

Prioritizing Phronesis:  
Theorizing Change, Taking Action, Inventing Possibilities  
with the Sudanese Diaspora in Phoenix  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

This project draws on sociocognitive rhetoric to ask, How, in complex situations not of our making, do we determine what needs to be done and how to leverage available means for the health of our communities and institutions? The project pulls together rhetorical concepts of the stochastic arts (those that demand the most precise, careful planning in the least predictable places) and *techne* (problem-solving tools that transform limits and barriers into possibilities) to forward a stochastic *techne* that grounds contemplative social action at the intersection of invention and intervention and mastery and failure in real time, under constraints we can't control and outcomes we can't predict. Based on 18 months of fieldwork with the Sudanese refugee diaspora in Phoenix, I offer a method for engaging in postmodern *phronesis* with community partners in four ways: 1) Explanations and examples of public listening and situational mapping 2) Narratives that elucidate the stochastic *techne*, a heuristic for determining and testing wise rhetorical action 3) Principles for constructing mutually collaborative, mutually beneficial community-university/ community-school partnerships for jointly addressing real-world issues that matter in the places where we live 4) Descriptions and explanations that ground the hard rhetorical work of inventing new paths and destinations as some of the Sudanese women construct hybridized identities and models of social entrepreneurship that resist aid-to-Africa discourse based on American paternalism and humanitarianism and re-cast themselves as micro-financers of innovative work here and in Southern Sudan. Finally, the project pulls back from the Sudanese to consider implications for re-figuring secondary English

education around phronesis. Here, I offer a framework for teachers to engage in the real work of problem-posing that aims - as Django Paris calls us - to get something done by confronting the issues that confront our communities. Grounded in classroom instruction, the chapter provides tools for scaffolding public listening, multi-voiced inquiries, and phronesis with and for local publics. I conclude by calling for English education to abandon all pretense of being a predictive science and to instead embrace productive knowledge-making and the rhetorical work of phronesis as the heart of secondary English studies.

## DEDICATION

To PRG – Because Deep calls to Deep

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is a collective effort through and through. Surely, Tap, Samra, Dalila, Saher, Rota, and many other Southern Sudanese in Phoenix who have come to be my friends are all over this text – their thinking, their care of each other and of me, their struggles, their pursuits, their courage, their triumphs, their laughter, their generosity of time and spirit are the core of this dissertation. I hope this writing at least hints at the depths of their dignity and the strength of the friendships we’ve come to enjoy.

Many others’ thinking and scholarship influenced the work of this project: Linda Flower, whose foundational work at the Community Literacy Center, profoundly shapes my understanding of what rhetoric is good for in spaces of conflict; Django Paris and Elenore Long, who cast imagination for the *kind* of scholar I want to be and showed me that it is possible to keep your heart alive and be responsive to people’s everyday struggles from our positions within the academy; Jim Gee, who always offered strategic counsel; Doris Warriner, who spent hours reading a dissertation not in her discipline – thank you for your detailed attention to my thinking as well as my writing; Aaron Levy and Darren Crovitz, who put me on the path to Arizona State University; Beth Daniell and Mary Lou Odom, who whet my appetite for studies in literacies and rhetoric-composition; Carol Gilles, whose question – So what does this look like in the classroom? – helped spawn chapter 5; Rebecca Dingo and Donna Strickland whose “Yes, and!” stance at a presentation of this work let me know that I was on to something; Shirley Rose for the FYC sandbox you’ve let me play in; students in my FYC and Methods courses at ASU and

Chandler-Gilbert – thank you for hanging with me in that space of cognitive dissonance. I learned so much from you all; and NAU student teachers – Beau Newton, Lauren Ramos, Brandi Rasmussen, and others – it is your work with young people that helps guide what I’m up to.

## PREFACE

The Four Corners, marked by a monument on Navajo Nation land, is the only place in the United States where four states (Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado) come together at one place. Here a person can stand in four states and on the semi-sovereign land of four sovereign indigenous nations (Navajo, Hopi, Ute, and Zuni) at the same time. For many travelers, there is something especially compelling about standing at this unique intersection and taking a snapshot of themselves bridging converging boundaries. This dissertation is, in many ways, just this kind of snapshot.

Certainly, the work of this dissertation seeks to mark the convergence of a number of disciplines: applied anthropology, emancipatory education, critical literacies, rhetorical education, secondary English studies, pre-service teacher education, and public literacies. Equally important, if not more important, is that this project marks the convergence and flux of identities – of mine, of the Sudanese, of pre-service teachers, of secondary and post-secondary students – that we put on and take off as we move in, out, and among institutions. Central to eighteen months of research with the Sudanese and to the methodological and pedagogical implications that follow are the hard and worthwhile rhetorical work 1) of creating a sustained and focused, collaborative “We” and 2) of partnering with local residents and with students to pursue some goal that, at the outset, is elusive and yet-to-be-discovered.



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## CHAPTER 1

### CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, PROBLEM POSING, AND RHETORICAL PROBLEM-SOLVING: STRUGGLING OVER THE OUGHT TO BE, STRUGGLING FOR THE OUGHT TO BE

Implicit in any talk of school reform is a theory of how change happens, and in the United States, these debates most often hinge on a reform/revolution paradox, with each paradigm requiring different, possibly conflicting, actions. However, this paradox—whether we believe change happens incrementally over time or suddenly, all at once—relies on a rather pervasive, if false, theory-practice binary and excludes the realm of productive knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The most useful knowledge in the riskiest, most unpredictable spaces, productive knowledge is concerned with “the indeterminate and the possible—and that which presents us [...] with alternative possibilities” (Atwill 195). In this dissertation, I explore rhetoric as *poesis*, as “poetic world-making” (Warner 114), as productive knowledge that is “decisively instrumental and uncompromisingly situated” (Atwill 195), and I call for refiguring secondary English education to prioritize rhetorical studies, *poesis*—that is, as the art of intervention<sup>2</sup> and invention, where the focus of instruction is what I’m calling *contemplative social action* in specific rhetorical contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, productive knowledge, see Janet Atwill’s *Rhetoric Reclaimed*, especially chapter 7, “Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and the Theory/Practice Binary.” Also, Bent Flyvbjerg’s work about applied phronesis (forthcoming in 2012) and social sciences methodologies argues also makes important contributions for understanding and valuing the situated, variable, particular nature of productive knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Intervention has a long and beleaguered history, and the idea and actions of intervention have surely been appropriated for purposes of domination that caused very real violence. Many critical scholars have written about this history and cautioned us about intervention. In taking their work to heart and

## Poetic World-making

In rhetoric, our poetic world-making is born in a space of felt difficulty, because of “some real-world need, some palpable contradiction” (Spellmeyer 185) that makes our questions and predictions meaningful and worth undertaking in the first place. That is, we begin constructing our working theories in the face of what doesn’t work. Because our poetic world-making starts as working *theories*, we strive to articulate our theory’s goals, values, and assumptions (Flower 90). And it is this articulation that makes our working theories visible to others and opens them up to reflection and to the test of outcomes (Flower 90). At its best, our theory-building in the face of what doesn’t work opens up creative possibility and leads to framing and re-framing action. It calls on us to do something, to run our theory through someone else’s gauntlet and see if and how it shapes up on the other side. In this way, constructing and testing our working theories reflects one version of productive knowledge as we invent alternative possibilities that are “operational (a tool kit of conditions and strategies); [...] situated (adapted to its particular time, place, and people); and [...] always under revision (responding to the test of outcomes)” (Flower 90).

But our working theories and creative plans are made in the face of situations not of our making. Even more daunting is the fact that we can neither fully know or predict or control either the constraints or the results of our work. And so, as we

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in my own pursuit of what Cornel West calls “prophetic pragmatism,” here, along with Janet Atwill, Elenore Long, and others, I aim to draw on indigenous mythologies to re-claim intervention (and also invention and *techne*) as primarily belonging to everyday people (as opposed to an elite class or to a dominant institution) and to assert wise rhetorical intervention as a responsibility for pursuing more just and reciprocal relationships, policies, and practices. For more about our ill-ease over intervention, see Janet Atwill’s work in *Rhetoric Reclaimed* as well as Elenore Long, Nyillan Fye, and John Jarvis’s “Gambian-American College Writers Flip the Script on Aid-to-Africa Discourse.”

learn new information, are faced with additional or changed constraints, and bump up against unpredictable results, we find ourselves in a space of ongoing assessment and construction of an ever-shifting rhetorical situation. This space can be unsettling, to say the least. After all, the most important part of a working theory is that it works: that it is responsive *in real time* to the test of outcomes (Flower 91, emphasis added). Thus, rhetorical work with young people and with community partners looks to the “back-talk” of a situation (Flower 98) to “conniv[e] with reality” (Atwill 93) to test alternative moves and hypotheses, bringing failure and mastery into conversation in the same moment. Where the “back-talk” of a situation may point to failure, it is the “conniving with reality” to create alternative paths that alludes to rhetorical mastery.

The elusive nature of rhetorical work in the face of real-world needs calls us to what I am naming *contemplative social action*—in which we construct the intersection of failure and mastery as one of invention rather than one of despair, and in which our contemplation compels us to act and our social action compels us to contemplate, to reflect, to continue inventing. As I argue in this dissertation, shifting the focus of classroom instruction and our work with community partners to contemplating and taking real-time actions within specific, localized, real-world contexts puts both students and teachers in a space where they must “grapple with the material realities of genre and access” (Atwill 210)—of the forums and tools available (to whom, for whom) and of what must be invented to enable the kind of political agency in pursuit of alternative futures that was once the primary aim of rhetorical instruction.



## Struggling For the Ought to Be

The futures that school reforms aim to build are often obscured from the young people most affected by the policies, practices and politics of those reforms. Kirk Branch observes that “*all* educational practice, simply because it has in mind a future for students, projects a vision of the world as it ought to be. What that “ought to be” should be [...] forms the center of most educational debates” (8). However, the charged debates over what the *ought to be* should be are often hidden, tucked safely away, out of sight and out of reach of the young people most affected by them. Instead, the pedagogies, policies, and standards young people are subjected to are often presented as normative, as stable and indisputable, far removed from contestation rather than as debatable decisions-in-flux about the *ought to be*. And so young people are put in a position to assent (or not) to decisions others have already made about them. One example of this is crystallized in a district-sponsored poster that literacy scholar-activist Django Paris saw hanging on a classroom wall beside students’ desks during his work with youth of color in Arizona when conflict over oppressive immigration legislation was at its height. The poster read: “*‘The only violence in schools should be the kind you read about in history classes. Be smart. Don’t become history.’* (On the poster, there is a picture of a history textbook opened to a page titled ‘Civil War.’)” (Paris “Become History”). Paris narrates the poster’s message to students: “Be smart. Don’t become history. Leave history in books. History is in the past. Violence is in the past. The Civil War, that violent battle for, among other things, human rights, is in the past. Leave it there. Such struggles are not a part of school” (“Become History”).

But these struggles *are* part of school, whether they are visible and accessible through classroom instruction or not. And it is exactly these struggles—over rights, for rights, about possible futures and what ought to be—that young people most need to be part of, that we most need them to be part of. For these struggles—through wise rhetorical action and invention—offer the potential for transformation of individuals, of relationships, and of systems.

What would it mean to engage young people in these struggles in ways that are transformative? Steve Parks reminds us, “an informed student paper does not by necessity lead to political change” (9). I contend that it would mean creating a very different classroom – one that is related in its critical approach and participatory bent to both community organizing (Goldblatt; Parks; Warren and Mapp) as a catalyst for school reform and to participatory action research (Irizarry; Morrell; Tuck) but one that differs radically in its focus and its pedagogical praxis.

While critical scholars have argued to foreground student action in critical research and critical pedagogy, participatory acting—a natural extension of participatory inquiry—is under-theorized and under-taught. Literacy scholar-activist Ernest Morrell has argued for critical research that “looks for literacies of engaged citizenship” and that identifies “the strategies that students are using to critique and act more powerfully upon their social world[s]” (98). Further, he observes that “critical research enables us to expand the notion of what we mean by student work to include student action, particularly action for change” (100). Still, much participatory action research (PAR) might more accurately be described as participatory inquiry in which “those most affected by the problem are involved in doing the actual research,” by which we typically mean data gathering, analysis, and

representations of findings to power brokers and other stakeholders. As PAR researcher Eve Tuck points out, though, it is *action* that is at the heart of PAR, or at least should be. Indeed Tuck and Zeller-Berkman assert the importance of acting early and often, and Tuck draws an important and telling metaphor for the role action plays in critical research:

I have come to think of action as having the role that fires have in the forest growing cycle of interior Alaska – forceful, with somewhat unpredictable trajectories, but necessary to regenerate and make room for new growth. Of course, fire is a bold and metaphor; maybe leg waxing captures this same goal without such high, high stakes. (52)

With this insight, she began “designing methods that blurred the lines between method and action, that were pedagogical or provocative, and that served as dynamic interventions to unfair practices” (53). However, inventing and evaluating blended method-actions with youth led to an unexpected intellectual and existential crisis. Together Tuck and the youth she worked with began asking important, angst-ridden questions:

- What is the point of doing research? (53)
- How in the world are we supposed to affect capitalism anyway? (54)
- What can research do anyway? (54)
- How do we think that change happens? (54)

And it is precisely these kinds of questions that call us out of the domain of the theoretical, out of the domain of practicing what already exists, and into the domain of a different kind of knowledge, a *productive* knowledge, and squarely in the realm of rhetoric. Rhetoric calls us to extend representation and critique and *to do something* (Porter et al.) or more precisely, as Aristotle would observe, to *make* something. The *poesis* or “making” that rhetoric is bent toward is “decisively instrumental and

uncompromisingly situated” (Atwill 195) —utterly and unabashedly dependent on the contingencies of time and circumstances and ever concerned with the indeterminate and the possible and how something that *could* be otherwise might *become* otherwise. Rhetoric, as a productive knowledge, works to “de-form limits into new paths in order to reach—or better yet produce—[...] alternative destination[s]” (Atwill 69). Thus, re-figuring secondary English education to prioritize rhetorical studies would mean re-figuring the work that teachers and students do together in and beyond the classroom around a very different question: *What could it mean—here and now—to intervene in such a way as to “invent” alternative futures?* (Atwill 207).

With an eye toward individual as well as material and systemic transformation, in this dissertation I contend that joining with others to confront the issues of our communities (Paris “Become History”). As Branch remind us, inventing alternative futures is not only about raising critical consciousness and recognizing competing versions of the *ought to be* but also, and more importantly, about the interplay of struggling *over* the ought to be and struggling *for* the ought to be in morally ambiguous contexts (11). Similarly, Paulo Freire writes: “To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it [...]. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action and reflection” (69). For Freire, the process of gaining increased critical consciousness of the world is naturally coupled with transforming that world. However, many scholars oversimplify the relationship between raising critical awareness and taking wise action when they assume that critical awareness automatically leads to collective action in the form of “unified social movements, sweeping structural changes, or radical shifts in consciousness” (Cushman xx). This assumption is not only false; it also minimizes the fact that we

often construct our critical consciousness and take action(s) in worlds not of our making, under constraints we cannot control, and in the face of outcomes we cannot predict. It also renders invisible the dialogic nature as well as the *chronos* and *kairos* of reflection and action, mastery and failure as they play out in real time in individual and collective struggles in, out, and among institutions. Further still, this simplified and widespread view of critical consciousness disregards the important and difficult rhetorical work 1) *of individuals* as they “accommodate and undermine, placate and rebuff, obey and challenge” (Cushman xxi) in order to negotiate constraining structures and 2) *of local publics* (Long) as people seek to call others together around issues of shared concern; construct alternative terms of engagement; and leverage people’s situated expertise to inform, construct, and evaluate decisions related to public practices and institutional policies.

Throughout this dissertation, I seek to scaffold a stance for taking and teaching rhetorical action that is strategic, reflective, purposeful—a a stance that can keep building on, learning from, and using what went before. And so I aim to address a central challenge in critical pedagogy: how to make operational a compelling but tentative way of knowing<sup>3</sup> without valorizing institutional priorities that enact an expressive but not persuasive rhetoric, and, thus, close the door to deliberation. Primarily framing our pedagogies and partnerships around critique, expression, or representation also excuses us from doing the work of praxis, which includes strategic planning—constant learning from what works and what doesn’t,

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<sup>3</sup> Here, I draw on what John Dewey has called “an experimental way of knowing” but resist his terminology in light of a long, painful, and despicable history involving medical experimentation on people of color. Readers might recall the Tuskegee syphilis study, the so-called Mississippi Appendectomies, and Henrietta Lacks who is known in the medical community as HeLa.

revision, re-creation, and serious assessment of our own goals and efforts. These are moves at the center of powerful traditions in rhetoric, community organizing, and leadership.

In this project, then, I ask: *How, in complex situations not of our making, do we determine what needs doing and how might we leverage available rhetorical means for the health of our communities and institutions?* In response to this question, I sought to pull together rhetorical concepts of the *stochastic arts* (those that demand the most precise, careful planning in the least predictable places) and *techne* (rhetorical problem-solving tools that transform limits and barriers into possibilities). The rhetorical concept of *techne* is concerned with the concrete and indeterminate and is bent on bringing something into being. Aristotle reminds us that those who invent and use *techne* consider “how to bring something into being that is capable of being or not being” (1976, ss 1140a1-23). That is, *techne* is not concerned with necessity or inevitability but with possibility, and it chases a particular goal (Aristotle, 1976, ss. 1140a24-b12). As I joined with some Sudanese refugees in Phoenix to pursue versions of transformation within local instantiations of the diaspora, I sought to ground our work together by forwarding a stochastic *techne*. Part of what a stochastic *techne* can do is re-frame the intersection of mastery and failure as one of inquiry, invention, and pragmatic hope rather than one of despair in the face constraints we can’t control and outcomes we can’t predict.

My work with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix—namely with Tap, Samra, Saher, Dalila, and Amou, who you’ll be introduced to more fully in the next chapter—is, in part, about seeking to understand the issues that confront our communities. As you will come to see throughout this dissertation, their

understandings reflect a humanist self-image: “the expression of an oppressed human community imposing its distinctive order on an existential chaos, explaining its political predicament, preserving its self-respect, and projecting its own hopes for the future” (West 85). In this same spirit, Tap Dak , a young man, a leader in the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, used language similar to Branch’s to describe what he called “the world as it is” and “the world as it could be.” It was Tap’s stance that tempered my own white do-gooder humanitarianism as well as my indulgences in despair. Tap’s way-in-the-world called me into what Cornel West would call a space of “tragicomic hope” — “the ability to laugh and retain a sense of life’s joy” — to preserve hope in the face of adversity as opposed to falling into the “nihilism of paralyzing despair” (*Democracy Matters* 16). But this dissertation is not only—nor even primarily—about understanding or representing the experiences of the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, or about critiquing well-intentioned but limited or oppressive institutions. Rather, this dissertation is about productive knowledge—about “Pascalian leaps of faith in the capacity of human beings to transform their circumstances, engage in relentless criticism and self-criticism, and project visions, analyses, and practices of social freedom” (West “Prophetic Tradition” 38). That is, the work of this dissertation is primarily about *poesis*; about poetic world-making; about imagination, transformation, and partnership. It is about *joining with* Samra, Saher, Dalila, Tap, and Amou. It is about learning with them to keep my “eyes on the ought to be” (Branch) and about struggling alongside them over the ought to be and for the ought to be.

In this dissertation I have two goals: 1) to honor the complexity and specificity of the savvy rhetorical problem-solving some of the Sudanese are up to in

the face of layers of globalized racial, economic, and gendered oppression and 2) to consider what it might mean to join with others to engage tough problems and to ask (and keep asking) what it means to be “good [people] speaking well” (Quintilian Book 12.1.1) but in the world(s) we find ourselves in now. I seek to reveal how Tap re-positioned me in order to connect me to the larger network of Sudanese refugees in Arizona; how Samra, Saher, and Dalila worked, and are working still, through inventive fashion to construct alternative versions of what it could mean to be Sudanese and American and female; how Amou sought to test the limits of public discourse by calling other Sudanese youth into democratic deliberation; how by positioning themselves as micro-financers of ambulances in South Sudan Samra, Saher, and Dalila dismantled microfinancing models based on American, paternalistic humanitarianism and racialized versions of noblesse oblige to re-cast themselves and their family members in Sudan as innovators and entrepreneurs. I also seek to reveal our rhetorical problem-solving by advancing what in rhetoric are called “a techne”<sup>4</sup> and “a working theory”<sup>5</sup> of our joint work together—concepts that I elaborate extensively in chapter 2. But what would it take to partner with others to confront the issues that confront our communities? In this dissertation, I aim to make this work teachable in the classroom. My larger goal is to re-cast English education

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<sup>4</sup> Readers may want to consider Atwill’s description of techne in *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (66-69), Branch’s description of *métis* in “*Eyes on the Ought to Be*”: *What We Teach When We Teach About Literacy* (206-210), and Long, Fye, and Jarvis’s description of conflicting definitions of techne as well as techne’s importance for rhetorical education and community literacy (“*Gambian-American College Writers Flip the Script on Aid-to-Africa Discourse.*”)

<sup>5</sup> Flower has addressed the role of working theories in each of these discursive activities: the teaching of writing (“*Teachers*” 9), composing (*Construction* 260-62), deliberation (“*Intercultural Knowledge*” 272), and theory building (“*Intercultural Knowledge*” 6). The concept of a working theory is central in Flower’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*.



around real-world, real-time rhetorical problem-solving in ways that expose and dismantle systems of oppression and construct alternative means of working toward the humanity of all people in and out of schools.

