture, death, depression, disability, DIY publishing, domestic, drugs, economics, education, elderly, emotion, environment, equality, faith, family, fear, feminism, finance, freedom, french, gay, gender, government, health, history, homelessness, illness, immigration, and information. On the right, there is a search bar with the text 'Search' and a magnifying glass icon, and an 'Apply' button.

Figure 17: FWWCP Search Page with Thematic Tags

Author/Publisher Search: Using the *FWWCP* authors or publishers as the key creators of these texts places the importance on them as experts. Moreover, for any community member wanting to find their text, they can search for their own work or the work created by their writing group. Recently, we had a request via the website from a daughter of a member of the Scotland Roads '83 group. She did not have a copy of her father's writing, but through this website she was able to request a PDF or text version from us. This search feature and digitization is crucial because, in many cases, these copies might be the last surviving text. For example, below is what comes up when I search "Sally Flood" and then choose from her list of publications. At the bottom of this page, users can access a PDF of her book.

The screenshot shows a web page with a breadcrumb trail 'Node / Paper Talk' at the top. Below this is the title 'Paper Talk' in a large, bold, monospace font. A list of metadata follows: 'Author: Sally Flood', 'Region: London', 'Themes: community', 'poverty', 'Genre text: poetry', 'Medium text: booklet', 'Publisher: The Basement Writers', 'Copies: 1', and 'Other: Astrolith publishing'. A 'File upload' section contains a single entry: 'Flood, Sally Paper Talk.pdf' with a file size of '891.38 KB'.

Figure 18: FWWCP Search Page for Sally Flood's *Paper Talk*

PDF circulation: Once a user finds an author, theme, or region that they are interested in, they can access a PDF version of the text they want. Ideally, we will have all 1,800 texts digitized, but currently we have 25 of the most used publications (use-value here is dependent upon the teaching of these materials at Syracuse University, LIU Brooklyn, and the University of Akron, as part of our *CCCC Research Initiative Grant*). This PDF feature allows users across audiences and among various geographic locations to access and circulate this information. If someone cannot make it to London Metropolitan University, they can still utilize the *FWWCP Archive*. Such digital representation is ethically complex because each author or publisher obtains individual copyright. For some authors, we have copyright approval. For others, we are operating under the ethos of the *FWWCP/FED Executive* committee and the understanding that these texts were made with the hope of being circulated. We are actively trying to contact as many individual authors as possible, but until then we will also operate with the *FWWCP's* approval and the caveat that any text will be removed should it be requested.