My work in this dissertation turns on the theory-praxis intersection of sociocultural approaches to literacies, rhetorical approaches to community literacy, and liberatory pedagogies in English studies. These theoretical approaches each aim at honoring the everyday literacies of people. Further, they are grounded in a resource approach (Moll, et al. 132)<sup>6</sup> to people's private worlds—their vernacular literacies and their situated expertise—and they explore the connections (or lack of connections) between people's private worlds and public spheres. Most importantly, these approaches, at their best, work to humanize our selves, our relationships, and the systems we find ourselves in, out, and among.

In order to offer an initial sense of the context in which Sudanese refugees and I worked together to confront the issues confronting the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, let me briefly provide some historical background.

### **A World Not of Their Making**

In post-colonial Sudan, race, religion, and resources have sparked intense conflict since the 1970s. In the 80s, oil was discovered in southern Sudan and was a catalyst for civil war and systematic genocide of the Black tribes of the south.

Thousands of children, some as young as four years old, were forced to flee when

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<sup>6</sup> Since Moll et. al.'s important work, a number of scholars have advocated for what Django Paris calls "resource pedagogies" that draw on students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et. al.). Interested readers might consult the work of David Kirkland, Molly Blackburn, Eve Tuck, Jason Irizarry, June Jordan, Valerie Kinloch, and Michelle Grijalve, among others.

their villages were raided by soldiers from Khartoum. Many took cover in jungles and began making their way through their war-torn country to Ethiopia, where they stayed in refugee camps until civil war in Ethiopia forced the children, most of them young boys, to flee a second time. In the face of continued life-threatening hostility in Sudan, they made another long trek down the length of the country to Kakuma, a United Nations refugee camp in Kenya. Those who did not die along the way lived the next ten years in the camp and came to be called the “Lost Boys of Sudan.” Intolerable living conditions in the camp prompted the Australian, Canadian, and American governments to resettle thousands of the refugees to major cities. Four thousand Lost Boys were scattered across the United States, 550 of whom came to live in Phoenix in 2001.<sup>7</sup>

Now, a decade after being relocated to Arizona, more than 3,000 displaced southern Sudanese men and women continue to struggle to carve out a transnational cultural identity and to figure out what it means to thrive in two differently hostile environments. In Arizona, within the community, language and cultural differences between the older generations and the community's youth, the relative isolation of the youth from other generations, class differences, internal political strife, and struggles for respect among men and women across four generations threaten to unravel the community. Meanwhile, the Sudanese are trying to survive the current economic recession and build a vibrant and sustainable transnational community while addressing their more immediate needs of education, vocational training and

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<sup>7</sup> Readers wanting to learn more about the sociopolitical conflicts in Sudan and their effects on individuals might read Eliza Griswold's *The Tenth Parallel*, which documents strife over religions and resources along the tenth parallel. Tap Dak, a young Nuer man in Phoenix, also Tap Dak recommended the following books to me as representative of his experience as a boy soldier and a resettled refugee in the United States: Dave Eggers' co-authored piece *What's the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* and Emmanuel Jal's *War Child: A Child Soldier's Story*.

licensure, and transportation as well as their deep concern over the vitality of their community. Now, on the other side of the 2011 referendum for the secession of south Sudan from north Sudan, the Sudanese in Phoenix whose families often include parents and siblings on both sides of the contested boundaries of north and south Sudan, are faced not only with the complex and difficult work of surviving and thriving here but also with trying to support and assist their loved ones in Sudan with nation building.

Ten years into resettling in Phoenix, Arizona, leaders in the community are recognizing that they are at a crossroads: neither their traditional Sudanese cultures nor the overtly American culture are enough to help them move forward. Instead, community leaders across four generations are faced with inventing ways for the community to thrive against existential and material conditions that seem to thwart the community's health at almost every turn.

## **Community Health**

But what does it take to build healthy communities? In part, it depends on how a community names "health." William Julius Wilson contends that viable social programs are the bedrock of a healthy community. Sociologist Peter Jackson compares conflicting versions of neighborhood health in terms of urban economic reinvestment via the arts or urban heritage. David Coogan argues that "middle spaces"—spaces of public life where it becomes possible to imagine an alternative future unfolding and where people are challenged to extend their self-interest in the name of a public—can be a reflection of local community health (162). John McKnight contends that turning away from being a care-less society and working to

re-vamp “care” and relationships are indications of a society’s health. In recent decades medical professionals have extended concerns about individual and community “health” to include poverty, the single greatest predictor of medical health. Glynda Hull and Michael Angelo James describe the ways after-school programs can work with poor urban youth to reconstitute notions of place and self. They note, too, the contested nature of determining the priorities of an after-school program intended to promote community health, conflicts that affect whether the program is designed around child safety or academic achievement or something else altogether (256). Certainly, conversations about reclaiming what it means to thrive in inner cities are abundant and ongoing.

Complicating these already complex conversations about community health are scattered communities—immigrant, migrant, and diasporic peoples—navigating cultural “contact zones” (Pratt). Jacqueline Copeland-Carson, in her ethnographic work with African immigrants in Minneapolis, describes health and wellness in terms of a neighborhood-based nonprofit that attempts to “create a sense of locality in a place where residents may have community affiliations that crosscut the globe” (3). Copeland-Carson’s fieldwork explores the ways Africans “focus[ed] on the body as a vehicle and agent for cultural recall and revitalization [...] attempting to create a different way of conceptualizing, sensing, and reconnecting what they call the ‘mind/body/spirit divide’” (9). Guadalupe Valdes, in *Con Respeto*, described the strong family values that were central to the kinship of extended Mexican families—values that were in conflict with the white mainstream values of American schools. Judith Byfield et al. consider diasporic health in terms of the construction of gendered identities in the face of racial and patriarchal constraints (10). Elenore

Long, Diane Deerheart, and John Jarvis documented the Nipmuck tribe's long battle for federal recognition as a pursuit of tribal health. Similarly, Gambian American students have been working with American and Gambian institutions as well as tribal elders to promote educational access and opportunities for young women, a marker of well-being contested in Gambian tribal cultures (Long, Fye and Jarvis).

With these conversations and cultural clashes in mind and with the understanding that global migration is increasing and urban, suburban and rural areas are becoming more multicultural (Klein; Smelser, et al.), I began this study with Tap, a Nuer man in his late twenties, at the Arizona Lost Boys Center in Phoenix. With 114-degree heat scorching outside, I listened to Tap talk about incarceration rates, suicide rates, and homelessness rates climbing among the Sudanese in Phoenix. Rather than voicing concerns for social or educational institutions (or other disciplinary priorities) he invoked the priority for the Phoenix diaspora to work across generations, genders, and tribes to forge new ways in the world, alternative ways of being together and of navigating the persistent cultural clashes they were encountering here and in South Sudan.

Naming a vision of community health and its corresponding obstacles can be a difficult task. In fact, public discussion of community health—like the public conversations about the role of women in the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix that I will mention in chapter 2 and describe and theorize more fully in chapter 3—often reaches an impasse because the problems are complex, there is much at stake, and the tools for productive dialogue often remain outside any of our grasps. Further complicating such matters, these problem spaces are also where power threatens the most control—vested as power is in maintaining the status quo. In chapters 3 and 4,

I will describe and theorize the ways Sudanese women came up against and responded to power and tensions related to the roles of women in constructing community health within the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix. As I listened to private and public conversations I heard different discourses and logics circulating not only about the role of women among the Sudanese in Phoenix but also about the context in which the Sudanese saw their struggles. In light of the words of my Sudanese friends and the day-to-day lived experiences I bore witness to, I came to see their concrete struggles for respect, meaningful work, and kinship against broader contexts of capitalism, creativity, and the commons.

### **Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons**

The Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix is comprised of many people from many tribes from north and south Sudan, and over the past 22 months I have spent time with men and women and their families of different tribes hailing from lots of different regions in South Sudan—Abei, the Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains, and others. However, I have spent most of my time with Nuer families. The Nuer have been well-known in anthropology because of the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard who described their traditional life in southern Sudan (1940; 1951; 1956).<sup>8</sup> That several thousand Nuer live in Phoenix and other major cities across the United States is but one indication of how the lives of the Nuer have changed in the past several decades.

Still, among the features of Nuer life that Evans-Pritchard discussed, cattle remain

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<sup>8</sup> E. E. Evans Pritchard's work with the Nuer is perhaps among the best known case studies in the history of anthropology. He was the first anthropologist to work in Africa using now well-accepted methods of long-term fieldwork and participant observation. Based on research that began in the 1930s and spanned at least two decades, Evans Pritchard wrote three ethnographies that are now classics within the field of anthropology – *The Nuer*, *Marriage and Kinship among the Nuer*, and *Nuer Religion*.

central to Nuer cultural values. Evans-Pritchard described cattle as central to Nuer economic life in that they provided milk, hides, meat, and dung for fuel. Moreover, cattle were central to Nuer social relationships. Cattle served to tie together broader networks of kin, and tribal and clan divisions were largely defined in terms of access to pastures and water supplies required for their herds (Holtzman 5). Importantly, marriages are enacted through the payment of bridewealth cattle from the family of the groom to the family of the bride. Now, payment often takes the form of cattle as well as cash, with each cow gaining about three hundred U.S. dollars. In Sudan, and even in the refugee camps, the Nuer lived within a network of family and friends which made up a close-knit community. In Phoenix, however, and in other cities across the U.S., the Nuer find themselves scattered, often living with family but living among American neighbors who are strangers. Further, the basis for Nuer economic and social relationships in the United States has shifted (and continues to shift). The intricate community life in Sudan has been wholly disrupted through the process of flight, resettlement, and migration. Many Nuer have few, if any kin in Phoenix, and people come from different villages, different regions, and even different tribes within the broad range of Nuer ethnicity. A critical issue, then, is the extent to which – and how – Nuer refugees can come together to form a community, especially in light of the ways what is common to the Nuer is reconfigured along with economic and social relationships. Many of the Nuer I have come to know describe the ways they find themselves navigating on a daily basis three overlapping, often contradictory systems: kinship networks, old capitalism, and new capitalism.

*Kinship Networks.* Samra and Susana tell stories about the southern Sudanese economy being based on cows and including marriage, with women gaining cows as dowry for their father's family. With the Sudanese scattered around the world, the dowry is often negotiated as some hybrid payment of cows and cash. The difficulty of saving cash or purchasing cows for the diaspora in Phoenix complicates the ways the Sudanese in Arizona navigate marriage contracts here and in Sudan (Holtzman).

*Old Capitalism.* Many of the Sudanese in Phoenix tell stories about working factory jobs and taking classes at local community colleges to earn degrees, only to find that their degrees don't help them find or secure other kinds of employment. Many are stuck in the "remaining backwaters of old capitalism" (Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 18) working low-level jobs doing repetitive, mind-numbing work for meager wages in an economy that is increasingly cut-throat and characterized by technological change, fickle customers, and "lean and mean" companies (18).

*New Capitalism.*<sup>9</sup> For the Sudanese in Phoenix, many of whom send as much cash as they can back to their families in Sudan, part of thriving here means helping their families in south Sudan thrive as well. Some of the Sudanese in Phoenix hold out hope that constructing niche markets and engaging in entrepreneurial work might be one way forward despite saturated markets here in the U.S. (Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 26). Many Sudanese see the independence of South Sudan also opening up new markets where important goods and services could be offered that could have a significant impact on people's health in South Sudan and in Phoenix.

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<sup>9</sup> For more 'fast capitalist texts', Gee, Hull, and Lankshear recommend Joseph Boyett and Henry Conn's *Workplace 2000*; Tom Peter's *Liberation Management*; Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*, and Hammer and Champy's *Reengineering the Corporation*.



However, engaging in entrepreneurship in South Sudan is less about the commodities themselves—although those matter—and more about designing needed goods and services that also double as important symbols of collective transnational identities and community thriving for those consuming and designing these products.

As the Sudanese diaspora navigates these systems and works to move forward and carve out a transnational identity for themselves, it is the contradictions *among* these systems that are the places of potential transformation or further chaos. In chapters 3 and 4, I will describe and theorize more fully the ways Sudanese attempted to navigate these systems through public discourse and through inventive fashion and to re-construct social and economic relationships in Sudan and in the United States.

Still, despite the ways some of the Sudanese in Phoenix are leaning toward health and the ways chapters 3 and 4 close on a high note, mastery is not about having a culminating epiphany or orchestrating a single breakthrough. While the discipline of rhetoric (or any other for that matter) offers no absolute guarantees, rhetoric calls us as educators to enter into those problem spaces precisely at the intersection of mastery and failure. Working with others to test and to refine theoretically informed, data-driven responses to real-time constraints and outcomes, together we can de-form limits into new paths. The promise of rhetoric is that it recasts these high stakes problem spaces as a perpetual series of occasions for hope, where health is elusive but attainable.

Guaranteed outcomes are beyond our abilities to reliably predict or control. Instead, mastery is about developing a repertoire of available means of rhetorical

action so that we have more and more tools to leverage in the face of infinite variations of constraints and outcomes. The catch is the only way to develop a repertoire for rhetorical action with community partners is to exercise the repertoire we already have and put our theories to work “in the streets.” In other words, mastery is not necessarily about offering or implementing a particular model that is sustainable or that brings about a breakthrough; rather mastery is about and comes as a result of being precisely in the space where what fails and what works are in conversation with one another. Mastery is about the *theorizing* that happens in situ as we find ourselves in real time with real people against real challenges and we’re asking ourselves questions like the ones in the stochastic *techne* in order to do real work. That charged space is one we often bow out of or attempt to stabilize in order to get some relief, but that relief is a luxury not afforded to some of our community partners. Instead, for them, these spaces call for radical responses—either despair or invention. If we are to partner with young people to confront the complex issues that confront our communities, our choices aren’t much different.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The chapters that follow this introduction build upon one another as I seek to make visible what *phronesis* – determining and taking wise rhetorical action -- might look like in our communities and in our classrooms. In Chapter 2, I detail the methodology I used throughout my 18 months of fieldwork. I attempt to capture the messiness of engaging in *phronesis* while also constructing do-able methods for other scholars wishing to engage in collaborative inquiry and invention with people in unpredictable spaces. I hope that between the explanations of public listening,

critical incidents, and situational maps of chapter 2 and the narratives of chapter 3 that the dynamic and lively nature of inventing and testing working theories in concrete material ways will be apparent and will feel worthwhile and do-able, even as the work is always by nature a bit daunting.

In Chapter 3, I describe the *stochastic techne*, a heuristic for determining and testing wise rhetorical action. In addition to narratives, which are perhaps the best tool for teaching *phronesis*, I offer a number of principles for constructing mutually collaborative, mutually beneficial community-university/ community-school partnerships as we work together to address real-world issues that matter in the places where we live.

Chapter 4 briefly explains some of the rhetorical work that some Sudanese women are getting traction around as they do the hard work of inventing new paths and destinations for themselves and others in pursuit of healthier, more fulfilling lives here and in Sudan.

Chapter 5 pulls back from the Sudanese to consider implications for re-figuring secondary English education around *phronesis*. As I mentioned in the preface, my own positionality as a former secondary English teacher, current teacher-educator, university supervisor for pre-service English teachers, and critical literacy and rhetoric-composition scholar puts me at an important and interesting intersection. When we do the work of *phronesis* and perform rhetoric day-to-day, we do this in, out, and among institutions, flexing our various identities as we attempt to navigate complex discourses as well as constraints. While much of this dissertation is about engaging jointly with the Sudanese in complex social arenas to work toward the health of the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, the fifth chapter is about joint

collaboration with students to pursue the health of our local communities. In this chapter, I offer a framework for teachers to engage in the real work of problem-posing that aims to get something done by confronting the issues that confront our communities (Paris). While the examples I offer are from a First Year Composition course, I have in mind secondary English teachers as well as FYC instructors and upper-division rhet-comp teachers. By embracing this intersection, I draw on a long line of scholars in English education, sociocultural literacies, and rhetoric and composition who aim to “educat[e] a critical citizenry who will promote democratic values and who will draw upon a heritage of what [Cornel] West terms a ‘deep democratic tradition’ to fashion humane responses to unwarranted social misery” (Gilyard 3). Chapter 5, thus, offers a framework for rhetorical education that includes critical reception and production of “language and thus the American experience itself” (Stull 3). In light of my position, during the writing of this dissertation, as an FYC instructor, I walk readers through one version of this framework as it played out in a First Year Composition course I taught and provide tools for scaffolding public listening, multi-voiced inquiries, and *phronesis* with and for local publics. Throughout the chapter, I work to take metaphorical “four corner snapshots” to bridge the intersections of secondary English and FYC. Finally, I conclude the chapter and this dissertation by calling for English education to abandon all pretense of being a predictive science and to instead embrace productive knowledge-making and the rhetorical work of *phronesis* as the heart of secondary English studies.

## CHAPTER 2

### TOWARD A RHETORICAL ACTIVIST METHODOLOGY FOR CHANGE

In critical literacy studies, we're used to researchers recounting charged situations with people with whom they're working. Mollie Blackburn describes a young lesbian reading the beginning of her autobiographical poem to a youth LGBTQ group:

“Dyke!” The group was silent, attentive. Then it was her voice again, but tense now, “he yelled as I released my girlfriend/ from my arms and kissed her./ I heard him and thought.” And then, in such a sincere sounding voice, the voice I think of as Justine's, “Dyke? What does that mean?/ Am I sex-crazed, dirty, man-/hating, braburner; with more hair/ on my face than my [cunt]?” (317)

Likewise, Ellen Cushman relays a tense interaction between Lucy and a social worker (1-2). Lucy was angry when she left the social worker's office: “What would it have taken that lazy fucking bitch to get off her sorry white ass and get my other file?” (31). Cushman recounts having talked with Lucy to better understand why Lucy was so angry and to make sense of Lucy's own resistance as she “held her own” during the interaction with the social worker. Ralph Cintron notes doing fieldwork at times in Angelstown “with people who seemed difficult and not very likeable” (130). For example, in an extended conversation between a married couple, Cintron explained that “Alberto twisted Maria's plea for sharing household duties into a put-down of what she did not know how to do,” thus “disrespect[ing] what she did know and, moreover, ma[king] her 50/50 plea appear to be somehow inherently contradictory and something to be ridiculed” (135).

These insider moments are necessary and important parts of the work of ethnography that aims to gain insider trust and grasp of the cultural meanings of participants (Paris 3) and to share the burden of representation alongside people we are learning from and with (Cushman 22). Often these accounts take the form of description or critique, forms that stem more from the sciences of representation than the rhetorical arts of intervention. Cintron's insightful chapter "Gangs and Their Walls," represents the limits of discourse between dominating and shadow cultures and then skeptically alludes to intervention:

What specific policy might have worked? I am approaching quicksand on this one, but if I were to maintain the faintest hopes in broad public discourse, and I doubt that I do, I would argue for pushing further back the fence line electrified by fear by encouraging gang leaders and membership to participate in public forums with majoritarian society, insisting on careful documentation of the assumptions and beliefs of all parties so that they could be later deconstructed, and by insisting that these forums move toward concrete truces, programs, and proposals. (195)

Cintron goes on to say that "[i]n the Angelstown of 1990 and 1991, such an approach would have been outrageous" (195). And so, with no intervention—outrageous or otherwise—the next several years continued to see "the unremitting enforcement of powerlessness upon those whose actions speak of a need for power" (195).

In literacy studies we have been "more prone to reproduce the given than invent new possibilities" (Atwill 207), often taking our methodological cues from the

English (literature) departments where we are typically housed and from other social sciences. But we need to face “the possibility that [our] seemingly radical discursive maneuvers [may] do nothing to further the struggles ‘against oppression and exploitation which continue to be real, material and not merely “discursive” problems of the contemporary world’ (Dirlik 176). While we need representations and radical discussions in seminar rooms, we cannot “privilege the realm of representation as the primary arena of political struggle” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale and McLaren 151). The best ways we can do real and material justice to the people we work with “in the streets” (Mathieu 1) and honor research that does the work of representation and critique are to stay true to the grounded and material work that rhetorical action affords us. As Porter et al., put it, for rhetoricians “critique needs an action plan” (613). Janet Atwill casts the work of constructing rhetorically grounded “action plans” this way: “What could it mean at the turn of the millennium to intervene in such a way as to “invent” alternative futures?” (207). And her question couldn’t be more important. An example from Domestic Workers United illustrates the point.

One Friday night in September 2011, about a dozen local residents and I had gathered at a local bookstore to hear Mary Romero read from her new book, *The Maid’s Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the American Dream*. A young man in the audience asked Romero what she thought about the book and movie *The Help*. Romero said that *The Help* caricatured domestic workers, and that The Domestic Workers United had responded on their website with a post to allow Americans to “meet today’s ‘help.’” She continued, “You know, if you’re [Americans are] so interested in domestic workers, we’ve got a lot of issues we’d like to address.”

Domestic Workers United published the following post on their website in August 2011:

This week the movie “The Help” premiered. 50 years after the stories told in the film, a workforce of over 2.5 million domestic workers go to work every day to take care of the most precious elements of their employers' lives - their homes and families. Still mostly women of color, far too few domestic workers receive overtime pay, meal and rest breaks, sick leave or vacation. And far too many of them work for less than minimum wage. In this regard, too little has changed.

Today, the National Domestic Workers Alliance is releasing “Meet Today’s Help,” [a 2-minute video](#) that tells the stories of domestic workers today and lets people know what they can do to help today's “help.” (Domestic Workers United, 12 Aug 2011)

Romero’s own work offers a more just and current representation of the lives of today’s domestic workers than *The Help* and seeks to demonstrate how “mythologies of meritocracy, the land of opportunity, and the American dream remain firmly in place while simultaneously erasing injustices and the struggles of the working poor.” Don’t get me wrong. I agree that just representations such as those Romero’s book offers are certainly desperately needed, especially where the situated accounts presented implicate us as readers, calling us out of “an ethics of impartial respect” (Nussbaum xvi) and allowing us to “enter[...] imaginatively into the lives of distant others” (Nussbaum xvi). Still, despite the real value of this kind of research, the domestic workers themselves mark the limitations of representation. No doubt, they are speaking back to the caricature of domestic workers in *The Help*, but they are more concerned that “too little has changed.” They are not only committed to telling the stories of today’s domestic workers but also to calling people to take action and intervene in a political and economic system that produces and perpetuates unjust



working conditions. It is this work—the work of intervention, the work of constructing alternative futures—that we need far more of.

As we seek to leverage our disciplinary understandings on behalf of and alongside local residents and work not only to understand but also join and support the work of youth and adults within local public spheres, we are faced with the need to construct methodologies of invention and intervention for the purposes of individual and social transformation. Since the action of rhetorical work in local communities requires invention and intervention, and the representing of rhetorical work requires description, the work of this dissertation does not fall neatly into one methodological box. In this chapter I seek to invent and test—the two tasks cannot be separated—a rhetorical activist methodology for change.

With regard to intervention in social and political affairs, Alasdair MacIntyre has observed, “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (216). Similarly, drawing on Cheryl Mattingly, Bent Flyvbjerg reminds us that “narratives [...] provide us a forward glance, helping us to anticipate situations before we encounter them, allowing us to envision alternative futures” (312).

To understand the stories of the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, then, I drew on methods of ethnography and situational analysis over 18 months of field work with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix. However, since my primary concern was with *phronesis*, I found that I also needed to do what I am calling *public listening* with a particular focus on the limitations of public discourse. Even so, these methods allowed me to understand the individuals and communities I was working with and the barriers and limitations they experienced, but these methods still left me without

a heuristic for engaging the pragmatism, the practical wisdom, of *phronesis*. As I mentioned in chapter 1, to address this limitation, I pulled together rhetorical concepts of the *stochastic arts* (those that demand the most precise, careful planning in the least predictable places) and *techne* (rhetorical problem-solving tools that transform limits and barriers into possibilities) to forward a *stochastic techne* that grounds the rhetorical work of community outreach at the intersection of inquiry and invention and mastery and failure in real time given constraints we can't control and outcomes we can't predict. I came to see the *stochastic techne* as a tool—one of many I hope we come to construct—for making *phronesis* do-able with local publics and teach-able in the classroom. Given the elusive nature of rhetorical work, the *stochastic techne* helped me ground my work with the Sudanese refugee population in Phoenix. I came to see *postmodern phronesis* as a kind of contemplative social action—thoughtful and intensely pragmatic intercultural collaboration that is situated at the intersection of classical *phronesis* (which interrogates values, interests, and power in localized contexts) and *applied phronesis* (which invents new paths and new tools to produce alternative futures). Postmodern *phronesis* is, thus, not only concerned with contemplating practical ethics, but also with accomplishing ends that fit a local public's values. The *stochastic techne*, therefore, stabilizes – if only briefly and always fleetingly – *phronesis* just enough to construct the real-time intersection of options, actions, and outcomes as one of invention rather than one of despair. The *stochastic techne*, which looks to contemplate social action and take social action while continuing to contemplate the action just taken and other possible actions that could be taken, asks the four questions below:

*Phronesis: Taking Contemplative Social Action*

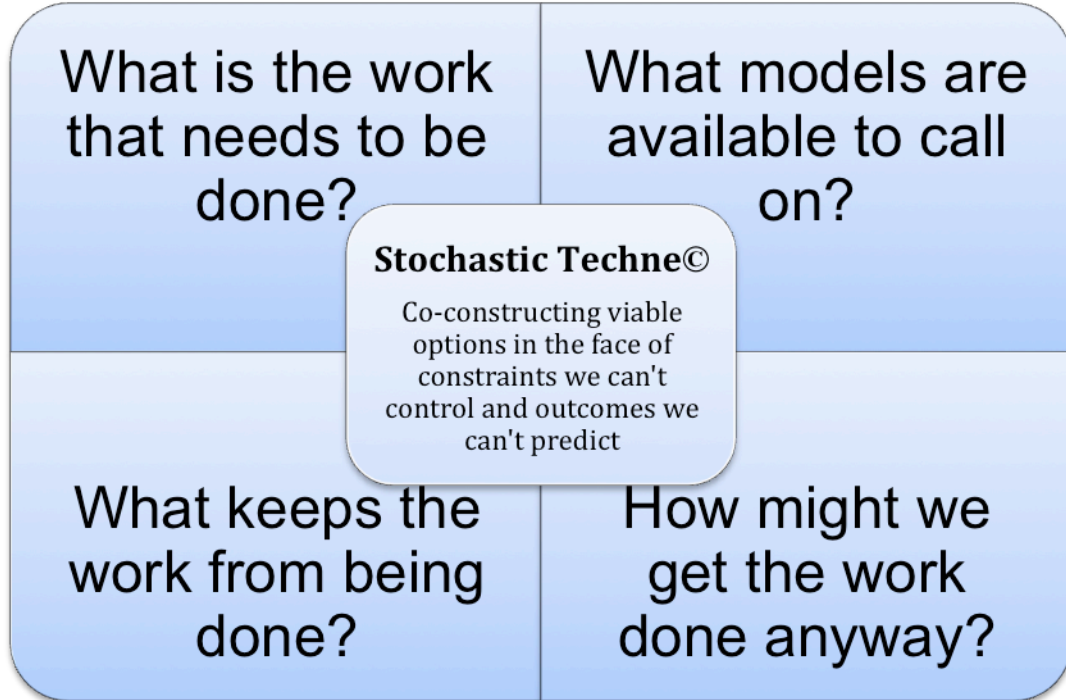


Figure 1. Questions that constitute a *Stochastic Techne* for Applied Phronesis.

Employing this *stochastic techne* during my work with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix was a dynamic, dialectical, highly iterative and highly constructive process.

My key method of macro-level analysis throughout the study was grounded theory. True to both grounded theory practitioners (Charmaz; Strauss) and general qualitative methodologists (Miles and Huberman), in my rhetorical work with the Sudanese, there was little difference between collecting data, making sense of it through analysis, and constructing and testing working theories of wise rhetorical action.

As my goals in working with the Sudanese were not goals of representation but rather goals related to transformation, I drew on methods of data collection (interviews, participant-observation, collecting artifacts) and analysis (critical

incidents and situational analysis, related to representation) in order to empirically understand and construct complex and representative rhetorical situations among the Sudanese for the purposes of co-constructing wise rhetorical action. Thus, the analytical methods I used—constructing critical incidents (Flanagan) and generating situational maps and relational analysis (Clarke)—were ways of making sense of the interactions among the situated knowledges and rhetorical means available (or constrained or not available) to rhetors for individual actions as well as collective or representative social actions (Clarke 112).

The work of understanding (and constructing) rhetorical situations and co-constructing options for rhetorical action relies heavily on embodying a research stance that remains explicitly open to potential shifts in phenomena of interest as well as ways of conceptual frameworks for theorizing those phenomena. This does not mean that I entered the field with no theory or methods in mind; in fact, the *stochastic techné* I developed deliberately and specifically calls on existing working theories, models, and *technai* in community literacy as possibilities for understanding and engaging in rhetorical action in the here and now. Remaining open to shifting phenomena and frameworks does mean that I drew on my own preconceptions, grounded in decades of others' important work and my own time with the Sudanese diaspora, as *sensitizing concepts* (Charmaz) to be explored. As I will show throughout the dissertation, such flexibility was a key for employing the *stochastic techné*, and, thus, inventing and testing working theories of wise rhetorical action throughout my time with the Sudanese.

## **Making Sense: Grounding Theory through Analysis**

Two kinds of analysis—1) rhetorical listening for critical incidents and 2) situational mapping and analysis—grounded the ways I made sense of the rhetorical situations among the Sudanese and the rhetorical means available to individual and collective rhetors. To make clear how these kinds of analysis worked in conjunction with the *stochastic techné*, I need first to explain these two methods.

### **Rhetorical Listening for Critical Incidents**

Throughout my work with the Sudanese, I took a deliberate posture of rhetorical listening. As a constructive process, listening has recently garnered the attention of two clusters of rhetoric scholars. First, a set of feminist rhetoricians—Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe most prominently—identifies rhetorical listening as a trope for interrogating the interplay of race and gender within given relationships, texts, or cultures. In *Rhetorical Listening*, Ratcliffe describes four moves affiliated with rhetorical listening: “promoting understanding of self and other[;...] proceeding from within an accountability logic[;...]; locating identifications across commonalities and differences[;...] and analyzing claims as well as the cultural logics within which claims function. As such, rhetorical listening is a new theoretical approach for analyzing and navigating postmodern identity politics.

In addition to this growing crew of feminist rhetoricians, community-literacy studies also promote listening as a condition of public life. Listening is, for instance, a chief mark of an effective community leader (Goldblatt 285). Featured in his study of a cross-institutional literacy initiative called Open Doors, a community educator named Miguel earns Eli Goldblatt’s highest regard as someone “[...] intense but a

good listener” (285). Conversely, when community meetings fail, community residents often characterize the failures as failures in listening (Higgins, Long, and Flower 15); by extension, when residents express a leeringness to invest in public inquiry and deliberation, that skepticism often turns on whether others—whether adults or Suits—“in fact, will listen” (Higgins, Long, and Flower 25).

Such scholarship makes clear: acts of public listening are as tenuous as they are valuable. Activist researchers Jeff Grabill and Michele Simmons note that in their work with a community organization studying proposals to dredge a neighboring harbor of hazardous waste: “[T]he most difficult and fragile task was to figure out where and how to listen” (445). Eli Goldblatt describes his work in north Philadelphia primarily as a study in listening: “I listen for the self-interest of the neighborhood within multiple issues, I express my own self-interest in the project, and I try to see this neighborhood specifically” (286). In a study of urban school reform, David Coogan names his method—ideographic analysis—as a kind of listening (689). Similarly, in “Writing the Wrongs of Welfare,” Lorraine Higgins and Lisa Brush ask what it takes for former and current welfare moms to cast their written life-stories in terms others will recognize and respect. One vitally important factor is the capacity of supportive readers to listen attentively and purposefully to these writers’ emerging drafts (707). In Higgins, Long, and Flower’s rhetorical model of public and personal intercultural inquiry and deliberation—a model where “ideas and identities are argued and performed in the languages of its multiple participants”—listening becomes a key test of whether the model’s interventions are up to its task: abiding by a standard theorized by Tricia Roberts-Miller, the model demands that its participants “listen so well we can articulate the arguments of others

in terms they will accept, to avoid giving or taking offense, and to speak to others who disagree with what they will see as valid reasons, in terms they will understand [...]” (18).

But more to the point for the purposes of this dissertation are qualities that discerned by pairing feminists’ work on rhetorical listening with empirical studies on listening from community-literacy studies. From such a vantage point, public rhetorical listening is:

- ... *a stance born of moral humility*. Rhetorical listening invokes what Michael Warner would call a unique “stranger relationality” (74-76) predicated on openness, particularly an awareness that despite one’s best effort, one simply can not imagine what it’s like to walk in another’s shoes, but, instead “with careful listening” one “can learn to understand important aspects of [...] lives and perspectives” different from one’s own (Young 42). Quoting Gemma Corradi Fiumara, Ratcliffe writes that such openness exposes the ““fragility of our [own] doctrines”” (105). In *Learning to Rival: A Literate Practice for Intercultural Inquiry*, a similarly open way-in-the-world is affiliated with strong rival-hypothesis stance (51-53). This stance asks participants to seek out differences and gaps in their interpretation and experience in order to critically assess and expand their own knowledge of a problem. It means acknowledging counter claims that qualify and or set conditions on one’s favored interpretation.
- ... *performative rhetorical practice*. The point here, then, is not to mete out by some calculus distinct ways that reading, writing, speaking, and listening each

affect public engagement. Rather, to insist on listening as performative public practice is to emphasize the discrete kinds of knowledges that are purposefully orchestrated within public life. Toward this end, it is helpful to evoke Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's definition of a literate practice as "a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge" (236; see also Street, *Cross-cultural* 9).

- ... *epistemic*. Rhetorical listening claims cultural difference as a site of learning. Even more to the point, such sites allow for precise knowledge to be constructed that may well not be constructed otherwise or elsewhere. Ratcliffe lays claim to this feature of rhetorical listening by calling it "interpretative intervention" (189). In "Intercultural Knowledge Building," Flower dramatizes listening's epistemic capacity when she documents members of a Community Think Tank co-constructing a working theory of welfare reform. For such a group, the point of deliberation is not consensus among members but the transformed understanding of individual participants made possible through the structured process of collaborative inquiry (245).
- ... *supported by technai*. Practices affiliated with rhetorical listening can be scaffolded through *technai*—a non-normative class of knowledge that, as Janet Atwill describes in *Rhetoric Reclaimed*, is stable enough to be taught yet flexible enough to transfer across contexts. Moreover, according to the Western rhetorical tradition that Atwill details, *technai* work to expose



hypocrisies and rectify injustices of the system world. As such, *technai* assume a transgressive spirit that defies domestication and, thus, supports the transformative visions that guide both the feminists' work on rhetorical listening and community-literacy studies.

- ... *temporal*. Different practices of rhetorical listening support different dimensions of public life within the rhetorical "life cycle" of a given local public. (For more about how *chronos* and *kairos* function in local public life, see Long "Rhetorical *Techne*" 24-29.) Some practices of rhetorical listening are more attuned to the behind-the-scenes "design" work that helps focus and frame subsequent inquiry and deliberation. Other *technai* help scaffold inquiry and deliberation in the *kairotic* moment of public engagement. Even for a practice or *techne* that's robust enough to work productively at various points within such a life cycle, the intent and contribution that it generates will work according to what participants are up to at a given moment in time. (For more, see Long, *Community Literacy* 124-26; Clifton, Long and Roen).

### **The Critical Incident Technique: Listening for Situated Knowledge**

As I took this stance, I was listening for what John Flanagan refers to as the *critical incident* in his article aptly titled "The Critical Incident Technique." Below, Higgins, Long, and Flower describe the critical incident as a resource for subsequent joint inquiry among people who otherwise have few occasions to listen and to learn from one another:

Yet personal stories alone don't necessarily support intercultural

inquiry. The challenge is harnessing narrative's capacity to dramatize the reasons behind the teller's values and priorities (Young, *Intersecting* 72) and to illustrate the rich contextual background and social conditions in which problems play themselves out. Narratives that elaborate on stakeholders' reasoning, social positioning, and life contexts generate new information and propel discussion that can move people beyond personal expression to public problem solving. When narrative is elaborated in this way and focused around the causes of and responses to problems, it can be used for case analysis. [...] In the context of community-based deliberative inquiry, critical incidents elicit carefully contextualized accounts of how people actually experience problems involving, for instance, landlord-tenant relations, gang violence, school suspension policies, or welfare reform. (21)

In listening for critical incidents, we are attempting to hear where the private, localized knowledge of an individual or group might be reflective of or indicative of a more public issue of shared concern. Part of the test of a critical incident is its ability to elicit resonance with a listener, to evoke meaningful response, stir a relevant memory, or connect to another's prior knowledge, experience, or understanding in some way. Thus, when we are listening for critical incidents, we are listening for the places where someone else's story gets traction or raises tensions with our own or with someone else's story we've heard.

Our listening and interpretation of what we are hearing are always

constructions, always highly contextual, and always highly dependent on our own particular lives, histories, experiences, and knowledge. What resonates with one person or group may not resonate at all or in the same way with someone else. Further, our understandings are always provisional. It is not necessary, therefore, in this kind of listening to be (or to become) experts or insiders in a given D/discourse. Listening for and listening to and interrogating critical incidents is not about gaining mastery or accruing status (Young 55). Rather, listening rhetors assume “[a] respectful stance of wonder toward other people [that] is one of openness across, awaiting new insight about their needs, interests, perceptions, or values” (Young 56). Respectful listening is thus grounded in “attentive and interested questioning” where answers are always regarded with wonder as gifts and where listeners recognize that the other person may choose, for reasons of his/her own, to remain silent or offer only part of a story (Young 56).

As listening and understanding and seeing newly is the goal, neither I nor the Sudanese necessarily needed to be experts to spark conversations that would invite others to attempt to recognize or construct critical incidents and interpret/understand them. However, as Higgins, Long, and Flower note in their work in community literacy with problem narratives, some background knowledge may be helpful, even necessary, serving not only to inform our own expertise but also to call it into question by juxtaposing it with the expertise of others (23). The more nodes we have to inform our tentative schemas, the more we can appreciate the nuances within a critical incident.

### Three Types of Critical Incidents

**Participants' Constructions of Critical Incidents.** These incidents are described as “problem narratives” when they reenact a situation that the participant found particularly troubling, demanding, or otherwise challenging (21). Because of the fine-grained detail, hidden logics, experiential knowledge, and contextual cues that they convey, such critical incidents ask listeners to question and test common sense or even personal pet theories against more operational dramatizations of public commonplaces. These readily apparent critical incidents, which often take the shape of anecdotal responses to interviewers' questions, ask listeners to interrogate and test common sense or even personal pet theories against more operational dramatizations of felt difficulties, in this case, in the lives of the Sudanese.

*Myths of Assimilation.* Anguma Deng, a Southern Sudanese woman who has lived in the U.S. since 2000, spoke about how all-consuming work has been for her since she first arrived in the U.S.: “Your first task as a refugee is a job. You must get a job. You work to have a place to live, for food and clothes, for your family, to survive. Before you know it, five years have elapsed. When you open your eyes, time has really gone” (SCAA meeting 18 July 2010). At least ten other women, all of whom had been relocated to the U.S. between 1999 and 2001, echoed Anguma's frustrations that day. Many spoke of changing jobs every few months in search of better pay, daytime hours, better working conditions, and a location closer to where they were living at the time. Day-to-day tasks of making their way across Phoenix's urban sprawl; doing hours of repetitive manual labor; caring for their children; cooking at least two meals a day, often for six to ten people at a time; and spending hours at the Laundromat each week made pursuing educational credentials or

vocational licensure nearly impossible. Complicating these socioeconomic issues were cultural and language differences. Tap Dak knew of a number of Sudanese in Phoenix who had been fired for not looking an employer in the eye or for being late to work.

**Composite Critical Incidents.** Participants may also circulate other, less elaborated forms of situated knowledge whose relevance to a potentially public issue of shared concern become especially apparent in relation to the accounts of other participants within the diaspora, especially across tribes, generations, and/or genders. In this case, a critical incident is co-constructed by a researcher drawing illustrative details from across several interviews and field notes and embedding these details in a carefully constructed composite scenario whose truth-value would be its capacity to reflect the dynamics if not the specific details of a shared experience.