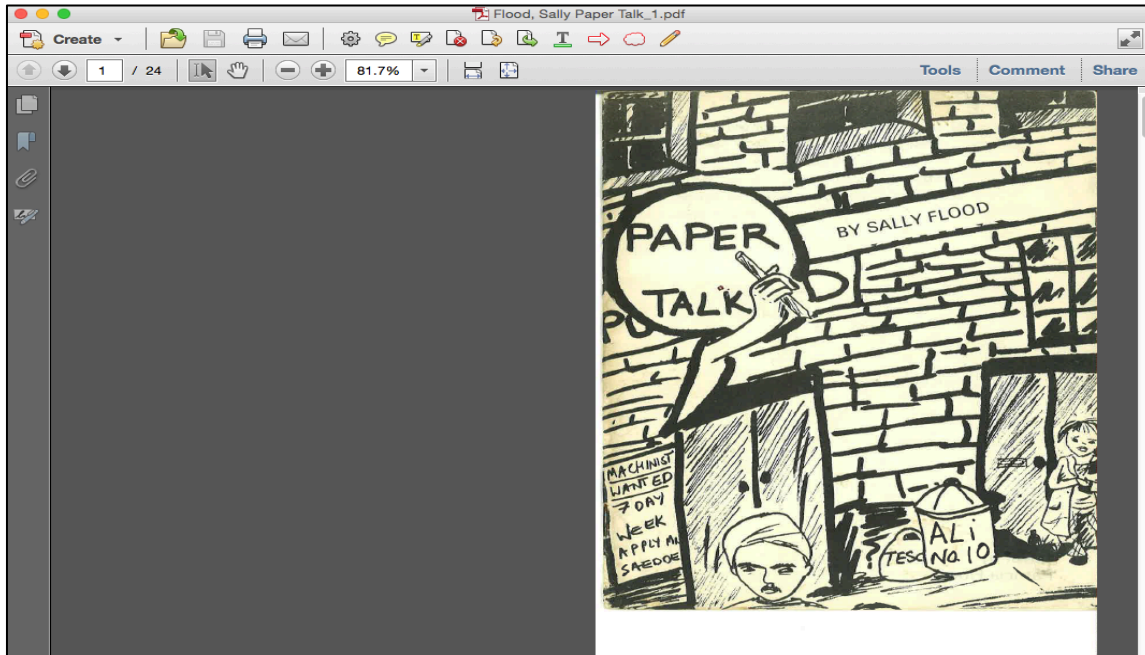


Figure 19: FWWCP Search Page with PDF of Sally Flood's *Paper Talk*

While the *FWWCP Digital Collection* is in its early stages, it is also carefully created to include participation and insight from the community members themselves. In the next stages, we would like to continue to build on these features and include interactive timelines, maps connecting to publications, audio and video interviews and performances, an oral history, and more. These features mirror what Pecketwellians began with their own archive, and they represent three key components that Writing Studies scholars Graban et al. advocate in regard to innovative digital archival work.

Relocating From Basements to Institutions to Digital Spaces

In their article, Graban et al. note three strategies that impact the shift from print to digital archives: *relocation*; *wider publics*; and *inventing historiographic methods*. I see the *FWWCP Archive* and *FWWCP Digital Collection* attempting to model each of these approaches, thereby presenting a new model of collaboration with community members drawing on community agency.

Recognizing the constraints of disciplinary/personal/institutional agendas and location on physical archives, Graban et al. note the digital archive's ability to "expedit[e] and concea[l] the availability of materials" (234). This availability increases Writing Studies scholars' ability to work and innovate with archives as a means of preservation, but this should not prevent us from acknowledging the agency and expertise of skilled archival practitioners beyond our discipline. Throughout the *FWWCP* archival practices, we have developed a methodological approach that keeps community values and desires intact while also providing more availability to the materials. By using regional and thematic descriptions from the *FWWCP*, their values have shaped the process of categorizing the texts, but they have been taken up in a digital space to ensure the possibility of circulation and use of the materials.

The circulation of materials enabled by digital forums also connects to the possibilities of "wider publics" described by Graban et al. From the beginning of the archival efforts, the *FWWCP* has indicated the importance of the archive being used by multiple audiences. The first use of this archive came when students from the United States visited the archive in 2015 and 2016 for a Civic Writing course, first taught by Jess and then co-taught by Steve and Jess. The next use of the print archive was when London Metropolitan University students in a creative writing class, taught by Sunny Singh, visited the archive. These projects have also prompted the use of the archive by Media and Communications classes at LMU, and have spurred interest from the Workers' Educational Association, a community organization devoted to education with a social purpose. A new *FED* member, who has been involved with the print archive, Lucy Parker, has also created a short film, *Some Grit, Some Fire* from archival materials, as her interpretation of some of the qualities of *FWWCP* writing groups (see: Parker). Moreover, *FED* members and member groups are brainstorming ways to use the materials for their own purposes

of sharing their legacy with younger generations. All of this circulation of the printed materials can continue and expand with a digital representation.