*Education as an Obstacle.* Another Dinka woman, Suzana Nhial, spoke about a different, but related, concern. Suzana works at a local Montessori school as a teacher's aide:

I am a mother of five. They are 10, 8, 6, 4, and 2. I have taken ESL classes and work as a caregiver at a Montessori school. I need the GED. I have no daycare for my children so I cannot take classes. I am not qualified for welfare or state daycare. I have worked at the Montessori school for two years but now I need the GED to keep my job. (SCAA meeting 18 July 2010)

Likewise, Samra experienced schooling and the GED as a barrier, despite her training and competence in the creative work she was most interested in: styling hair and designing clothes. She explains:

I start [styling hair] first time I come from Egypt [to San Diego]. I working with her [a stylist] almost two years. She have a beauty salon. I did twists. I did weave. This one is a single braid. The hair is dry with the chemical. And I make the relaxer. It makes it moist. I did all this. And I love it! Now I work at the cleaning [at a hotel] and I do hair in the home. But my husband tell me I need the license because of the chemical. (personal interview 27 August 2010)

While most of the Sudanese men I came to know had attended some kind of school in their villages or towns, in the refugee camps, and in the U.S., the women's educational experiences tended to vary quite a bit. Some women, especially if they were from tribes that were Muslim, had not attended school at all. Some had only gone to Arabic schools. Some only a few years. Many women of the Lost Boys generation spoke some form of "broken"<sup>10</sup> English or "broken" Arabic along with a tribal language. Fewer women could read or write any English or Arabic. Still, to maintain even low-level jobs in the U.S., most women found they needed to get their GEDs – a difficult task with little or no formal educational training. For Samra, even enrolling in beauty schools in Phoenix first required her to get a GED.

As I was engaging in public listening with different people in the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, I was developing working theories in research memos about the ways different people's accounts might be connected. Months later, Samra confirmed my understanding of the ways education seemed to be more of an obstacle than an opportunity:

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term "broken" here because it is a descriptor the Sudanese in Phoenix used to contrast their verbal use of English or Arabic as functional but distinct from more schooled verbal or scripted versions of the languages.

Like me, I don't go to [school in Africa]... And I know I have a lot of stuff in my head, I want to do it, and it's so hard [*her voice starts to quiver*] you can't do it because, you know, because you don't go to school. And it's okay. [*Her voice rises and cracks with this last sentence. Her eyes are full of tears. She chokes up and can't continue talking.*]

This approach to interview data and field notes is similar to Linda Flower's approach to critical incident interviews described in "Intercultural Knowledge Building." In preparation for a public dialogue on workplace and work life issues, Flower and a team of researchers (including college students) interviewed numerous stakeholders who had experienced changes in welfare-to-work legislation in various ways, given their unique perspectives, for instance, as human resource managers, union leaders, new hires entering the workforce from welfare, and the new hires' co-workers. To develop catalysts for discussion at deliberative sessions among concerned community members participating in the Think Tank's sequence of events, Flower crafted a set of written scenarios. These scenarios consolidated insights and details from the interviews into a set of dramatizations of what some of the most prominent recurring welfare-to-work issues look like, not in policy institutes' white pages, but down on the ground and in real time—as experienced by those with firsthand knowledge of the policy changes. Circulated in a *Briefing Book* mailed to Think Tank participants' homes, participants read these scenarios prior to and in preparation for their roundtable discussions. As Flower explains, as the basis for written or performed problem narratives, details from critical incident interviews can replace participants' generalities and untested pet theories with observations of specific behaviors, logics, and beliefs. This new knowledge can, in turn, lead to both a more

realistic understandings of complex problems and to more informed—and, thus, wiser—plans of action.

**Co-Constructed Critical Incidents.** Still other critical incidents emerge even more explicitly as the constructive product of the engaged listener. In such a situation, the listener is drawn to something perplexing about the experience that the contributor recounts. With the intent of honoring the complexity and nuances of that experience, a listener (say, a writing teacher preparing for a class discussion or a student researcher designing materials for an upcoming community dialogue) might deliberately transform loosely connected details and observations from an interview into a critical incident in an effort to draw other members of that local public into joint inquiry regarding the incident’s implications for informed action.

At its most perplexing, situated knowledge invites listeners to co-construct the critical incident itself. Rather than seeing this as a colonizing move to stabilize meaning, we would argue that it is an act of metonymic listening on the order of what Ratcliffe commends in her book *Rhetorical Listening*. The test of such a construct is whether it resonates for other readers/listeners, not unlike Michael Warner’s understanding of how any public discourse works: “raise it up the flagpole and see who salutes” (114).

Three co-constructed critical incidents were especially perplexing:

1. *Desire for a “Public Homeplace”*

- About six months into field work, I began realizing that nearly every Sudanese person I knew had moved multiple times in less than a year, so I began keeping a list of the moves some of them



were making. As an indication of the ongoing transitions many Sudanese face, here is a list of moves that Samra and her family have made in the past 18 months:

**Samra:**

- Fall 2009 – moved from San Diego to a house in Phoenix
- Spring 2010 – moved from the house to an apartment in Phoenix
- Summer 2010 - had an application for the apartment complex where her mother and sister live; she applied Aug 2010 and had to update the application every 6 months
- Summer 2010 – began working at The Phoenician, a gated resort an hour across town in Scottsdale, where she has to swipe a card to get in the gate to clean rooms
- November 2010 – moved to a house an hour further west of Phoenix, further from The Phoenician and her mother and sister
- March 2011 – changed jobs from The Phoenician to Casino Arizona

**Sami, Saher, and Dalila:**

- Summer 2011 – Sami, Samra and Saher’s brother, moved from Texas to live with Saher and Dalila in Phoenix
- Fall 2011 – Dalila was evicted from subsidized housing because three people were living in the apartment rather than two
- Fall 2011 – Dalila, Saher, and Sami move into a house in Tempe, AZ
- Fall 2011 - Saher worked as Certified Nursing Assistant in people’s homes for two weeks; she quit and then worked as security in Vegas at a couple of events

- In a trip to the Desert Botanical Gardens, Samra, her mother-in-law Mary, and her boys, Kueth and Guamar, talked together through telling stories more than I had seen them at any other time. The housing and farming areas seemed to be the most interesting to them. Samra and Mary both made connections to the garden areas where cactus branches formed a fence where sunflowers and vegetables grew. Samra told me, “My grandmother has a garden just like this [in Sudan].” Then she pointed to a large stone pot resting in a wooden crux and told me and her boys, “You put the water in this, and it keeps it cold. You can drink, everyone can drink.” She motioned spooning out water with a gourd. In the thatched cooking

areas and shelters, she called her boys over. “Guamar, have you seen this?” she asked. “It’s Grandma’s house.”

Jennifer: “The houses in Sudan are like this?”

Samra: “Just like this.”

Samra and Mary walk over to the fenced-in areas and Mary talked for a long while in Nuer -- a language Samra partially understands – and lingered a bit near the corrals. Finally, Samra asks me, “For meat?”

J: “For meat? Well, cattle, I think, yes.”

Samra and Mary both nod and smile: “Yes, yes, for the meat.”

Samra adds: “For the cows.”

- Samra: “We need a place, a center.” (personal interview 8.13.2011)
- Tap: “It’s not like being in Africa where you just pick a tree [for a place to meet].” (personal interview 6.22.2010)
- Janni: “The [AZ Lost Boys] Center is in the process of being re-named for funding purposes, either to something related to youth or something related to Africa. It's too limiting as a "Lost Boys" center. Others in the community think that the Center is only for Lost Boys and not for elders or women or youth.” (personal interview 5.20.2010)

## 2. *Resisting De-humanizing Forms of American Humanitarian Aid*

- Kuol about volunteering at the AZ Lost Boys Center: “Just show

up for a while.” (date / interview)

- Janni: “Most people who come to the center think they will find cute little boys, but these are grown men and women with serious issues. So we ask people to come to the center for a while so you can see who you are dealing with.” (date interview)
- Amou: “There is a word in Dinka that means stranger, white person, and it carries the connotation that you are not being true to yourself (or to the community).” (personal interview 6.30.2010)
- Toward the end of June 2010, I ran into Tap at the AZ Lost Boys Center after a mechanic had told him that his car wasn’t working. My field notes from that day note his need of help and his frustration with needing help:

Tap’s car will cost several thousand dollars to fix. The car is at the mechanic's but he cannot pay to have it fixed. He doesn't understand what's going on and he doesn't trust that these guys are going to really fix the problem... [Another mechanic told me] it would be at least \$2000-3000 to get another used engine or \$5000-6000 to repair the existing one -- money Tap doesn't have. He was worried about school. He's taking classes Mondays and Wednesdays at Phoenix College but doesn't have a way to get there. He's starting another job, maybe in the fall but needs a car to get to work. He was so frustrated. He started typing a letter [of

complaint to the Better Business Bureau] on the computer. I'm going to try to help him write a letter, but that feels pointless. Even so, he wants to do something about this and that's pretty close to the only option he has for any kind of retribution. I'm going to talk with Frank today a little more about his options. And I told Tap I'd give him a ride on Mondays and Wednesdays for the next month. *He doesn't want to need a ride, but there it is; he needs a ride.* I told him I wouldn't offer if I couldn't do it, didn't want to do it. Samra's about ten minutes away from Tap, so I can just try to arrange to meet Samra before I pick up Tap.

- Two weeks later, as we anticipated repairs for Tap's car being finished by the end of the day, Tap called, frustrated about a cell phone bill that was abnormally high. He didn't understand his bill and needed his car so he could drive to the cell phone dealer and ask about his bill. Tap called the mechanic who told him it would be two more days until his car would be fully repaired since they were waiting for a part to come in. Tap called me back, angry, yelling, "I don't know what to do. I know you trust this guy. I don't know if I trust this guy. If he don't have my car by Friday, I'm going to take it somewhere else."

Later in the conversation, Tap is still angry and frustrated as we talk about his next day or two without a car.

Jennifer: "I don't know what to tell you about the mechanic.

We'll work things out for another couple of days. I can give you a ride to class. Do you need to go anywhere else?"

Tap yells: "**I don't want a ride! I don't want to need a ride from you!"**

3. *Roles of Sudanese Women in Diaspora in Phoenix*

- **Bearing Blame.** Paulo: "You see, you have done nothing. You blame this one and this one and this one, but you get nothing done. This is why we want the women part of SCAA, so we can watch and make sure something gets done." (meeting in which 14 Sudanese women resign in visible frustration with each other and with the male leaders of the SCAA)
- **Bearing Responsibility for Progress.** William: "Every woman should be at work or at school." (interview 4.16.2010)
- **Bearing Responsibility for Nation-building:** Paulo to second-generation girls who graduated from high school: "You are the hope of Sudan. We count on you when we have independence." (graduation party 6.10.2010)
- **Initiating Grassroots Leadership.** Samra, Amou, Ajak, and other local Sudanese women work with the Sudanese Women's Empowerment Network to hold a conference in Phoenix informing the Sudanese diaspora about voting in the referendum and about the contested issues that still need to be addressed by the governments of North and South Sudan. (meeting 6.26.2010)
- **Sustaining Culture.** Suzana teaches Dinka children Dinka

language and songs at the Sudanese Episcopal Mission in Phoenix on Sundays.

- **Procuring and Circulating Social and Economic Capital.**

Suzana: “Sudanese women get respect because of their children.

The more children you have, the more you are respected.

Especially with girls. Because they bring dowry to the family, to the husband.” (field notes from a Chuckee Cheese birthday party 11.10.2010)

- **Maintaining and Resisting Traditional Roles.** Samra

described the traditional roles of women in her mother’s village in the Nuba Mountains: “The woman's dress is all around, around the face, covers the head. And they are separate. Separate from the men. They eat, they pray, they take care of children, do everything alone -- separate from the men, together with other woman. In the Muslim culture, the woman do not go to school. But my father, he made me go. He did not want me to be like the woman of my mother's tribe.” (field notes 6.17.2010).

- **Caring for Others.** Samra, to her mother when Dalila talked about wanting to cook at her own restaurant but not wanting to teach other women like she’d done in Sudan: “You don’t want to help no one?!” Dalila responded: “I’m tired.” (field notes 6.20.2011)

- **Creating Alternative Futures.** Saher about what she hopes comes out of selling dresses: “Helping people. Like helping

people. Like if this thing works and I'm able to do the Center I want to do and like kids are learning, improving”

Throughout my 18 months with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, I engaged in public listening to mark these incidents as they happen and then to code them later. Since rhetoric works to transform limits and barriers into possibilities and paths, I was especially listening for the range of obstacles different people were naming as well as the range of ways people were working to open up live options for themselves and others. This kind of focused listening helped me understand and contextualize situated knowledge that not only merits public attention but also has the potential to name, inform, and direct the very terms of intervention and invention around questions of what it means to be Sudanese in America today and how social institutions could be reconfigured to be more responsive to Sudanese and other refugee men and women across generations.

Rhetorical listening in this way has the potential for exposing pet theories and pre-conceptions and for fostering cross-cultural engagement—that is, for cultivating authentic learning across differences that tend to divide us.

### **Situational Mapping and Analysis: Understanding the Situation of Rhetorical Action**

In addition to engaging in rhetorical listening for critical incidents, I also constructed situational maps and performed relational analysis in order to frame the meso- and macro-level interactions and dynamics across generations and genders as the Sudanese sought to bridge their traditional tribal cultures with the American



capitalist cultures they now find themselves navigating. Creating situational maps allowed me to account for emergent phenomenon and to do the work of situated, real-time grounded *theorizing* (Clarke 28) of “a framework for the construction of diverse forms of social action” through *sensitizing concepts* (Charmaz). Rather than focusing on commonalities, this kind of grounded *theorizing* offers a method for making sense of and making visible the ways we understand the complexities of ever-shifting rhetorical situations with constraints we can’t control. Through situational mapping, “we can pursue directions and angles of vision that reveal difference(s) and complexities, heterogeneous positioning, including but not limited to differences in power” (Clarke). Thus, situational mapping keeps firmly in view the instability of interactions, a perspective that is crucial for constructing and testing working theories of wise rhetorical action.

In my work with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, I used the following types of situational maps and analyses:

1. **Situational maps** as strategies for articulating the elements of a situation and examining relations among them
  - a. Abstract Situational Map: Messy/Working Version
  - b. Abstract Situational Map: Ordered/Working Version
  - c. Relational Analysis Using Situational Map: Focus on “Lost Girls” generation
2. **Social worlds/arenas maps** as cartographies of collective commitments, relations, and sites of (potential) action
3. **Positional maps** as simplification strategies for plotting positions articulated and not articulated in discourses. (Clarke 86)

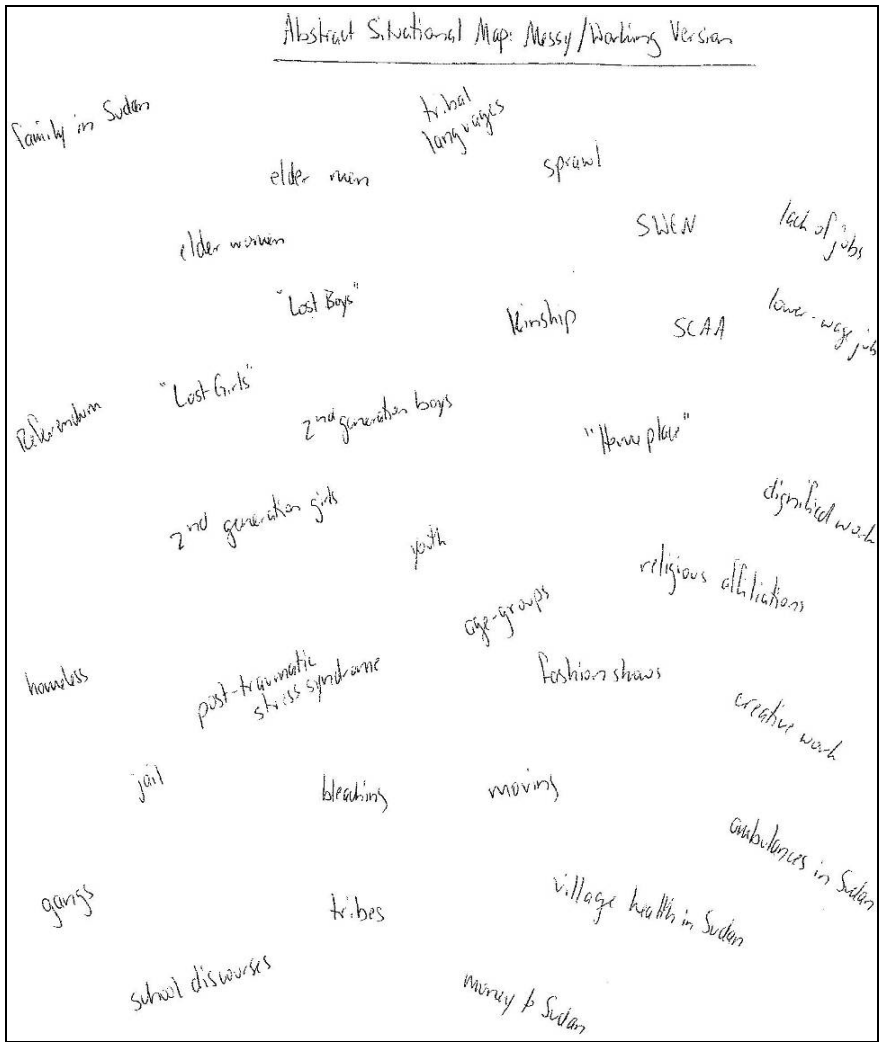
Engaging in situational analysis through mapping helped me avoid oversimplifications

and helped me “to address head-on the inconsistencies, irregularities, and downright messiness of the empirical world – not scrub it clean and dress it up for the special occasion of a presentation or publication” (Clarke 15). The situational maps seen below (online viewers will need to scroll down) (maps 1-4) helped me lay out the situation of concern by considering the following questions: “Who and what are in this situation? Who and what matters in this situation? What elements ‘make a difference’ in this situation?” (Clarke 87). Finally, in doing relational analysis (map 4) with the situational maps, I considered what the Lost Girls generation (late twenties to early forties) had to say about all the other elements. I circled what seemed to be the most significant relations, and there are many. The relational analysis makes visible the many elements that Sudanese women in Phoenix are juggling.

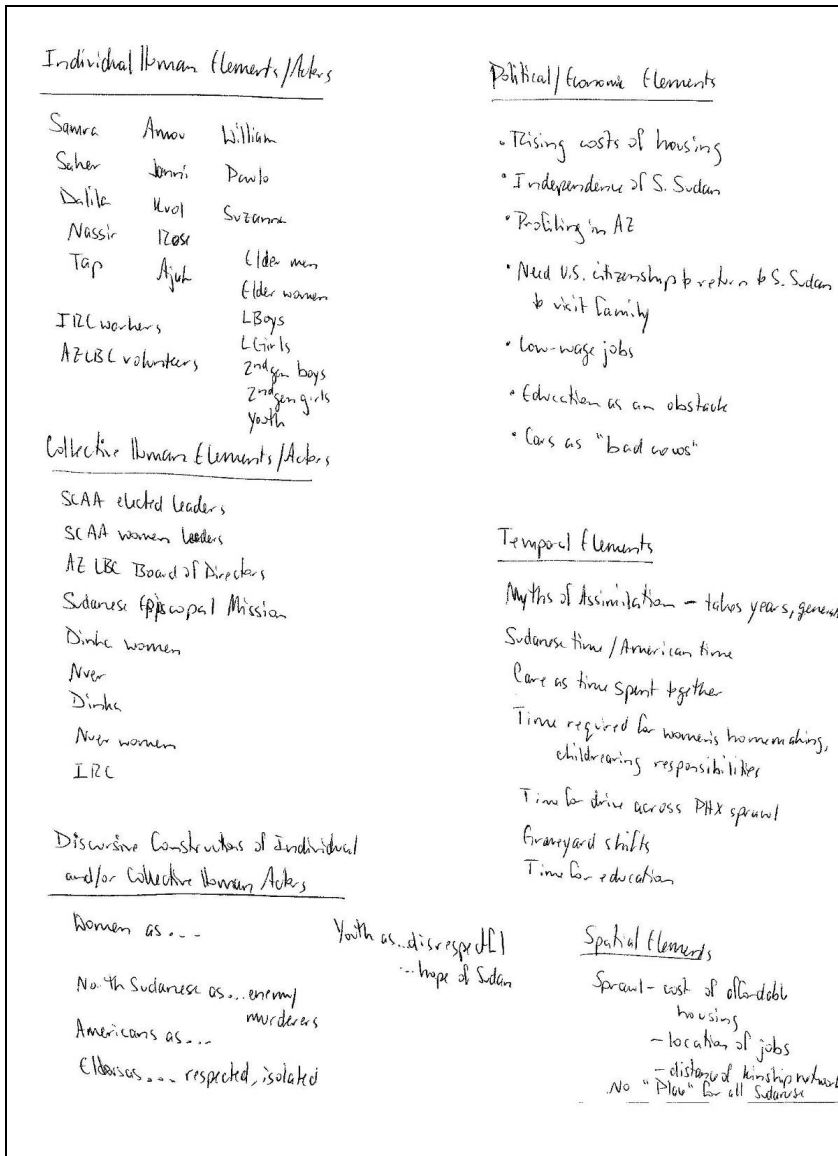
The social worlds mapping focuses on meaning-making social groups – collectivities of various sorts – people “doing things together” (Becker) in “universes of discourse” (Strauss). The social worlds map (map 5) that focuses on the social arenas of the Lost Girls generation shows the various ways Sudanese women organize themselves as well as the broader structural situations they find themselves in and must come to grips with and learn to navigate. The primary work that social worlds mapping does is to complicate modernist conceptions of individuals having pre-established essences. Instead, maps of social worlds make visible the ways people might act as individuals and as members of social worlds. Further, since these maps are, in this instance, a tool to aid moving toward *phronesis*, they serve a valuable role in that they make visible various social worlds (with varying commitments,

discourses, boundaries, and so on) in which individuals and collectivities might take action.