Graban et al. caution that the move from print to digital spaces requires ethical reflection and actions regarding the accessibility of the archives:

When historical metadata migrate from print to online spaces, rhetoricians must (re) define *open* and *access* so as to more ethically reach wider publics. The choice of digital space and the means of archival organization are rhetorical acts deploying arguments about relations, power dynamics, and gate-keeping methodologies and should be treated as such... Thus, scholars participating in digital repatriation must critically interrogate such social and political relations, even while embracing digitization's democratic potential. (237)

The importance of ethical archival practices cannot be discounted, but with the *FWWCP Digital Collection*, the methodology has constantly included the community members themselves. This collaboration aims to destabilize power dynamics and gate-keeping mechanisms throughout the process of archival work. As such, it has allowed us to collaboratively enhance the print and digital archives audience. One example of such collaboration is through the on-going “Archive Presentation” at the annual *FED Festival*. This forum provides a chance for those of us involved in the archive to come together with *FED* members to discuss the progress and hopes for the print and digital archive each year. And it represents the transparency and collaboration that are foundational to this project.

Taken together, the move from a printed to digital *FWWCP Collection* represents a new model of what Graban et al. call “inventing historiographic methods.” Such a model challenges the types of knowledge presented in archival work, by drawing from community expertise and knowledge. This model also provides a clear goal of ethical partnerships. But, as noted throughout this chapter, there are material conditions that continue to shape each piece of the *FWWCP* print and digital collections. There is theoretical truth and exigency for archival work

concerning working-class testimony, but it also exists within a material reality that makes this difficult. I would argue that we still need to push ahead and do the work at hand, but it must be done in connection to the community's desire for preservation, use value, and accessibility.

The *FWWCP Digital Collection* operates as an example of the possibilities of *Archives 2.0* within a specific community and its technological, financial, and ethical constraints. Without extensive grant money, like the in most other models, this project has had to rely on small moments of progress. The labor involved in such work represents a concerted effort toward preservation, if even in minor stages. Yet, such a project, when combined with community desires, has the potential for significant outputs. We have started to see the uptake of this project in classes in the United Kingdom and the United States, but we have also started to see community organizations (such as the WEA), writing groups, and individuals reimagine these archives for their own use. The joining of print and digital representations here provide yet another important step toward the preservation of the *FWWCP* histories. Moreover, the transition from print to digital format offers a means of reinvigorating working-class histories in an increasingly digital era. As we continue to use digital technologies for archival work within Writing Studies, we must continue to find ways for the sustained circulation of cultural histories and artifacts.

Conclusion: Relevance, Exigency, and Discussions of Class Identity in (Digital) Archival Spaces

Throughout these chapters, I've explained the significance of the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* within its historical context, as well as its connection to disciplinary conversations in Writing Studies. Building printed and digital archives to showcase and, ideally, re-animate the *FWWCP*'s legacy has been an enterprise to expand the field's theoretical framework to include the literacies of people marginalized by their class and educational backgrounds. On the one hand, this work seeks to add to the corpus of texts included in Writing Studies, while simultaneously challenging the literacies, bodies, and populations that fit this disciplinary framework. On the other hand, curation of archives *with* community members provides a significant methodological and ethical statement – one that recognizes community-based literacies and expertise. These projects challenge disciplinary frameworks of literacy, public writing, and history through the inclusion of *FWWCP* voices and actions. They also draw attention to the material circumstances that allow this work to continue and prevent some work from happening.

And, yet, this work also has the potential for a much stronger social and political impact. Indeed, the content and scope of the *FWWCP* and the creation of printed and digital archives of this work have a renewed, albeit unfortunate, exigency and meaning in relation to working-class identity and the importance of preservation today. We are living in an age of austerity budgets and political conflict. In the past year, London Metropolitan University's has been cut by 400 and more cuts and closures to the school's Holloway Road campus are in process (Pells). This is where the *FWWCP Archive* is located. Certainly, this provokes questions about the legacy of the *FWWCP Archive*, but it also prompts inquiry about the nature of these funding cuts for a school committed to social and economic diversity, particular for working-class students. The tensions

surrounding class identity through most of the *FWWCP*'s tenure have a reinvigorated relevancy connected to the representation of class—and we see this manifesting in the physical world but in digital spaces as well. In this conclusion, I will provide a brief example of the class conflict I'm referring to and then I will explain how I see the *FWWCP*'s history and archival material as a way to engage in class dialogue.