Finally, the position maps represent major positions taken in the data on major discursive issues. The position map (map 6) reveals the contradictions and contestations over the responsibilities of Sudanese women for economic progress and cultural sustenance. The positions on the map do not represent individuals; rather they represent positions in discourses. As Clarke reminds us, “Individuals and groups of all sorts may and commonly do hold multiple and contradictory positions on the same issue. Positional maps represent the heterogeneity of positions” (126).



Map 1. Abstract Situational Map: Messy/Working Version



Map 2. Abstract Situational Map: Ordered/Working Version, part 1

## Sociocultural / Symbolic Elements

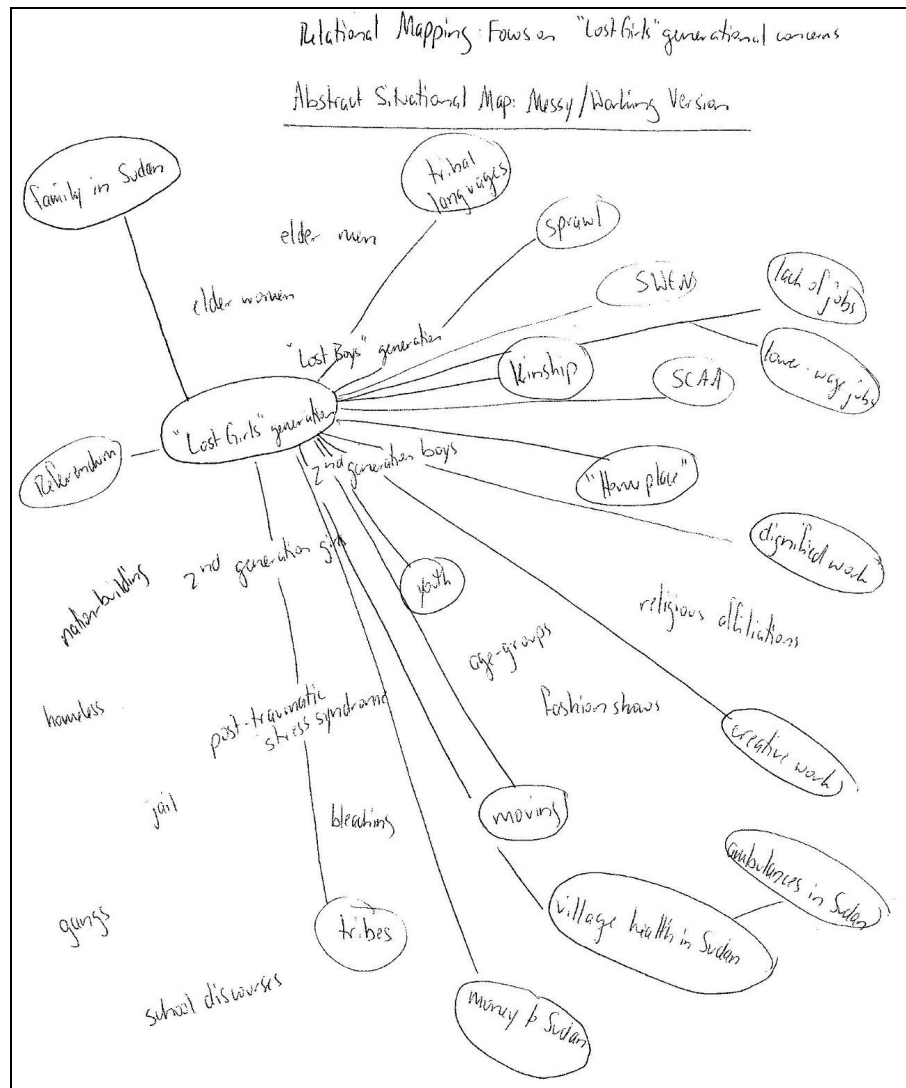
- Laws / cars
- ° Women - dowry
- Children - dowry
  - respect for women
- Variations of expectations of women / mothers / wives
- Variations of expectations of male / female youth

## Discursive Constructs of Non-human Elements

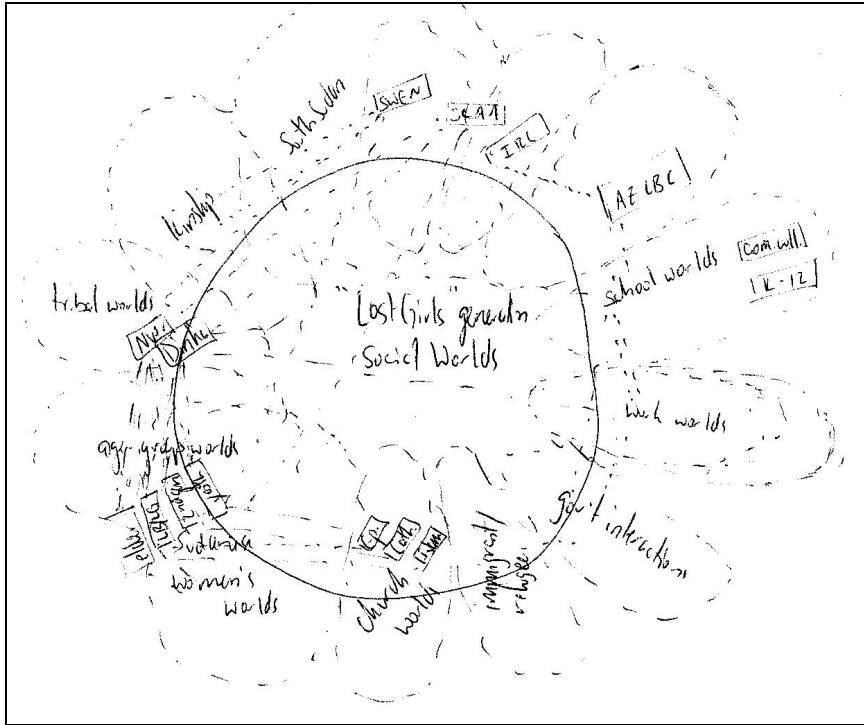
Education as...  
... obstacle  
... possibility  
... fool  
... useless

Cars as... bad cars

Map 3. Abstract Situational Map: Ordered/Working Version, part 2

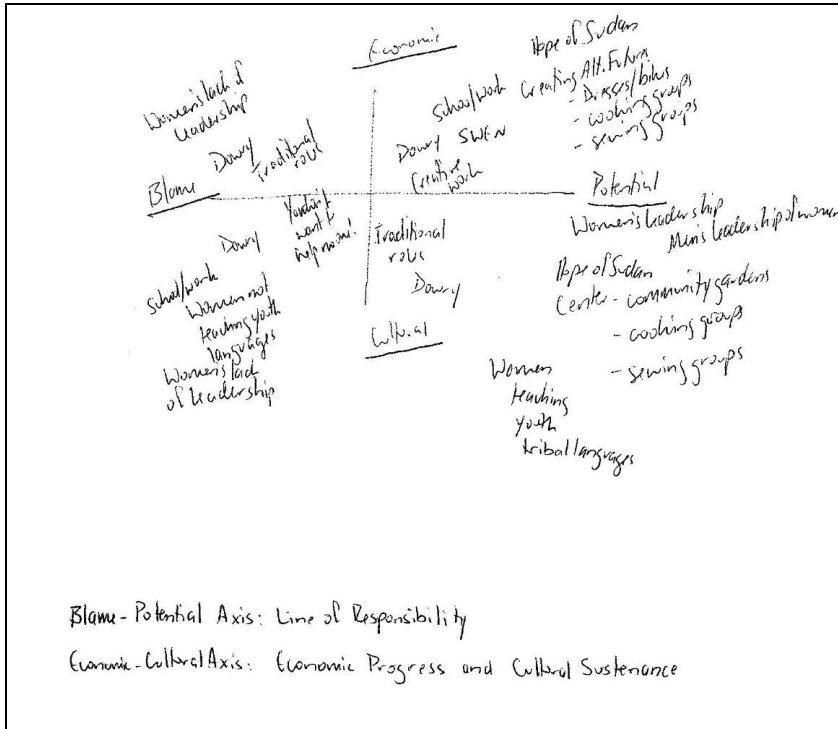


Map 4. Relational Analysis Using Situational Map: Focus on "Lost Girls" generation



Map 5. Social Words Map: Focus on "Lost Girls" generation





Map 6. Positional Mapping: Focus on Sudanese Women's Roles

### From Listening and Mapping to Inventing and Testing

Throughout this dissertation, I am transparent about my analysis, in part, to make visible the iterative nature of constructing and testing working theories of wise rhetorical action. In this methods chapter, I separate my discussion of methods from other discussion of theorizing, analyzing, and testing working theories with the aim of offering these methods as *technai* for others interested in this kind of work to build on. To convert my methods to *technai* that are stable enough to be taught but flexible enough to be adapted (Atwill), it is necessary that I stabilize them and make

clear the tools and the ways I used those tools. However, it is important to note that this is an otherwise artificial separation, and so, while traditional dissertations follow a methods then findings format, my analysis methods, including constructing critical incidents, situational mapping, grounded theorizing, and employing the *stochastic techne* are visible throughout the dissertation.

While I want to stabilize my methods for other scholars who want to engage in *phronesis* with local publics, I also want to resist the oversimplified, often prescriptive, predictive ways we in social sciences sometimes talk about determining and taking action (feasibility studies and risk analysis come to mind right away). Before I move on to describing the *stochastic techne* in the next chapter, I want to turn to the value of the highly contextual, unpredictable nature of *phronesis* – of theorizing and testing wise rhetorical action.

### **Stability, Instability, and Theory-Building in Real Time**

It's hard to overstate how *hard* a working theory has to *work*. As I explained in chapter 1, Our working theories are born in a space of felt difficulty, because of some conflict, contradiction, or conundrum that bears some significance on our worlds. It is the weight of these and the ways they matter in our lives that make our questions and predictions meaningful and worth undertaking. And this part of the process of theory-building – framing hypotheses and predictions – is the easiest part. Ideally, our theory-building in the face of what doesn't work opens up live possibilities and leads to framing and re-framing action. Ultimately, though, our theory-building in the face of weighty concerns calls on us to do something – and to keep doing something – in the face of uncertainty. As Linda Flower reminds us, the

real test of a working theory that it *works*: that “it is operational (a tool kit of conditions and strategies); it is situated (adapted to its particular time, place, and people); and it is always under revision (responding to the test of outcomes)” (90).

Our work in community partnerships asks us not only to construct working *theories* but also to articulate our (typically tacit) theory’s goals, values, and assumptions (Flower 90). Articulating our working theories with others opens the space for intercultural collaboration by making our thinking visible to others and opening up our actions, and the theories guiding them, to reflection and to the test of outcomes (Flower 90). In the work of *phronesis*, we find ourselves continually assessing and re-assessing an ever-shifting rhetorical situation. The uncertainty of this space sometimes leads those of us engaging with our communities to lean toward the language of mastery and failure, sustainability and unsustainability in order to stabilize *kairos* and place our feet on more solid and more settled ground. Most often, we pit mastery against failure as ways of naming the goals and measuring the worth of our university-community and school-community outreach. To talk about our work in this way, though, is to bracket or at least render temporarily invisible the third and perhaps most important part of a working theory: that it is responsive *in real time* to the test of outcomes (Flower 91, emphasis added). Far from bracketing *kairos*,<sup>11</sup> working theories look to *kairos* for the “back-talk” of a situation (Flower 98) and “conniv[e] with reality” (Atwill 93) to test alternative moves and hypotheses. Thus, it is *kairos* that brings failure and mastery into conversation in the same moment. As I said in chapter 1, where the “back-talk” of a situation may point to

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<sup>11</sup> By “*kairos*” I’m referring to the rhetorical sense of time as the “opportune moment.” The other term in this pair, “*chronos*,” refers to the sense of time that unfolds sequentially or chronologically. See Atwill, 138-39; Long, “*Techne*” 26-28.

failure, it is the “conniving with reality” to create alternative paths and alternative destinations that alludes to rhetorical mastery.

It is not the spirit of rhetoric that would have us stabilize time or tests or unpredictable outcomes of our work; rather that work belongs to the episteme of philosophy and science. But to rely on the stabilizing language of episteme is to tip the scale dangerously toward the ivory tower, to bleed our working theories of their work, and to render our community-university outreach a-rhetorical. Paula Mathieu reminds us that we are to “seek rhetorically timely actions” (17) in the face of “time challenges, incompatible schedules, [and] the often conflicted spatial politics involved in deciding on whose turf work can and should take place” (17). Indeed, it is precisely a dynamic relation to time and to constraints beyond our control that makes our work rhetorical. But it is also precisely a dynamic relation to time – both *chronos* and *kairos* – that should lead us to resist pitting mastery and failure against each other. When we name mastery and failure in binary terms, we frame mastery primarily in terms of our ability to secure pre-determined outcomes. But mastery is not about having a culminating epiphany or orchestrating a single breakthrough (despite the ways some of the Sudanese in Phoenix are leaning toward health and the ways this dissertation may seem to close on a high note). Rather, in *applied phronesis*, mastery cannot be reduced to a predictive formula. Bent Flyvbjerg distinguishes the work of phronetic social science, noting that the task is “to clarify and deliberate about the problems, possibilities, and risks that individuals and groups face, and to imagine how things could be done differently – all in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions, or even agree on a single version of what the questions are” (48). Therefore, mastery is about engaging in meaningful dialogue

in the most Greek sense – where *dia* means ‘between’ and *logos* means ‘reason’ – and exercising (and gaining) judgment and experience in the concrete, the practical, and the ethical. It is to narrating this “socially conditioned, intersubjective ‘between-reason’” (Flyvbjerg 48) that I turn next.

## CHAPTER 3

### MASTERY, FAILURE, AND JOINT PROBLEM-SOLVING AS A STOCHASTIC ART

In chapter 2, I described the methods that led me to devise the stochastic *techne*—the logic or operations of which I’ll turn to next. The overall goal of this third chapter is to make visible the rhetorical *work* of the *stochastic techne*. Given this dissertation’s concern with productive knowledge, or applied *phronesis*, this rhetorical work is, in the words of Bent Flyvbjerg, “focused on the dynamic question ‘How?’ in addition to the more structural ‘Why?’” (43). That is, this work is at once interpretive and analytical; at once, kinetic and deliberative. Thus, in the following, I rely on the narrative capacity of vignettes to portray this applied *phronesis* in action.

The figure below highlights the four questions that drive the stochastic *techne*. Operating in concert with one another, the goal of these questions is the co-construction of viable options in unpredictable spaces. I argue that these questions can spur contemplative social action, a certain kind of productive knowledge that is attentive to the social locations and identities of others, attuned to material constraints and risks beyond our understanding or control, and bent towards ends in sight. Scaffolding *phronesis*, the dynamic and iterative work of taking contemplative social action, in a writing classroom is the focus of chapter 5; here, I turn our attention to four questions that can frame a stance for engaging in this work with local community partners.

*Phronesis: Taking Contemplative Social Action*

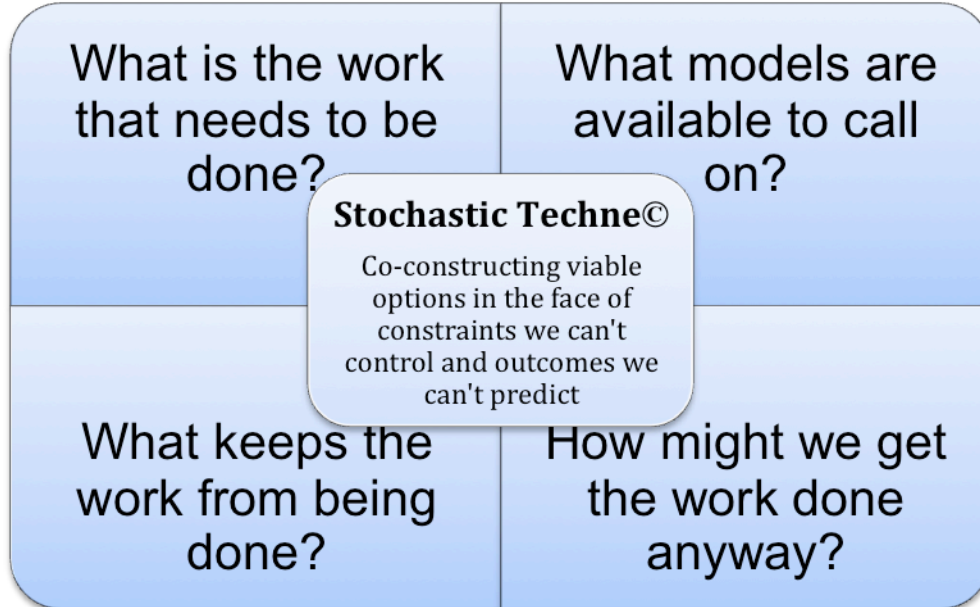


Figure 1. Questions that constitute the *Stochastic Techne*.

These questions are not meant to indicate rhetorical work as taking place in distinct stages or cycles. As the vignettes reveal, these questions proved useful in relation to each other in response to very specific constraints of time and place. In this chapter, five cases dramatize how these questions functioned heuristically at five critical points in developing a partnership with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix:

Case 1: Constructing an Experimental Way of Knowing

Case 2: Various Versions of Health

Case 3: In, Out, and Among Institutions

Case 4: Limitations of Public Discourse

Case 5: Conniving with Reality

What is most powerful about these four questions is the ways they anchor rhetorical invention “in the streets” (Mathieu 25) and bring mastery and failure into conversation with each other in real time. To emphasize the insights that this *stochastic techne* yielded, each case includes a set of points, or claims, that inform a working theory for forging community partnerships at the intersection of mastery and failure. These claims tie the rhetorical work featured in the vignette to larger concerns regarding productive knowledge.

The following cases illustrate and explore the complex intricacies of the stochastic art of rhetorical engagement within the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix as, alongside the Sudanese, we sought to construct possible versions of health, invent appropriate means to pursue health, and understand and assess and revise the means and ends we were after in our work together as we tested our working theories in day-to-day realities.

### **Case 1: Constructing an Experimental Way of Knowing**

When we<sup>12</sup> first began to spend time at the Arizona Lost Boys’ Center (AzLBC), we were trying to determine the work that needed to be done and what models we might call on to inform our work. Our initial efforts began as a cross between Eli Goldblatt’s model of “showing up,” listening, and building relationships and Ellen Cushman’s model of creating alignments within and among institutions. In our first few weeks at the AzLBC, it also seemed that our work might center on writing mentorships, and so we drew on collaborative models from David Coogan

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<sup>12</sup> The ‘we’ throughout this chapter refers to a loosely organized group of five from Arizona State University. As this work became the focus of my dissertation, I took the lead in working with the Sudanese.



and Elenore Long (*Community*) to imagine possibilities for the shape our work might take. In this initial discursive space, we found ourselves trying to make sense of the work that needed to be done and to open up possibilities for doing that work by considering existing models of community outreach. Despite these alignments and models being available to us within the university, it would soon become clear that, although they might prove fruitful later, we would need to attend foremost to other goals and models in light of the ways Sudanese leaders were framing the health of the local diaspora, as described in Case 2.

*Responding to the Arizona Lost Boys Center.* Emily, who was a senior at ASU at the time, had heard one of the Lost Boys talk at one of the many speaking engagements they do to raise awareness of local, national, and transnational concerns of the Sudanese and to call for volunteers at the Arizona Lost Boys Center (AzLBC), a non-profit organization in Phoenix funded by the United Way. After hearing their stories and learning that the Center had issued a call on their website for writing tutors, the undergraduate, a tutor at the writing center on Arizona State University's main campus, decided to offer her time. Within a couple of weeks, she had rounded up a group on campus to think more about how ASU might work with the AzLBC, especially around working with writers.

When we first approached the executive director of the Center, he told us to “just show up” for a while and then we could talk. So that’s what we did. We showed up at the Center on Saturdays. And that is how I ran into Tap Dak, quite literally, as I rounded a corner my first Saturday at the Center, trying to find my way to wherever some writers might be. Tap introduced himself to me and told me to follow him to

an office down the hall. We would spend the next two hours and the next several weeks working together on writing projects for an English class he was taking at a local community college.

Meanwhile, on campus, our team met with the director of the Writing Center at the time and the director of the Academic Success Center on the Tempe campus in order to pursue material and disciplinary resources and begin talking about creating an institutional infrastructure. I continued to work with Tap and other leaders within the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix who were taking courses at local community colleges.

#### **Point #1:**

- In understanding the work that needs to be done, it is important to venture into work with a community organization on terms the organization names and in light of felt difficulties the organization describes – even if the work ends up shifting drastically. In fact, the stochastic nature of the work promises it will.