In November 2014, Emily Thornberry, a British politician resigned from her job after posting the following to her twitter account. She labeled this “Image from #Rochester.”



Figure 20: Emily Thornberry Tweet, Image from #Rochester

Thornberry, a Member of Parliament associated with the Labour party (also deemed, as I described in chapter 3, “Britain’s democratic socialist party” that grew out of trade union and socialist movements), posted this image while she was campaigning in Rochester, England. Immediately, some people were in an uproar, calling her a “snob,” stating she had a “prejudiced attitude.” But why?

To some, there might be a disconnect here: why would an image of a house, a van, and

flags cause a woman to resign? What does this have to do with literacy? With class-based rhetoric? And why should we care? Although there are surely multiple answers here, we can only begin to understand this scenario, if we understand how different people read this image, based on the context, the speaker, and audience. To see each of these parts is also to understand that there are multiple types of literacy (mis)represented here—literacies based on ideas of political, gendered, nationalistic, class-based, racialized identities. Even more, these representations circulated throughout Twitter and almost instantaneously resulted in Thornberry's resignation from her work as part of Attorney General Ed Miliband's shadow cabinet.

First, let's break this image down: There is a yellow housing structure, with three flags, and a large white van. The housing structure is social housing, or what is also known as council estates. That is, this housing is easily identifiable as government-supported housing. Council housing historically has deep roots with working-class identity in England, dating back to the 1890 with "The Housing of the Working Classes Act" (Bentley). By 1979, when Margaret Thatcher came into power, almost two-fifths of the British population lived in social housing. Once Thatcher introduced the "Right to Buy" opportunity for the tenants, dramatic changes precipitated impacting the affordability of such housing (Bentley). Within these years, such changes prevented many working-class families from being able to afford the very housing meant to be affordable. Still, the housing structure in picture suggests that the tenants are, economically, part of the working class or working-poor.

Two of the flags flying along the top of the building are St. George's Cross flags, otherwise known as the flag of England (*only* England) or the Union Flag. This flag is distinguishable from the Union Jack, the national flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, representing the inclusion of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and

Wales. For some, St. George's Cross carries dismissive or even racist connotations about people who are *non-English* (Glancey). The tension of using this flag parallels, in some ways, the use of the Confederate flag in America today; however, it is also the flag of England used for representation on a world stage, such as for the World Cup (which was last in 2014, the same year of Thornberry's tweet) and the Olympics.

The final flag holds the crest of the West Ham football club, a football club founded by an ironworks and shipbuilding company. Since these foundations, West Ham has continued with a working-class base as its support. Its symbol is defined by two rivet hammers crossing over a shield. And the club is nicknamed "the Hammers" or "the Irons" representing the tools of workers.

The last piece I'll discuss is in the large, white van parked in front of the housing. In England, drivers of this van have retained the nickname "white van man"⁴² as a stereotypical representation of independent workers (such as plumbers or electricians) who would need this type of vehicle. More than this, though, "white van man" has become stereotypically synonymous with aggressive driving and represents a vernacular jab at the "hooligan" football lover and working-man that most often is stereotyped to drive these vans.

By posting this image and marking it #ImagefromRochester, Thornberry presented a viewpoint that, for many, furthered stereotypes of a white working-class population as racist, hooligans living in social housing. Despite being part of the Labour party, this tweet distinguished Thornberry from many of the working-class constituents the Labour party needed to maintain.

Fast forward to 2016: After attending a writing group in Newham, a borough of London,

⁴² According to the Social Issue Research Centre, this term was coined in 1997 by radio host Sarah Kennedy (SIRC), and this term has since spread to various forms and interpretations, provoking a sitcom *White Van Man*, memes, and the colloquial usage of this term as an insult.

I sat around a pub table with some members from the writing group. One of these men belonged to the *FWWCP* while it existed and the other two became associated with the *FWWCP* through its offshoot organization (the FED) that developed in 2008. As these men described their current political views to me and reflected on the Thornberry image, Paul chimed in: “I lived in council housing.” In rapid succession, the others stated: “So did I.” “Yep. Me too.” Each self-identified members of a white working class, these men were frustrated with the representation forwarded by Thornberry’s tweet. Paul, for instance, said, “I wear a West Ham necklace. I support the Hammers. I live in East London. I lived in council housing for most of my life. What does that make me?” Here, Paul was acknowledging his frustration at being perceived into a stereotyped version of the white working class that was furthered by Thornberry and felt by others in the group as well.

Let me be clear here and say that the goal is not to demonize Thornberry or even present her in a negative light. Rather, what I hope comes across is the realization for the extremely nuanced and continually provocative nature of class relations in England. While much of this dissertation focuses on the timeframe of 1976-2007, this event from 2014 and its continued discussion shows the impact of such class-based (mis)representations.

Looking at the *FWWCP* though, gives us concrete representations of a working-class network – a network that gathered over 100 groups to write, dialogue, perform, and publish about identity; a network that engaged transnational audiences and encouraged multilingual publications; a network that used class as an entry point to talk about working conditions, migration, food, religious customs, sexuality, gender, and more; a network that created and reimagined itself to evolve with its membership base to be inclusive and accessible; a network that had groups create oral history projects, design curriculum, sponsor their own learning,

publish their own work, and build their own user-led adult basic educational college. Working-class agency, innovation, and intelligence manifest in each of these actions. But this representation of the working class, I would argue, is not the most often represented. The *FWWCP Archive* and *Digital Collection* are a means to circulate this version of the working class and to compile more stories like these.

In the *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo reflect on the complexities of class-based representations. In the article, “Twenty Years of Working-Class Studies: Tensions, Values, and Core Questions,” they write, “changes depending on the situation in which we are using it...class involves relations of power, based in economic positions that shape individuals, culture, history, and interests” (5). Such an understanding of class opens up interpretations that often take two routes: first, that “class is a position, a relationship, a social force” (5). Under this framework, they write that “we trace the way the contrasting interests and power of people in different class positions play out within capitalism, sometimes by looking at specific cases but also by looking broadly at economic, social, and political conflicts and changes” (5). Another side of class, Linkon and Russo explain, deals with “the varied conditions, perspectives, and lived experiences of working-class people” (5). With this view, class is understood as “a social category and a culture, which we study by identifying the shared values and practices of working-class culture and by tracing how people express or enact that culture through actions and expressions (5). The circumstances that place a group of people within a class-position, based on connections to capitalism, do not mean that group also has the same “shared values and practices” or culture. In other word, working-class culture is not homogenous – and it certainly cannot be summed up in an image or tweet. As I showed throughout Chapter Three, even within the collective of the *FWWCP*, class culture was not uniform. And class-based

culture must be reflective of its position within a network of identities. As we consider these moments of class culture and explore how people enact class-based literacies, we must continually remember that they are contextual and contingent moments.

Class-based discussions within Writing Studies and across disciplines must continue to think across boundaries, especially considering local and global impacts. At the end of 2016, the *Journal of Working-Class Studies* emerged, with the goal of representing a global working-class population through an international editorial board—from the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand, and Australia—and representations that magnify working-class experiences across these spaces. Sarah Attfield and Liz Giuffre explain,

The *Journal of Working-Class Studies* has launched at a time when the working class is under threat in many parts of the world. Political unrest and distrust of traditional information outlets has left many feeling unclear and uncertain about their futures. Now, more than ever, is a time to unite and focus. We hope that the articles here, and those to follow in future issues, will be read widely and make a difference. We strongly believe that acknowledgement of how class works is vital if we want to move towards more just and equitable societies (1).