#### **Point #2:**

- As we constructed a working theory of what the AzLBC needed and what we might offer or construct in response to the need they named, it was helpful to draw on existing models of community outreach that could suggest possible ways forward. Approaching models in this way converts them into techne that are stable enough to be taught and flexible enough to be adapted to new situations.

#### **Point #3:**

- Determining the work to be done and the techne we might employ or invent were not separate enterprises but endeavors radically intertwined.

### **Case 2: Various Versions of Health**

Initially, the official discourse of the AzLBC's web site and the Sudanese men who spoke on behalf of the Center framed health, at least in part, about writing efficacy, primarily for college English courses. In one conversation, the director of

the AzLBC described writing difficulties in terms of cultural values. Dinka and Nuer tribes are typically oral cultures, and the director said, “they always have something to say. At a typical meeting, every Sudanese in the room will speak his opinion. But the meeting will go on for hours. We do not know to get to a point quickly.” To drive his point home, he added with a smile, “Even thank you notes are a problem.” Casting health in terms of American values for brevity and concision also cast our roles and called on mastery around writing mentorship, ESL, and sociocultural approaches to literacies. And this is the expertise we highlighted when we initially approached the director and Tap in response to the AzLBC’s request for writing tutors.

However, as we began to spend time offering writing support, Tap, and later the current as well as the previous director of the AzLBC, named other goals for us to pursue for the health of the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix – aims of problem-solving, community building, identity construction, and creating intergenerational and cross-gendered deliberative spaces to re-think the men’s and women’s roles across generations. They deemed these different versions of health far more important than writing efficacy, and these ideas of health called for different versions of our knowledge and abilities in the rhetorical arts, primarily around community building and democratic deliberation. Chief among their versions of health was the idea of a “public homeplace” (hooks 41) and calling Sudanese scattered across Phoenix sprawl together into solidarity and community to construct new identities and practices.

This case has three turns:

- Co-constructing a Rhetorical Situation – Tap constructed alternate versions of health; we drew on existing models of community literacy to cast imagination
- Considering Teche, Weighing Options – We considered existing models and came up against their limitations in light of the ways Tap constructed community health and named specific challenges
- De-forming Limits into New Paths – We created a tentative alternative model that might offer a possibility for constructing spaces for deliberation and identity work.

Together, these turns dramatize the stochastic nature of collaborative invention with community partners.

*Co-constructing a rhetorical situation.* In March 2010, Tap Dak was the Outreach Coordinator at the AzLBC. By May, funding for his position was cut, and he was out of a job. In this short window while he was at the AzLBC, we were able to forge a working partnership and, later, a friendship. I came to know Tap, a former child soldier in the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), through his reading and writing for class. His work centered on issues like post-traumatic stress syndrome, arranged marriages, and teen pregnancies – issues he considered important and contested within the Sudanese diaspora. In our time together working on annotated bibliographies and research papers, Tap spoke of the Sudanese refugee diaspora in Phoenix being caught between “the world as it is” and “the world as it could be.” I asked Tap if he would be willing to meet and talk more with Elenore Long and me

about the Sudanese in Phoenix. A couple of times a week, we would meet at the Center, make our way through some part of an extended writing project, and then Ellie, and occasionally another student or two from the university, would join us. Ellie and I would listen to Tap and try to make sense of the internal diversity Tap described as well as what men and women across four generations and many tribes were up against and up to in Phoenix.

Tap talked about struggles. We wrote them down on large poster paper:

- Tension with African Americans
- Police and racial profiling
- Alienation and isolation among elderly
- Needing a space for the community to gather – one not affiliated with the “Lost Boys”
- Young mothers needing to go to school or to work but needing skills and childcare
- Younger generations growing up here and not knowing their Sudanese tribal cultures or languages
- Adolescent boys being unruly and on their own, drifting in the independence that marked their manhood in Sudan
- Teen girls feeling smothered by the rules of their Sudanese families
- Lack of respect for the elderly Sudanese by youth growing up here, due to language and cultural difference
- Young ASU graduates not able to get jobs

Tap shared with us his dreams of a community center, a daycare, and “family nights.” We talked in more detail about what “family nights” might look like and

described STRUGGLE and Risk and Respect, two projects that came out of the Community Literacy Center in Pittsburgh. Ellie and I were hoping to help Tap imagine the kinds of conversations that could take place on “family nights” and to have a better grasp of the kinds of tools and resources we could offer. Tap thought that bringing the Sudanese together in conversation was more important than focusing on any one issue.

Point #4:

- The initial reason a local public sphere considers partnership with university affiliates is not necessarily what might best serve the local public or the university. Community partners may hedge their bets because of uncertainty about what university partners could offer and/or to protect the interests of the community in light of unequal power distribution. It is these very limitations that need transforming.

Point #5:

- Determining the work that needs to be done is not merely a matter of assessment or passive listening but is rather a process of co-construction and highly dependent on the various versions of health that are being named.

Point #6:

- Constructing a space with community partners to consider various versions of health as well as options and outcomes of *techne* that have been used elsewhere can be productive in constructing a rhetorical situation more in tune with a local public’s concerns and can be generative in inventing and contextualizing *techne*.

*Considering techne, weighing options.* A rhetorical model of community literacy calls for assessing a rhetorical situation that is already perceived to be public in some way, recognizable by the “din” surrounding it. The contested issue that sparks the din is what brings stakeholders into conversation with each other even though the issue itself may be named differently by different stakeholders and is likely being constructed around competing values and points of stasis. The first two steps of the

rhetorical model are to assess the rhetorical situation and call a local public together. The public issue of shared concern is the object of deliberation and the local public is called together to seek an outcome – or likely multiple outcomes – through dialogue across difference. An alternative kind of stranger relationality may be one outcome, but a new kind of relationality is not necessarily the goal; the aim is grounded instead in the contested issue itself.

This model was not available to us with Sudanese diaspora. Although Tap named a number of issues that could serve as the focus of deliberation, the “din” he perceived was less around a particular issue and more around the fragmentation of the Sudanese diaspora itself. In the case of the Sudanese refugees, they came together not around a particular issue but around a perceived common identity, and the identity itself is contested and fragmented within the Sudanese diaspora. The issues that Tap named were not the reason to come together as they are in the Higgins, Long, and Flower’s rhetorical model of community literacy; rather, the issues are a means of coming together. Certainly Tap’s list names concerns important to the Sudanese, but he wanted to bring the Sudanese diaspora into conversation primarily to reconfigure their ways of relating to enact a more vibrant version of health. Tap’s aim is not peculiar to the Sudanese diaspora; any groups, like the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, LGBTQ residents, immigrant and refugee populations, and African diasporas, that perceive themselves as having a common identity might hold out similar layered versions of health.

Re-casting health around constructing a “public homeplace” led us to consider a model that worked well with the women in the Tenderloin Reflection and Education Center (Heller). This group came together in the form a creative writer’s

workshop, primarily “to nurture” tenderness and individual value and a collective sense of place. Although this group matured together and months and years later engaged each other as well as external publics in political issues of “fairness, equality, justice, authority, and power” (Heller 162), the group initially and primarily worked as a centripetal force, “calming and consolidating narratives of place and order amidst a fragmented backdrop of chaos and disorder” (Heller 122).

This model of consensus and consolidation that is so common in community building and identity construction informed our work with the Sudanese, but could not yet offer a model for us to adapt. The Sudanese, despite wanting to construct a “public homeplace,” were not interested only or primarily in consolidation and consensus. Rather, they recognized the many areas of tension among them and the contested nature of their tribal, gendered, and generational identities and conflicting ways of relating.

The version of health that Tap was calling for was a hybrid of dialogue across difference and community building; indeed, it was a call to construct an alternative discourse through dialogue across difference for the purpose of community building. The difference cannot be overstated. While in community literacy, we’re familiar with thinking about this in terms of two or three different discourses – academic discourse, AAVE, discourse of policy – here, the need for an alternative is even more clear in the ways Tap describes the Sudanese diaspora with over 140 tribes with multiple languages and cultures.



Point #7:

- Models or techne that worked well in other situations may not be available even if the community organization we're currently working with has similar goals.

Point #8:

- When techne that is already circulating is not available or appropriate for the current situation, we must invent and test a new techne.

*De-forming Limits into New Paths.* Together, the three of us started plotting a series of seven weekly conversations around two questions – *What are you up to? What are you up against?* – that would be part of a digital story telling project and would kick off a wider series of conversations if all went well. At the time the goal was to construct a “public homeplace” and to support learning and listening across conflicting cultural ecologies within the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix. Tap imagined this as the beginning of practices that would allow the Sudanese to invent and co-construct an alternative community identity, to create alternative ways of deliberating issues of shared concern, and to design additional practices that would call community members into alternative ways of being, doing, thinking, believing, and writing.

We crafted a written plan together one week; the next week, Tap called the former executive director of the AzLBC, to his office to talk with us. Tap was vetting our ideas with him, testing whether we were on to something that might benefit the community. The former director talked with us at length, offering his support along with his caution, echoing the current director’s warning that the people we would be

working with were neither Lost nor Boys. After this conversation, we set up a meeting with the current director in hopes of getting his stamp of approval before moving forward. The following week we met with the current director, offering a copy of the plan we'd written up with Tap. The director then told us we should come to the next board meeting to get the authorization of the Board of Directors before going ahead.

One Saturday in May, we attended a board meeting at the Center that exposed the conflicts among the multiple cultures the Sudanese are trying to navigate; in this case, kinship ties Sudanese leaders want to protect and nurture were cast in contrast to the organizational interests that humanitarian nonprofits are trying to protect. The board was fairly evenly split, male and female, but was entirely white except for one African American man. The former and current directors were at the meeting but spoke little, nodding occasionally, primarily there, it seemed to me, to take directions from the board members. A homeless Sudanese woman who spent her days in the TV room of the Center, taking shelter from the heat, was angrily yelling about being ousted from the large room to make way for the board members. Under different circumstances, this situation would have called the current director, a Dinka man, into a role of caring and kinship. In this scenario, his loyalties were split. The board members saw her anger as disruptive and potentially dangerous – an assessment that seemed unwarranted to me – and instructed the director to call the police and have her removed, which he did. In the meeting, we presented the plan we'd drawn up with Tap and vetted with the directors. The board members offered their support for moving forward with our work with AzLBC.

### **Case 3: In, Out, and Among Institutions**

Tap arranged a subsequent meeting that would put two more questions on the table: (1) How can ASU help graduates make good on their degrees? (2) How can ASU leverage resources for the Sudanese community, for those in, out, and among institutions? These concerns that Tap raised also led Ellie and me to consider other alignments within the university that might open dialogue about existing opportunities the university offers, about the university's responsibilities to its graduates about creating opportunities to help the Sudanese develop weak ties. While another kind of alignment was on the table, and something we would continue to talk about, community building and constructing alternative ways of relating and being was still the primary focus for Tap and for us.

The most significant thing about this meeting was the way Tap was working to shift and thus, re-construct, potential alignments. The Lost Boys Center held a complicated and contested position within the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix. The United Way-funded organization called on the name of the "Lost Boys" to invoke a humanitarian view of Aid to Africa based on exoticizing and domesticating the Sudanese as well as calling perhaps well-intentioned Americans to enact a form of noblesse oblige. Within the Sudanese diaspora, the term "Lost Boys" both misrepresents the men, many of whom have families of their own and are no longer "lost" or "boys" and stirs resentment among the women and other generations of men who face many of the same losses and struggles but without the recognition, resources, or support that have come to the more publicized "Lost Boys." Further, the Lost Boys Center is managed day-to-day by a Dinka man, but programmatic

decisions are handed down by a primarily white board, and this model does not sit well with many of the Sudanese in Phoenix. Tap was attempting to construct an alternative rhetorical situation, one in which Ellie and I – two representatives of the university– could signal overtly a different kind of relationship with the Sudanese by affiliating ourselves more with Sudanese-elected leaders than United Way-appointed directors.

*Tap was moving us.* We met with Tap a few days after the board meeting. He told us that he would set up a meeting with the president and vice-president of the Sudanese Community Association of Arizona (SCAA). Ellie and I hadn't known there was such a thing. While the AzLBC's mission at the time (it has since been revised) was to serve the "Lost Boys" in Phoenix, the SCAA's officials were elected by the 3,000-plus Sudanese in Arizona – although the particulars of the election process are hard to pin down – to help care for and meet the needs of all of the Sudanese scattered across the state, primarily around Phoenix, Tucson, and Flagstaff.

In May, Ellie and I met with Tap and the president and vice-president of the SCAA in a small room at the AzLBC. We showed them the plan we had drawn up with Tap already circulated among the directors and board of the AzLBC. Over the course of our conversation, the president and vice-president of the SCAA spoke in ways that both valued and undermined Sudanese women, illustrating the very thing that's concerning them – the contested nature of gendered roles and identities across tribes and generations. They talked about women solving their own problems, knowing what they need most, being crucial to maintaining traditional Sudanese culture and language. At the same time, they viewed the women as a means to

something else, namely nation-building, rather than valuable in their own right. Further, many times in this conversation and in subsequent conversations and meetings, whether or not Sudanese women were present, they took to scolding the women for not going to school, for not working, for not teaching the children their tribal languages and cultures, for not better teaching youth respect for their elders. The talk of the Sudanese men and the equally charged responses women had to their talk were clearly indicative of the competing discourses in the diaspora and the growing frustration that was circulating throughout the Sudanese population in Phoenix.

It was also in this meeting that Tap turned on ASU and raised issues that concerned some of the younger “Lost Boys” as well as the “second generation” Sudanese youth who were finishing high school and attending universities and community colleges. Tap, who was working on his own two-year degree at a local community college, was frustrated that recent graduates were not able to find meaningful work and did not know what to do with their degrees in Phoenix or in Sudan.

In effect, Tap was moving us into a position in which Sudanese leaders would endorse us, which would allow Ellie and me to work in a more networked and relational way that would extend beyond the reach of the Az Lost Boys Center. However, because of the contested nature of cross-gendered, cross-tribal, cross-generational relationality within the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, these leaders’ endorsement would only take us so far. Our work, then, would take a more grassroots shape as Tap connected me with Samra Maragan, an energetic, visionary young woman who was one of eleven women elected as part of the SCAA and

someone Tap saw as a leader among the Nuer women, as well as a “second generation” Dinka woman, who had recently graduated high school. We didn’t work with the AzLBC in any official capacity again, although we continue to talk with the executive director as “a community leader who gets things done,” a role he distinguishes from his position at the Center.

Point #9:

- We are all positioned in, out, and among various institutions and should consider our various positionalities as well as the positionalities of our stakeholders as part of our available means toward rhetorical action.

Point #10:

- We may need to shift our positionality in relation to the university and other local institutions to gain rhetorical traction within local public spheres. We should be prepared for local partners to re-construct their positionality as separate and perhaps even in resistance to institutions.

#### **Case 4: Limitations of Public Discourse**

Tap and the two SCAA leaders talked about tensions across genders and generations, but the next two vignettes describe the conflicts we witnessed among the women about defining health for Sudanese women and about creating an effective process for talking with each other and making decisions – endeavors complicated by multiple tribal languages and cultures as well as divergent experiences of Phoenix sprawl. These two narratives also reflect the limitations of public

discourse as well as the didactic and iterative nature of constructing a rhetorical situation and calling together a local public.

Point #11:

- We should pay attention to the limitations or failures of relationships, partnerships, discourses. These are often reflective of the failing health of a local public, and they may also be the very spaces where we have the most to offer and the local public has the most to gain.

*Frustration and Resignation.* The president and vice-president of the SCAA sat at a table in the front of a room filled to capacity with Sudanese women. The eleven women who were elected as leaders among the Sudanese women sat behind the president and vice-president, along with the director of the International Refugee Center in Phoenix, and a local leader in the Somali refugee community. The president of the SCAA had invited Ellie and me to sit in on this part of the meeting, to observe and learn more about the community and about the women we were getting to know. The stated purpose of the meeting, according to the president of the SCAA, was to hold a vote to see if the eleven elected women would remain leaders who were accountable to the other women but who were independent of the SCAA, or if they would come under the leadership and governance of the president and vice-president of the SCAA. Part of making a decision involved a kind of analysis and evaluation of the work of these women so far. Two hundred Sudanese women across several tribes and speaking five different languages told stories mostly of frustration about resources they needed but did not have, ranging from different kinds of paperwork to childcare to vocational and language training to mentoring

relationships. The vice-president of the SCAA and an Episcopal deaconess at the Sudanese Mission Church in Phoenix, translated as best they could to English or Dinka. The women in the room who spoke primarily either Arabic or Nuer struggled to follow and to contribute to the conversation. The vice-president's translations tended to inter-mix his own belittling comments that blamed the women as a group for not going to school, for not going to work, for not passing Sudanese cultures on to their children. Many of the women recounted their frustrations to the group in charged language and strong voices. The women were dissatisfied with the lack of results since the 11 women had been elected but they did not necessarily want to give up their group's independence to the president and vice-president of the SCAA. At 5 p.m. as a number of women asked to wrap up the meeting so they could head to the Sudanese Catholic church, the meeting took a turn. One after another, all eleven of the elected women, including Samra, walked to the front of the room, took the microphone, and addressed the group: "I resign." "I resign." "Me, too. I resign." The three-hour meeting dissolved in palpable frustration.

Point #12:

- Our working theories must *work*. They must be responsive to the test of outcomes. We cannot reliably attain our goals, but we can pursue them as much as possible. When our working theories fail, that is not necessarily the time to stabilize our rhetorical work by marking it failed or unsustainable and moving on. Rather, it is a time to problem-solve and de-form limits into possibilities (Atwill 69).



*Testing the Viability of Calling a Local Public Together.* Later that summer, Nyakan,<sup>13</sup> a second-generation Sudanese woman, would achieve similar results when she tried to call together women of her own generation. Nyakan first voiced her concerns about Sudanese youth to me and Ellie at a Starbucks in north Phoenix. We were talking with Nyakan, who anticipated starting college in the fall, while Tap borrowed my car to run some errands. Tap's daughter sat at the table with us and colored, occasionally looking up and flashing a shy but happy grin.

Nyakan was concerned about issues of beauty and dignity. She talked about “bleaching” and the ways young Sudanese women are bleaching their skin to lighten it because they think a lighter color is better in some way. She spoke with obvious passion about wanting Sudanese women to see themselves as beautiful the way they are. She put this in terms of valuing the way God made them. Nyakan recalled a young girl with dark skin at a friend's recent graduation party who bleached her skin a couple of weeks later, Nyakan thought, because of a light-skinned boy at the party.

We talked about doing some sort of inquiry with Sudanese young women around what beauty is, what counts, who gets to decide, and so on. She talked about Sudanese models—ones she looks like with her dark skin and full-figured build—who are popular in Africa and in Europe. She connected these ideas not only to beauty but also to respect and dignity and identity. Nyakan mentioned a trip she'd taken to Sudan to see her father's family, and she framed the importance of the trip around allowing her to see that “there, Sudanese are respectable.”

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<sup>13</sup> With their permission, I have kept Tap's, Samara's, Delila's, and Saher's real names; a pseudonym or other titles mark other Sudanese participants.

I asked about finding a way to have hard conversations in ways that value people's rights to choose things that we may not agree with (like bleaching) and being willing to hear the ways young women who bleach are defining beauty and to honor their right to choose to pursue (or not) beauty in the ways they decide. Nyakan's face and tone seemed to soften then, and she said that she would love to hear from these women about why they bleach. She wanted to understand what these women were valuing even while she wanted to open up a range of alternative options.

Throughout the conversation, Nyakan continued to ask us not to name her as the person who brought these issues up if we did something with the community later. She continued to try to position herself within the community and not as someone standing on the edge of or outside the Discourse. She said that if she were to raise any issues about youth, about women, that she would not be received well, and they would be resistant to what she had to say.

She also talked about the jealousy that she said the Sudanese typically feel when anyone does something for one person or for a small group in the community. Others feel like they should get something too, and they get angry when they are not included. Yet, she was careful to say -- and here she positioned herself in ways that distanced her from me and Ellie and the Sudanese community where earlier she had not made these moves-- that if/when we moved forward, it would be best not to come off like we were trying to help. Instead, she told us—even while she differentiated our approach in positive ways from the work of other outsiders – we needed to come in and learn from the community and seek to understand. She also cautioned us that we may need to frame something more fun so that it doesn't feel

like “work” or like “help.” The Sudanese do love a good party, she assured us; people would come for a party.

Verbally, I made a move to mark our intentions, to mark our involvement as both relational (Goldblatt) and rhetorical (Higgins, Long, Flower). I told Nyakan that we wanted to listen and see what emerged from the community, that perhaps we would need to listen a lot and see what issues were named as important by a number of young women, that perhaps if a group (and not only Nyakan) saw some of the same issues, there might be some critical mass that would open up space for conversations around hard but important topics.