I see this global focus as one step toward a larger discussion of class that needs to happen with representations of the working class. Another commitment of this journal is to be accessible to multiple audiences, to let working-class people and stories come together in dialogue. They write, “Personal stories provide access points for readers as well as platforms to explore broader patterns of power relations” (1), and I would argue that the work of the *FWWCP* also allows us to “explore broader patterns of power relations” as we consider them as a historical recovery project involving a transnational membership base, audience, and now partnership. Linkon and Russo also explain the importance of a global understanding of class: “It may be that paying more attention to transnational commonalities and global shifts, including the specific experiences and interests of working-class people in particular places, will help us become a

more truly international field” (8-9).

The representation of class is particularly important today, as it connects to an increasingly globalized world. On June 24th, 2016, I woke up in the middle of the night to the news that England had voted to exit the European Union. Brexit (The British exit of the EU) had become more than just a thought but an actual vote for action. Brexit is important for many reasons to this project, most notably because of the international partnership created through this work—a partnership that has depended on the movement of ideas, information, texts, funds, and people across borders. Quite literally, people who work in London on visas from other European countries might now have difficulty staying at London Metropolitan University. The morning after the Brexit vote, it was clear that working-class, industrial towns obtained the largest number of votes for Brexit. And this result set up a flurry of responses about a stereotyped racist working class that would do anything to speak against immigration. But, like many, I would argue that this situation much more complex. It is a situation that some have used to create binary and divisive rhetoric without much dialoguing in between. Unlike the *FWWCP* debates (that I described in Chapter Three), which allowed for people to discuss class identity as separate from or intersectional with other identities, there have been few instances where working-class representation comes from the working class themselves. It is this in-between space—the space of the working class speaking for themselves—that interests me. Over 40 years after the *FWWCP*'s creation, I would argue that class is still something we don't talk (or listen) much about. Class identity is still, clearly, an issue. And working-class distinctions, within social and political discussions, have increasingly become an easily demonized identity. But such rhetoric fails to represent the diversity a working-class population that acknowledges the intersections of identity.

In an Opinion piece from *the guardian*, Phil McDuff writes about the tensions of being working-class when the media represents working-class people similarly to the Thornberry example, and without a nuanced sense of their identity or the world around them; or, when someone does try to separate themselves from those who are racist, they are then distanced from others in their class, no longer working-class *enough*:

The working class mostly lack our own voices in the media. Instead, we are reported on. This reporting seems, even now, to believe that the true working-class identity is, as Kelvin MacKenzie put it in the 1980s, “a right old fascist”. Culturally insular, not interested in or smart enough to understand real news, generally afraid of people not like him (it’s always a him). Migrants and native people of colour are stripped of their right to a working-class identity, and even cast as the enemy of the “real” (ie white) working class... Likewise any of us who are white and born here, but refuse to blame migrants for the result of government policies, are cast as the “metropolitan elite” even if we’re earning the same amounts and living in the same towns. Working-class identity becomes necessarily and by definition anti-migrant... Once everyone who doesn’t fit is excluded, those who remain are transformed from real people into weaponised stereotypes to be turned against those who resist the advance of jam-obsessed fascism. Even the complexity within people is stripped out as individuals are merged into a howling mass whom you must “understand” or risk losing your tolerant, liberal credentials (McDuff)

Here, McDuff explains the paradox of being white and working class, but not fitting into a simplified narrative of the stereotyped fascist working class against what the media pits against “tolerant” liberals. For McDuff, and many others, these representations of class have been generalized and abstracted so that they do not nuance discussions of a white working-class population that is perhaps privileged with their national citizenship or ethnicity but does not fall into the racist and anti-migrant stereotypes provoked by others. I use this example because I think it adequately represents the in-between space of many *FWWCP* members and texts that I’m thinking about—a space that represents working-class people as more than the stereotypes created and perpetuated by some. Of course, we must fully acknowledge that some working-class people *are* racist. And sexist. And anti-immigrant. But the conflation of the whole group is

what we must not overlook. That is, what happens to the working class that, like many in the *FWWCP*, see themselves as *part of an intersectional struggle*? What happens when we see these representations from the working class themselves? What happens when working-class people acknowledge a global understanding of class because they are a part of it? People within the *FWWCP*, like Sally Flood, Florence Agbah, and Tricia, as well as many on the *FWWCP Executive Committee*, saw class identity as multifaceted—something that was necessarily inclusive of migrant experience, gendered experience, racial identity, and religious heritage. That is, from these narratives of class, we see how some working-class people represent themselves. And these moments—of understanding and collaboration, complexity and intersectional identity—are equally true representations of the working class. I hope that these are the experiences that can be taken from the *FWWCP Archive* and *Digital Collection* for future conversations that can nuance discussions of class-identity.

I believe it is important to recognize and build solidarity from class-identity, like the *FWWCP* did, and there should still be a cautious reflection on how groups function. For instance, even Working-Class Studies has, as Linkon and Russo write, “resisted the idea that class is more important than race or any other category. Across the field, we recognize that ‘the working class’ is not white (or male, or heterosexual), and we challenge approaches that ignore this complexity” (6). They continue: “we must wrestle with the way racial difference and racism have played out within the working class while also resisting the tendency—in the U.S. but also in the UK and elsewhere—for societies to assign racism as a social problem exclusive to the working class” (6).

So, where does this leave us? Class—regardless of it being represented in the *FWWCP*, a discipline, or in our everyday practices—resists simplistic definitions. But the *FWWCP* offers a contributing point for class-based discussions: within Writing Studies and across disciplines;

between recovering literacy and rhetorical histories of the past and practicing ideas for future digital preservation; and, in connection with communities, activists, and people interested in the possibilities of writing for social and political change. The *FWWCP* also presents a model of collaboration that foregrounds community agency through working-class voices. It is a model that, while flawed in individual moments, celebrates working-class culture through shared experiences, actions, and often values about the possibilities of writing in a community. Such possibilities include the belief that writing can indeed impact lives, materially and socially. As teachers and researchers of writing and literacy, I hope we can all be part of such a community.

Afterward

In August 2016, Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP (the United Kingdom Independence Party), and a figurehead for the Brexit vote spoke at a rally for Donald Trump. He compared Trump supporters to “the same people who made Brexit happen.” Following this, Trump continues this connection on Twitter, “They will soon be calling me MR. BREXIT!”



Figure 21: Donald J. Trump Tweet, Brexit

I’m reminded of the importance of “transnational commonalities and global shifts” mentioned by Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo and the impact this has on class-based conversations. When Brexit happened, my world shifted a bit. Many of the friends I gained in

Europe throughout this project and during my time abroad seemed to be, once again, demonized through their class. But many of them—like my friends in Newham—didn't fall into the simplistic working-class stereotypes. They were disappointed in their country, and yet held to a class-category (through the media's and some politicians' definitions) that didn't adequately represent their view. Other, younger, friends worried how their work, visas, healthcare would be affected as European (but non-British) nationals working in England. Only time will tell.

It's November 9, 2016 and Donald J. Trump has won the presidency of the United States of America. I'm not even sure that I've processed what that statement means. Nate Cohn from *The New York Times* declares in his headline, "Why Trump Won: Working-Class Whites." The article continues, "Mr. Trump swept the string of traditionally Democratic and old industrial towns along Lake Erie." I'm from one of those. Most of my family continues to live in a handful of those industrial spaces. The towns and cities full of the steel factories and manufacturing plants that had to lay off their employees. Those boarded up buildings were typical throughout my childhood. I'm from one of those places—where my parents were forced to leave after 35 years of building a community because the medical bills were too high and the work too unstable. My parents left every piece of themselves, including my Bushia and Dzia Dzia and the majority of our extended family and friends who were born and raised there. Many of these people were also the "traditionally Democratic" population that now voted for Donald Trump.