Weeks later, after I had several more conversations and late night texts with Nyakan, she volunteered to arrange a meeting with two other young women whom she and some of the elders in the community had named as leaders and “the future of Sudan.” One Saturday afternoon, five of us squeezed into a booth at the Jack-in-the-Box down the street from the AzLBC. Nyakan led the conversation; Ellie and I were there to see if Nyakan’s ideas and discourse might get traction with these young women and be a catalyst toward a series of conversations around respect and beauty and the changing roles of women in the Sudanese community. The two young Sudanese women showed up out of respect for Nyakan and out of deep concern and care for their community.

While they were willing to acknowledge that some women bleached their skin, they did not see this as a problem, and certainly not one to discuss with two white women at the table. The two women named other issues as more pressing. Intergenerational concerns topped their list. Young Sudanese men were joining gangs. Parents were adhering to strict tribal rules for the girls, who were rebelling in

their teen years by engaging in sexual activities. Nyakan took another tack and asked if they and others might want to talk about these issues together to make sense of them and consider what action they might take. She called on the image of Martin Luther King, Jr. and beckoned to her friends, “We could be the ones who turn things around...” But they did not see the use of talk. And they did see quite clearly the risks of engaging their peers about such painful and heated issues. Quite simply, they were not willing to take on the risks of inciting more conflict among their peer groups and elder generations or the risks of hoping for something they were not sure they could bring about. We were at an impasse.

*What's Keeping the Work from Being Done.* The two previous scenarios remind us that getting people in a room and having a structure to the dialogue does not constitute public discourse capable of transformation. Nyakan, who was testing the potential of an idea by “raising it up the flagpole” (Warner), couldn’t get traction simply by calling four people together, raising an issue of concern and offering examples and asking pointed questions. She was faced with the need to construct and call others around a concern that was shared. For the SCAA women, simply coming together around shared concerns was not enough. The men and women attending the meeting relied on Discourses that were already at odds with each other and resulted in scripted ways of dismissing others, culminating in the resignation of 11 women. For transformative deliberation, they would need to construct an alternative Discourse.

These two meetings raised serious questions for Ellie and me: What were we to do now, given the tenor and results of both meetings? Should we simply cut our

losses or should we try to construct a way to move forward? And if we chose to move forward, what would that mean – what would moving forward even look like and what would it call us to do?

These questions put us squarely at the intersection of mastery and failure and in the domain of rhetoric as a stochastic art. The apparent “failures” of these meetings called us into a stance in which we would need to rely on existing disciplinary mastery and to continue constructing our own rhetorical mastery as we test what rhetoric is good for in these contested spaces where a people’s ability to thrive together hangs in the balance.

Our work was not simply a matter of listening or of assessing a rhetorical situation that already exists, but of co-constructing a rhetorical situation capable of calling the Sudanese together as a local public. We would need to work with the Sudanese to co-construct issues of concern as well as alternative deliberative practices that the Sudanese would not only give attention to briefly but would be willing to share in and circulate.

### **Case 5: Conniving With Reality**

After both meetings, Ellie, Nyakan, Samra, Tap, and I determined that it would be best if Ellie and I would spend time with a few of the women, with two primary goals in mind: 1) assess and co-construct issues of shared concern among the women; and 2) call a group of Sudanese women together as a local public.

For the past 9 months, our work with the Sudanese has looked more consistently like ethnographic work – more participation than observation. Three to four times a week, I would meet Samra at her house, and we would do anything from

play with her two boys, go to the Desert Botanical Gardens, fill out job and housing applications, create an email account, look at photo albums together, make a trip to the local market, drive to the post office or the bank or the utility company, talk while she braided another young woman's hair, look at dresses she had made, and so on. Through Samra, I met other Sudanese women and began spending time with them.

Point #13:

- For the limitations of public discourse to be productive rather than debilitating, they should lead us to a space of inventive problem-solving where we connive with the realities of the local residents to create new paths. In this case, it meant paying attention to the ways and reasons Sudanese women were already going public.

In the last four months, Samra's work designing dresses with her sister Saher, and their mother Dalila have been the main focus of our time together. The dresses allow for going public in at least four different ways, which is an important point, given that public discourses aren't readily available for Samra or many of the Sudanese women.



Image 1. Yellow Dress Playing with Man's Tie.

- 1) The dresses are material instantiations of dignified and creative work and resist the kind of low-wage work that capitalism affords them as a housekeeper for local casinos and security for local events. Samra and her sister enact alternative public identities as fashion designers, as they design and sew dresses and respond to invitations to showcase their work at fashion shows at various local, regional, and national Sudanese events throughout the

country, ranging from birthday parties to celebrations of southern Sudan's independence.

- 2) While it was precisely tribal languages, cultures, and identities that led to the breakdown at the SCAA meeting where debilitating notions of womanhood were invoked by the men in attendance, Samra and Saher describe the dresses not as tribal nor as Sudanese but as African and American. Thus, the hybrid design and public circulation of the dresses works to construct and assert a transnational identity that claims a vibrant and rightful place both in the African diaspora and in American public spheres.
- 3) As the product of entrepreneurial work, the dresses Samra and Saher design construct a version of autonomy for women that is not necessarily available in a kinship model where women are primarily valued for the dowry they bring to their parents and, later, the potential dowries they bring to their husbands by producing daughters.
- 4) Samra and Saher use vibrant traditional African prints along with sexy, alluring cuts and the playful juxtaposition of male clothing (like the tie down the front of the dress in the picture) to playfully construct their gendered identities in the design of the dresses. Their designs work to re-cast Sudanese femininity by visually challenging both traditional roles of women in tribal kinship system and American views of Africans that rely on humanitarian models and AID to Africa discourses.

Samra and Saher have designed twelve dresses so far and shown them at two fashion shows within the past four months and are slated to have their dresses



modeled at two more fashion shows in the coming months at national Sudanese events. It is important to remember that the work that Samra and Saher are doing with the dresses is rhetorical and performative and public. They are re-naming themselves and the world in ways that other Sudanese are paying attention to, referencing, responding to, articulating, and circulating. This is especially powerful since there isn't a common vernacular discourse in which to do this work.

Point #14:

- A repertoire of other technai and the work those technai not only provide good company but can be helpful in interpreting the work that we and community members are up to and in recognizing and leveraging turning points.

The following profile of Samra is one I wrote this summer in an effort to honor the work that she is up to, to acknowledge the struggle, and also to model writing a profile with an First-Year Composition class. Later, I read this profile out loud to Samra in front of Dalila and Saher. They wept.

In Caroline Heller's book *Until We Are Strong Together*, she describes the community building and group maturation that happened as the pieces the women wrote bore witness to each other's struggle and dignity. I did not have Heller's model in mind as I wrote this piece or read it to Samra. The invention Samra, Saher, and I were up to at the time was more focused on casting imagination than building community. However, I could understand and make sense of my friends' tears and the rhetorical work they did afterward because of Heller's work.

My bearing witness to their work and their weeping as they did constructed a different rhetorical situation – one that would solidify the five of us and our work together and one that would influence Samra to circulate the tentative plans we were co-constructing to create cross-generational and cross-gendered deliberative spaces around community gardens, sewing, and cooking, at a recent gathering where Dinka and Nuer women were practicing traditional tribal dances to perform at a party celebrating southern Sudan’s recent independence. Clearly, Sudanese women have been getting together for a long time; the dance practices and the party were happening with or without the work Samra and I were doing together. But it was the community building that happened over the months we’ve spent together and that had recently culminated in their tears over the profile that moved Samra to reconstruct the gathering of the Sudanese women into a space where she would circulate our work together and do the rhetorical work of calling a local public together around a plan that we co-constructed.

I include the profile I wrote below not only as an artifact of the community building and maturation that took place but also because the meeting that this profile is based on and Samra’s talk at that gathering sparked the invention that led to a multi-faceted plan Samra has since circulated among the Sudanese women and invited them to participate in. So far, thirty-five have responded.

### Profile of Samra

Four of us sit around a kitchen table. I've brought salads, fruit, hummus, and flat bread to tide us over while we talk. An industrial-size pot of soup simmers on the stove. A large tray of pizza is in the oven. The pizza and the soup will provide meals for 8 people until Tuesday. It's now Sunday.

Saher, Samra's younger sister, wears a lovely dress in a black and yellow African print. The wig she wears is one I haven't seen before – shoulder length, soft bangs. Samra is still in her work clothes – navy pants and a white short-sleeved polo shirt. Her hair is in tight cornrows that have become a bit fuzzy after long days of work and short nights of sleep. Over the week, pieces of hair slowly sneak free of the braids. They give her a kind of aura or halo.

This is not a look Samra likes. Most often, I have seen her in beautiful wigs that complement her stunning self-made wardrobe: sexy dresses and skirts and fitted tops that are a kind of funky hybrid between the bright prints and long, flowing dresses of her traditional Sudanese culture and the provocative and revealing cuts of clothes of the West. And these clothes – what they are in their own right and what they represent – are the reason the four of us are huddled around Samra's kitchen table.

This night represents a turning point of sorts for Samra and Saher and puts them on the cusp of things they've long imagined: dignified and creative work; helping other women to thrive in an economy that alienates them from themselves and their families; creating solidarity across generations of Southern Sudanese rather than watching the youth and the elderly of the community slowly slip away from each other; building a center for the Sudanese community—scattered by the economics of the real estate market and the long commutes between where they can afford to live and where they are allowed to work—to call Home.

But this night is only a turning point in terms of resources. Samra and Saher, like thousands of other Sudanese, have been in this in-between space, caught between two worlds, for over a decade. In the aftermath of civil war and genocide in Sudan, Samra and Saher, and 3,000 displaced southern Sudanese were relocated to Phoenix. Thousands more were dispersed randomly to major cities throughout the U.S, Canada, and Australia, and many thousands more have been stuck in refugee camps in eastern Africa, unable to go home and unable to go anywhere else for nearly twenty years.

It's not clear whether those who were relocated or those who are in refugee camps got the better deal. What is clear is that neither deal is good. And an entire nation has been scattered to the winds for more than a decade and struggling for their lives and their dignity for much longer than that. And now, even after a 2011 vote in which southern Sudan seceded from the north, there is no clear way forward. Ten years into resettling in Phoenix, Arizona, she works to invent a way forward where there seems to be no way.

When Samra first got here, she didn't know any English and so she did the only job she could find. She took out trash and washed tables at Chuck E. Cheese. This job required no language to explain, just pointing and gesturing. She was a quick learner and watched a friend in the kitchen make pizzas. On a busy night, she decided to help her friend out and worked next to her in the kitchen. A manager saw her and moved her from her previous job busing tables to topping pizzas in the kitchen. Later, Samra tried school at a local community college, but with little previous schooling in Africa, the discourse of American education didn't make much sense and was far removed from the language and skills she needed day-to-day in her work. The futility of her efforts and the ways institutions do more to keep her out than let her in make her weep:

Like me, I don't go to [school in Africa]... And I know I have a lot of stuff in my head, I want to do it, and it's so hard [*her voice starts to quiver*] you can't do it because, you know, because you don't go to school. And it's okay. [*Her voice rises and cracks with this last sentence. Her eyes are full of tears. She chokes up and can't continue talking. We sit quietly at the table. We know the stakes are high, the urgency real.*]

Old proverbs remind us of the heartache of hope deferred, a heartache Samra and the Sudanese know too well. But despite the realities she wakes to each morning at 5 a.m. when she puts on her work uniform and drives an hour through traffic across Phoenix sprawl to the new Casino AZ, Samra clings to another vision for herself and for Sudanese women and their families.

She shares memories of her mother's work in Egypt, making dresses and teaching other women to sew and design patterns and to cook and take care of their families. Her mother did this work for free, only taking enough money to cover the materials. Samra anticipates doing something similar here.

And before in Africa [my mother] start sew the clothes and help people how good the cooking. And I see her all the time, how she do it, like she do good job for the other people, you know? Teaching people how you can cook, how you can handle your, your family. [*Her voice rises in an audible smile*] And me too, I love doing that too. It's not only for me, it's for the other people too. You know?

**Profile of Samra continued**

And maybe now she do the clothes and two weeks again she do the cooking.... Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Like before, she have a small group, and, and this one, she start to do it, and all the time the people come more and more and more. She collect the money and she buy like the place, a center, and the woman she come, like maybe the time she want to cook, like I can bring something in my house, or maybe you can collect and bring all of it together and you can go the store and which one you wanna cook it and which one you don't know how to cook it, and she tell you how to buy it and you come, all of the group together, sit down together and she teach you how to cook this one, how to cook this one, how to cook this one. And how to do this one, and after that it's finished and you can eat together, you sit down and eat.

On their own time and with a small Nyakannt of money they'd managed to save, Samra and her sister designed and sewed thirteen dresses this past fall. Samra talked about holding a fashion show and charging tickets and using the money to help other women in the Sudanese community go to school or start a daycare. The fashion show didn't pan out in the fall, but two weekends ago they put on a show for the Now four of us are working together with Samra so she can start a business here with her sister – one that honors the vision Samra's held to for herself and the Sudanese all these years. We're in the early planning stages, but Samra talks about apprenticeship, a community center, a daycare where children learn their Sudanese culture. And for the first time here, these are within her grasp.

There is a very real sense in which it matters what, if anything, comes of our talk together, of her Sudanese community in Phoenix, and their work was a hit.

struggle so far. And it does look as if things are in place now for the business, the community center, the daycare Samra dreams of to become a reality. But Samra knows that for lots of people, Samra included, the deck is stacked, the system rigged, and access to needed resources never comes. And so the work she does – to work hard within unfair systems even while she resists them, to call people together around a shared vision even though she doesn't know how to bring it about, to struggle against hope deferred, to publicly pursue her desire for something better at personal cost and risk with no guarantees-- and the good she brings is layered and defies calculated measurement because it is both material and symbolic.

*Getting the Work Done Anyway.* Readers may wonder about why Samra and other Sudanese women like her view educational institutions in such stark light, and ethnographic studies of day-to-day realities of refugee women as well as statistics beyond the scope of this piece could tell that story, but it is Samra's perception and the perception of the Sudanese women that are critical here. Samra's experience of American education systems was enough to bring her to painful tears. Still, she did not view her experience "as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation [she] could transform" (Freire 49). And it is this perception that she could "transform limits into new paths" (Atwill 67) that became "the motivating force for liberating action" (Freire 49).

The meeting the profile describes led to later conversations, plans, and grant proposals for the following groups, each designed to support intergenerational, cross-gendered, cross-tribe community building of multiple public homeplaces, concrete and situated responses to the unhealthy situations Tap had earlier narrated: sewing groups, family and community gardens, cooking gatherings, and a micro-financing venture to fund bamboo bike ambulances in Sudan.

In keeping with the work of *phronesis*, this chapter has “focused on the dynamic question ‘How?’ in addition to the more structural ‘Why?’” (Flyvbjerg 43). In that applied *phronesis* is concerned not only with interests, values, and power but also with something getting done, the next chapter situates the rhetorical work that Samra, Saher, and Dalila are doing through the fashion design and social entrepreneurship in light of competing discourses and options for action.

## CHAPTER 4

### PHRONESIS: INVENTING ALTERNATIVE PATHS, PRODUCING ALTERNATIVE DESTINATIONS

As introduced in chapter 2 and described more fully in chapter 3, engaging in postmodern *phronesis*, which puts us at the intersection of classical *phronesis* (which interrogates values, interests, and power in localized contexts) and *applied phronesis* (which invents new paths and new tools to produce alternative futures). Postmodern *phronesis* is, thus, not only concerned with practical ethics but also with accomplishing ends that fit a local public's values. In previous chapters, I have tried to describe what *phronesis* looks like in practice. In this chapter, I will describe the ends we are currently working toward – the alternative destinations and paths we are creating that resist dominant and dominating discourses and that draw on emancipating possibilities of rhetorical action. Of course, these alternative paths and destinations as well as the ways they are valued, are always “socially conditioned, intersubjective” (Flyvbjerg 48) and under construction. The layers of critical incidents and various situational maps in chapter 2 and the narratives in chapter 3 aim to make visible these perspectival ways of knowing and being in the world. With the messiness of these social worlds and discursive positions and situational elements in mind, here I will more specifically describe different versions of “women’s empowerment” that Samra, Saher, and Dalila are enacting as they pursue individual and community health in ways that pull together notions of self-definition and self-reliance; social justice, education, and community; as well as material and systemic changes and resist various shades of gendered colonialism.

## “Women’s Empowerment”

Women’s empowerment is an illusive concept. Rebecca Dingo explains:

While certainly [...] the argument for women’s empowerment has its roots in second- and third-wave feminist consciousness raising, the concept as it appears in late-twentieth century global policy circles is what Saul Halfon describes as a “rather open-ended, free-floating, signifier” (83) that could stand for women’s access to health care, political action, personal agency, the right to speak, the ability to work outside the home, the right to maintain cultural practices – or often some combination of all these (2).

Although the rhetoric of “women’s empowerment” can suggest “a positive and pro-woman agenda, the phrase is often deployed to legislate practices that in fact often are not empowering and that may further disenfranchise women” (Dingo 5). Patricia Hill Collins equates empowerment with social justice, education, and community *as well as* self-definition and self-reliance. Although for Collins, empowerment must come from within, it is enabled by a wider support system (119). Empowerment is not merely personal but made possible by a complex matrix of situations, according to Collins, because oppressions are linked they therefore necessitate “transforming unjust social institutions” (273).

While Dingo, a feminist rhetorician, demonstrates in her work the ways “policy makers and global institutions have reframed the feminist term ‘empowerment’ to legislate neoliberal practices that actually reinstitute the very structures that limited women’s empowerment in the first place” (7), below, I describe the ways the grounded work that Samra, Saher, and Dalila are up to is in

dialogue with these institutions and practices and works to re-write them in ways that create alternative paths and produce alternative destinations.

**Dresses as Identity Texts.** The dresses Samra, Saher, and Dalila are designed and created mark hybridized identities among Sudanese women. They are what Paris refers to as “identity texts” inscribing “ethnic, linguistic, local, and transnational affiliations” (279) through, in this case, clothing. Many of the dresses Samra, Saher, and Dalila have designed begin with vibrant colors and geometric patterns that are distinctly African, even to my white American eyes. Some of the dress designs draw on more traditional cuts, like the mock-up pictured in Image 1<sup>14</sup>, but most rely on cuts that are shorter (images 3 and 4), close to the body (images 2-4), and often revealing around the shoulders (images 1-4). The dresses, with their blend of African prints and African-Western styles, span not only continents and cultures but also “various media between the oral and written, the textual and otherwise symbolic, the static word and the moving word, and the dominant voice and the marginalized one” (Paris 279).

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<sup>14</sup> Pictures were an important part of my work with the Sudanese. Images of Sudan and pictures of Nuer cross-country runners, Dinka men making clay cows – a cherished symbol of Southern Sudanese village culture, headshots of women and men across generations with text describing their journeys to the U.S. lined the walls of the AzLBC. Pictures were also integral to my fieldwork as I sought to get to know Samra, Dalila, Tap, Saher, and others. Samra and I would often sit together on the floor with her toddler boys and flip through our photo albums together, telling each other stories about our lives, piecing together the geographies and intimate histories of our scattered worlds. We would also take pictures of each other on trips to the Desert Botanical Gardens or at Chuckee Cheese birthday parties to remember our times together. The pictures that show up in this dissertation were taken in that larger context of attending to visual sovereignty of indigenous people. The pictures included here are always with permission of the participants in this project, and the pictures are often re-purposed here for an academic audience since we often had another more immediate audience in mind when we took the photos. We originally took the pictures of the dresses, for example, to circulate them to a community organizer who invited Samra and Saher to submit their work to RAW Phoenix for a chance to hold a local fashion show and get to know some local boutique owners who might be interested in their work.



“Identity texts,” Paris tells us, are bound together by three factors: “they index identities as members of particular groups, they are unsolicited literacy acts not officially evaluated by school [or other official institutions], and they enact a multimodal performativity that Lunsford (2007) has called *secondary literacy*” (Paris 279). Paris notes that Michele de Certeau’s notion of the scriptural economy is especially helpful in understanding the cultural work of identity texts:

De Certeau theorizes that the power of “writing” has been subsumed by institutions and capitalist class structures to create and sustain the haves and have-nots. This economy functions by stratifying individuals and groups through systems of recorded text with clear, dominating social purposes. (279)

As you’ll recall from chapter 3, the requirements of school with its scriptural economy brought Samra to tears. In addition to dominating the economy of school (Paris 279), textual records dominated the economies of the public and private institutions that dictated resources available to Samra, Saher, and Dalila. They found themselves up against this scriptural economy multiple times each day. Much of my first few months getting to know Samra and her family was spent working with Samra to navigate documents like employment contracts and benefits, welfare requirements, employment and apartment applications, and proof of legal residency. These textual requirements continually reminded them of their lack of power in dominant American society, which clearly seeks to “maintain... power by defining who is literate, educated, and productive given the set of institutional records [who has them, who creates them, and how they count], thereby reinforcing power inequities” (Paris 279). In relief from and opposition to this dominant scriptural

economy is the counter scriptural economy of the worn texts (Paris) Samra, Saher, and Dalila are producing. Creating and wearing the dresses (some of the design sketches are seen below) is a powerful act of agency and pride in a place where being an immigrant, even one with refugee status, is often viewed with suspicion, if not criminalized. The dresses are a way for Samra, Saher, and Dalila to voice a connection to their homeland and to claim their affiliation with other Africans, a continental and cultural affiliation that is reflective of their transnational positionality. In South Sudan, people are known first by their tribe – Nuer or Dinka, for example, and physical marks on people’s bodies mark their tribal identities. However, in Phoenix, where Nuer and Dinka tribal marks and Sudanese national identities are not widely recognized, the dresses voice membership and call for recognition and respect of the dignity of that membership. In Cintron’s work on graffiti among Latino gangs, he calls such public texts “an intense need to acquire power and voice” (186) in situations that offer little or no respect. Likewise, the dresses Samra, Saher, and Dalila create are a declaration of self-determination (Collins 119) that aims to gain power and respect within situations of marginalization by dominant cultures.