These headlines continue on each website I turn to:

- *The Guardian*, "White, working-class and angry: Ohio's left behind help Trump to stunning win."
- *The Washington Post*, "How Trump won: The revenge of working-class whites."
- *CNN*, "White, Working Class & Worried: The anatomy of a white, working-class Trump Voter"
- *MSNBC*: "Trump reshapes map, forges 'white, working-class path.'"

The headlines continue, and it's apparent to me that we need to talk about class. I argued throughout this dissertation that we need to talk about class, and I think that these examples illustrate, too, the need to listen. The need to listen deeply to class conflict that has gone on for decades but has never been adequately addressed. What is it that many working-class people are looking for? And why has the working class (particularly an older generation of white working-class people in formerly strong industrial cities) accounted for some of the top Trump votes in the United States as well as a vote for the British exit from the European Union? These two events are different, of course, but they both symbolize a moment of intense class-conflict and blame across global spaces—a moment that has led me to believe we must continue to think about class identity, particularly as we move into a generation shaped by these events. It feels as if these two events show us the destruction of class collectivity when it is pitted against identity-politics without an understanding of intersectionality or commonality among groups.

I see my own family as being caught in the crossfire of these representations. As noted in my preface, my Bushia has always told me to “be smart,” but I wonder what happens when being “smart” pushes against the very community I grew up with, the identity that enabled me to get where I am right now through their support and sacrifice? What happens when the politics of my working-class background have shifted among generational lines— when my grandfather, a party-Democrat (after all, “it’s the worker’s party”) for every election since he was able to vote in 1944 feels deceived by the system he worked his entire life for? What happens when the working-class people I know have broken their bodies and carry the physical markings of a life of manual labor without any sense of financial security or health?

I don't think I'll ever get to an answer for these questions. But what I do hope for is an increased attention to class and the material conditions that surround the work we do. I hope that

we can have conversations that acknowledge these lived experiences before they are dismissed through simplified or binary narratives, while also recognizing that class reaches across borders and identities.

Appendix: List of interview questions for FWWCP members

Background History

1. How did you first hear about or become involved in the *FWWCP*? What year was this?
2. How long were you a member of the *FWWCP*?
3. What was your role in the *FWWCP*?
4. What writing groups were you part of?
5. Can you tell me how those writing groups worked? What was the goal?
6. Did you publish anything or go to the Annual Festivals?
7. What moments stand out to you from your time in the *FWWCP*?

FWWCP Questions

1. What were the values within the *FWWCP*? What skills did you gain from the *FWWCP*?
2. What did the *FWWCP* mean to you?
3. Originally, the *FWWCP* began as a working-class organization. Why was this important at the time? What connections did you see between working-class identity or rights and the *FWWCP*?
4. During your time in the *FWWCP*, did you see any connection between the group and social or political moments at the time?
5. Building off this idea of identity-based themes, I'm curious about how worker-writers expanded in multiple ways to include additional groups. One of my interests is how particular identity-based groups made their way into the *FWWCP*, but also how that affected the network's dynamic. I'm particularly interested in the role of women's groups (either groups around women's identity, feminist groups, etc.). Could you say something about this? Can you describe your reaction or the feeling about this? Do you identify yourself or your writing in this way?
6. I'm also interested in how the *FWWCP* challenged ideas of literacy. I recently read Ursula Howard's piece in the Guardian called "Literary Literacy," and was interested in how people in the *FWWCP* understand literacy. Can you describe what literacy means for you personally?

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