Image 2. African Print Mock-Up with Hat.

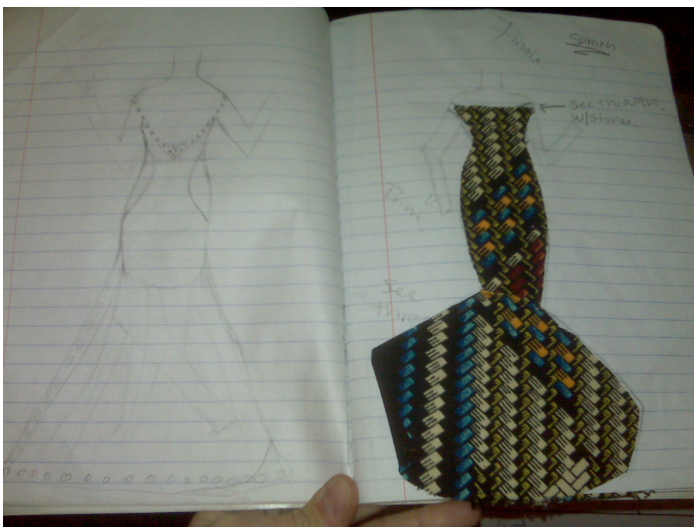


Image 3. African Print Evening Gown Mock-up.



Image 4. African Print Short Dress Mock-up.



Image 5. Sketch of Design for Dress.

**Social Entrepreneurship as Resistance.** As Samra, Saher, and Dalila work to launch a transnational clothing line, they are aiming to hold to a version of social entrepreneurship that resists aid to Africa discourse based on American paternalism and humanitarianism. Dambisa Moyo offers an example to depict the “erroneous impression of aid’s success” (44):

There’s a mosquito net maker in Africa. He manufactures around 500 nets a week. He employs ten people, who (as with many African countries) each have to support upwards of fifteen relatives. However hard they work, they can’t make enough nets to combat the malaria-carrying mosquito.

Enter vociferous Hollywood movie star who rallies the masses, and goads Western governments to collect and send 100,000 mosquito nets to the afflicted region, at a cost of a million dollars. The nets arrive, the nets are distributed, and a ‘good’ deed is done.

With the market flooded with foreign nets, however, our mosquito net maker is promptly put out of business. His ten workers can no longer support their 150 dependants (who are now forced to depend on handouts), and one mustn’t forget that in a maximum of five years the majority of the imported nets will be torn, damaged, and of no further use.

This is the micro-macro paradox. A short-term efficacious intervention may have few discernible, sustainable long-term benefits.

Worse still, it can unintentionally undermine whatever fragile chance for sustainable development may already be in play. (44)

This version of aid plays out in similar ways and with a more colonial tint as Americans ship cargo holders full of used bicycles (or insert your preferred product) while there is not a single bicycle manufacturer in all of sub-saharan Africa. In opposition to this bankrupt version of aid, Samra, Saher, and Dalila are working on a slower, more long-range plan to launch a transnational clothing line and to develop a prototype for bamboo bikes and bamboo bike ambulances that would eventually be constructed in Wau, South Sudan, where Samra and Saher's father lives. The manufacture, sales, and repair of bamboo bikes in Wau is a project that would eventually be micro-financed by a percentage of profits from the dresses. While I don't here want to linger in the details of the models we are considering, I do want to note that we are talking about a network of approaches that might include models that at first glance look like familiar versions of micro-financing or capitalism or aid but that resist those models in significant ways. For example, in addition to working with Phoenix RAW and local boutiques, Samra, Saher, and Dalila are planning to call on a charity model of aid and hold quarterly fashion shows and sell tickets with proceeds going toward product development that might include working with local Arizona farms to purchase cotton or wool; renting equipment and hiring experts to teach some Sudanese women in Phoenix how to make and dye fabric; working with local farmers in Wau, Sudan, to grow bamboo; purchasing bamboo in Tucson, Arizona, to build bamboo bike and bike ambulance prototypes. While typical aid charity models "inscribe a dehumanizing doer/done-to relationship between those giving and those receiving the aid" (Long, Fye, and Jarvis), Samra, Saher, and Dalila

aim to shift the center of agency, resisting a version of “empowerment” in which “power is bequeathed onto one from another” (Dingo); in this version of empowerment, the granter can easily take power away (Rowlands 12). Samra, Saher, and Dalila, however, aim not only to retain their own individual agency but also the individual and collective agency of Sudanese women in Phoenix as well as that of their families in South Sudan. This admittedly fragile but long-range, potentially sustainable vision that draws on the localized knowledges, desires, and needs of individuals in the Sudanese diaspora here and in villages near Wau, Sudan, resists the quick-fix aid that Moyo describes and instead aims to promote moderate, locally determined, locally valued growth and development over time. As you can see, this productive knowledge-making takes up as the site of problem-solving “specific values and interests in the context of particular power relations” (Flyvbjerg 25) as a “point of departure for managed action” (30). Further, our deliberation about actions to take and models to draw on transcend the dualisms of agency/structure, focusing on both actors and structures and the relationship between the two (Flyvbjerg 44).

**Micro-financing as Resistance.** Micro-credit practice often invokes the rhetoric of U.S. welfare policy, making individual behavior central to eradicating poverty (Dingo 45) and casting micro-loans as the “one-size-fits-all answer to the problems caused by structural adjustment, specifically the unavailability of well-paying jobs, a lack of social services, and public-sector employment, and a general growth in poverty” (Dingo 41). Further, the micro-loan industry tends to focus primarily on women, and policy makers and micro-lenders alike often rely on

“Westernized notions of sovereignty and individualism and stereotypical colonial understandings of third-world women” (Dingo 47).

Samra, Saher, and Dalila ran up against these rhetorics and practices in a consultation with a Yale-based student-run microcredit initiative. One of the Yaleys described an initiative they had recently funded in New Haven:

We met with an African-American man, this older guy, and over a series of consultations helped him put a plan together and write a business proposal for becoming a street vendor near the college. Our board looked over his proposal and gave him about \$1500. He’s got a hot dog cart now. He probably won’t make it. It’s a terrible intersection. But that’s the best shot he’s got. (meeting 8 Oct 2011)

The group’s lack of concern about whether or not the African American man would be successful in his venture draws from common (and historically embedded) representations of the poor and “hide[s] the larger structural causes of poverty and reify the bootstrap ideology popular in U.S. welfare policies” (Dingo 41). The Yale entrepreneurs’ rhetoric reflects a version of “empowerment” that allows them “to ignore... actual material practices – whether those practices are positive for [men or] women or not” (Dingo 11) and to deny any individual or institutional culpability. This rhetoric also situates the neoliberal lender as the acting subject, shifting attention away from the poorer individual who risks the entrepreneurial venture (Dingo 12). Further, the rhetoric of their microfinancing initiative “act[s] as a veil that masks the actual effects of neoliberal capitalism and in doing so elides the political, economic, and personal realities of [those] it... addresses” (Dingo 31).



Rather than positioning themselves as those “in need” of the “generosity” of *noblesse oblige*, Samra, Saher, and Dalila are re-casting themselves as micro-financers of innovative work here and in Southern Sudan. Samra, Saher, and Dalila also hope to avoid these kinds of classed models in their practices. For example, with other Sudanese women in Phoenix, they are working through small, niche, networked cooperatives rather than hierarchical business models.

In Wau, Sudan, Samra and her family are working to partner with local individuals and groups (farmers, nurses, newly trained bike mechanics, etc.) to address issues of reliable, sustainable transportation and reliable healthcare – concerns that are personal as well as structural. In Wau, South Sudan, a local clinic is designed to serve 13 neighboring villages. Despite this relative proximity, each month community leaders in Phoenix spread news of ill and injured people dying before they even reach the clinic because the clinic cannot be reached by car, and neither the villages nor the clinic have ambulances or other reliable transportation. These regular happenings in Wau exemplify a larger problem in South Sudan:

- Only 25 per cent of South Sudan’s population has access to adequate health services (2006 Sudan Household Health Survey, UNICEF).
- Southern Sudan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world (2006 Sudan Household Health Survey, UNICEF).
- Lack of access to effective transportation is a limiter to employment opportunities, local and regional trade, education, and public health. In fact, the primary factor determining whether girls in sub-Saharan Africa go to and stay in school is reliable transportation.

By working to construct a dynamic, locally responsive, transnational model of social entrepreneurship and micro-financing, Samra, Saher, and Dalila are resisting normalizing models of empowerment and embracing a model where women (and men) make decisions about individual and community needs and desires. No doubt, this work is tenuous; it is, after all, done in the nooks and crannies of the discourses, social arenas, geographies, and schedules that complicate the situational maps and narratives of chapters 2 and 3. As this chapter underscores, the task of *phronesis* is “to clarify and deliberate about the problems, possibilities, and risks...and to outline how things could be done differently – all in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions” (49).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONFRONTING ISSUES THAT CONFRONT OUR COMMUNITIES: HUMANIZING PEDAGOGIES IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

As I mentioned in the preface, my own positionality as a former secondary English teacher, current teacher-educator, university supervisor for pre-service English teachers, and critical literacy and rhetoric-composition scholar puts me at an important and interesting intersection. When we do the work of *phronesis* and perform rhetoric day-to-day, we do this in, out, and among institutions, flexing our various identities as we attempt to navigate complex discourses as well as constraints. While much of this dissertation is about engaging jointly with the Sudanese in complex social arenas to work toward the health of the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix, the fifth chapter is about joint collaboration with students to pursue the health of our local communities. In this chapter, I offer a framework for teachers to engage in the real work of problem-posing that aims to get something done by confronting the issues that confront our communities (Paris). While the examples I offer are from a First Year Composition course, I have in mind secondary English teachers as well as FYC instructors and upper-division rhet-comp teachers. By embracing this intersection, I draw on a long line of scholars in English education, sociocultural literacies, and rhetoric and composition who aim to “educat[e] a critical citizenry who will promote democratic values and who will draw upon a heritage of what [Cornel] West terms a ‘deep democratic tradition’ to fashion humane responses to unwarranted social misery” (Gilyard 3). Chapter 5, thus, offers a framework for rhetorical education that includes critical reception and production of “language and thus the American experience itself” (Stull 3). In light of my position, during the

writing of this dissertation, as an FYC instructor, I walk readers through one version of this framework as it played out in a First Year Composition course I taught and provide tools for scaffolding public listening, multi-voiced inquiries, and *phronesis* with and for local publics. Throughout the chapter, I work to take metaphorical “four corner snapshots” (see the preface) to bridge the intersections of secondary English and FYC. Finally, I conclude the chapter and this dissertation by calling for English education to abandon all pretense of being a predictive science and to instead embrace productive knowledge-making and the rhetorical work of *phronesis* as the heart of secondary English studies.

In a conversation with Carol Gilles, a literacy scholar at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Carol asked about my work with the Sudanese diaspora in Phoenix. After hearing some narratives, she asked what this kind of rhetorical work might look like in a classroom. “It sounds really great,” she said, “but what does that look like?” In this chapter, I aim to offer a framework for making the work of confronting issues that confront our communities (Paris) do-able in our communities and teach-able in the classroom. Before I get to specifics, I want to relay a “critical incident” (Flanagan) that offers a compelling “so what” for engaging young people in the hard work and unpredictable terrain of critical inquiry and rhetorical problem-solving.

In the fall of 2010 on the Day of Remembrance, young people across the nation came together to remember 15 gay youth who killed themselves in response to the ways they were being treated in schools. For Beau Newton, a gay student teacher doing his practicum at a school in western Phoenix, this day was especially important. He told me:

In the month of September, 15 gay students ended up committing suicide nationwide. It was shocking, and the statistics of it are interesting to me because September is the beginning of a school year, and it's this early in the school year and these kids are already being bullied to the point where they took their own lives. It was really upsetting.

That there was a public Day of Remembrance that students participated in by wearing purple shirts to school seems to mark a shared issue of concern. However, the way this issue took shape locally was particular to the high school where Beau was working and the particular students he found himself with that semester. Initially Beau had planned to conduct class as usual on that day, to simply wear his shirt and if anyone asked him about it to offer an explanation to that individual. He remembers:

But even before class, between 7 o'clock in the morning and 7:30 in the morning ... when the bell rang for class, there were just a bunch of people in the hallway like, "Oh, it's gay pride; it's gay pride," stuff like that, and that's not what the purple was there for at all. It wasn't gay pride in any way. It was a remembrance for these kids that were being bullied in many ways – cyber-bulling and face-to-face in the schools — because of their sexuality, because they didn't fit into these molds that people expect boys and girls to fit into.... Some students were wearing purple and didn't even know why. So I started explaining it to them.

In this case, what was an important issue for some of the students and teachers at the high school was misunderstood by others, even some of the students who were participating in the event. However, in attempting to confront their misunderstanding, Beau realized that not everyone agreed that the suicides or bullying were issues of public concern or that these were local issues, affecting people they knew.

Beau showed a short YouTube [video of a city councilman from Texas](#) who was using the television time of the city council meeting to speak about the 15 suicides. He began with one that occurred near Fort Worth. The councilman was sympathizing with youth who had experienced years of bullying and with their families because their children had taken their own lives in response. As Beau explained it, the city councilman told his own story of “how he had come out and how he had overcome bullying.” The city councilman alluded to his own suicide attempt as well. Beau recalls that the video is “powerful, very, very powerful... [The councilman’s] kind of just addressing the message that it gets better, it gets better.”

Beau recognized this as a timely and relevant issue because of the ways he saw his students relating:

And you know the dynamic in the classroom, in all of my classrooms, is actually – well, you’ve got the popular kids and then the slackers, and you’ve got these kids who are quiet and sit off to the side and don’t really fit into any other group... I see that some of these students are in the same class as the people that bully them. You know, they get bullied and their bullies are a couple of rows down.

I know they're bullied because one student complained because I moved the seating chart around a couple of weeks ago and he came to me and said, "I can't sit next to these guys. You have to move me. Please." So I did that. That was in one of the senior classes.

On the Day of Remembrance, students watched the video, wrote reflections, read them out loud and discussed their reflections in class. In the discussion, students framed the issue in different ways, sometimes shifting the point of stasis—the question the issue turned on. Beau explained:

There were a couple of outspoken students who, you know... were like, "Suicide is dumb. Whoever commits suicide is a coward. They can't face things in their own lives." And as a person – I won't say as an educator – but as a person who has gone through adversity like that, and, you know, having the discussions speak to me so personally, like "Oh, you're just going to address it as cowardice," you know, and say that they're too scared to face their demons or something like that, that's why they committed suicide. How dare these kids – the outspoken ones who are the bullies – say that because they've never experienced that before. They don't know how it feels.

Later in our conversation, Beau described a particularly poignant moment in class that day – one in which students had very different responses to the video they'd just seen, some not even acknowledging bullying as a local issue. Beau recounted:

There was one student who during the video started crying. She had had a history of being bullied as well... She started crying in class... she reacted very powerfully to the video; it was really heartbreaking to see that. So I felt like it was a necessary message and a necessary step to take in the classroom. She [the girl who was crying] was sitting in the corner, the back corner of the classroom. One of the popular girls on the other side of the room said, ‘That kind of bullying doesn’t happen in this school. This isn’t a problem in our community. We are all friends, we all get along at this school.’

I asked her, ‘How can you say that? How can you say that when we’ve got someone over here crying? This issue clearly touches some people very personally. We’ve got another person in this classroom crying...’”

She said, “Well, my friends and I don’t do that.”

I said, “But do you do anything about it? Do you do anything when you see it happen? You’re not unbiased. If you don’t take action, you’re passively supporting or submitting to whichever side is winning.”

These conversations with students led Beau to shift his curriculum. He had originally planned for the students to read Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* next; instead, he chose *The Taming of the Shrew* and designed a unit he described as “focused on gender stereotypes, individuality, and other aspects of students’ social lives that they do not usually think about consciously, but simply accept for truths without questioning them.” Throughout the unit students discussed and wrote about the implications of



gender stereotypes on their own personal lives, and how they are personally affected by Shakespeare's themes. Beau explained that he sought to engage students around tough questions: What does it mean to be a man or woman today? Do students feel they fit this description? What happens to people who do not fit into this mold? What is individuality worth?

Despite centering the curriculum around gender stereotypes and their impact on students, engaging students in dialogue across difference proved to be difficult. Beau framed part of this difficulty around "safety." He explained:

As a teacher, I focused on developing a classroom environment that was safe and secure. I wanted students to feel they were free to express their opinions without the fear of ridicule from their peers, or myself. In this endeavor, I do not feel I was as successful as I could have been. Students frequently would refuse to participate and answer questions posed directly... I have learned that security and safety are essentials in the English classroom, since subjects discussed are personal—they are individual opinions, which by nature require you to be vulnerable if you are to openly share them in a forum like a classroom.

Beau was doing his best to center curriculum on "enduring understandings" and to "confront the issues that confront our communities." Yet, even around the often more "acceptable" subject of gender roles rather than seemingly more difficult and controversial issues related to sexuality and bullying, Beau found it difficult, seemingly impossible, to get beyond students' scripted ways of relating and enacting dominance. One class discussion in particular came to mind for Beau. For

homework, Beau had asked the girls to complete ten statements that started “Being a woman means...” and the boys, “Being a man means...” The next day in class students talked about contemporary gender stereotypes as well as gender stereotypes in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Beau recalls:

It [the conversation] was a struggle because the guys were saying some chauvinistic things most of the time... The conversation went well because it was eye-opening for me but as far as actually having a conversation in class it was difficult because the guys were talking about how being a man means being strong or being able to clear your own way, stuff like that. And when the girls would pipe up and say something, like when one of them said being a woman means being independent or carving out your own life, some of the guys would chuckle and say something like, “Oh, a woman’s place should be in the kitchen.” And they were saying it as a joke, but it still meant something because it dismisses really what the girls were trying to go for.

A lot of their comments alluded to this feeling that women are subservient or that they have to take on this caretaker role and if they ever try to pursue something outside of that, they get laughed at... I was kind of in my own little head thinking, “Oh, those are ancient beliefs. They don’t exist in contemporary society.” And I’m sitting here with a class of 35 students, and it’s slapping me in the face that, yeah, there are still students who believe this and students who will continue to believe this...

Beau was beginning to realize that it was not enough to simply raise the issues or teach students to be “good discussants” (whatever we might mean by that<sup>15</sup>). Those things on their own won’t bring about a change in individuals, in systems, in ways of thinking and relating and engaging with each other.

### **Limitations of Current Models of Deliberation in English Education**

Certainly, it’s hard for our thinking to shift when we engage complex issues on our own; even harder when we try to do this in community because it requires us to suspend our own social situation in order to do the deep listening necessary to consider the narratives of those who are different from us without bracketing or diminishing difference but instead valuing those differences. Framing the difficulty in more stark terms, Ralph Cintron notes that a “society [...] cannot ‘think’ beyond what terrorizes it” (194). It was this terror that Beau found himself bumping up against; instantiations of this terror – one student dismissing the situated account of another student – revealed the limitations of our current models of deliberation in English education. As Cintron warns, without seriously reconfiguring self-other relations and public dialogue itself, even our best efforts will result in scripted ways of relating, allowing us to engage (or not engage) in predictable ways, often resulting in a point of stasis or impasse. And there are serious stakes academically and

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<sup>15</sup> Simply incorporating discussion or debate about texts and local events (whether we are using methods like Socratic Seminars or Junior Great Books discussions or dialogue about Controversial Public Issues (Hess)) is not automatically a move toward democratic deliberation and/or critical inquiry. *Phronesis* would have us interrogate the interests, values, and power at play in a given situation while also considering the questions of the *stochastic techne* to determine what goals to pursue and how to pursue them. For more about embracing and scaffolding this paradigmatic shift, readers might be interested in Bob Fecho’s *Is This English? Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom* and *Teaching for the Students: Habits of Hear, Mind, and Practice in the Classroom* as well as Linda Flower’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*.

ethically. If we simply avoid engaging controversial topics – and what is controversial and for whom is always locally situated and constructed – we continue to endorse institutional/systemic power differentials that harm young people, *and* our omission of these issues intensifies the “taboo” nature of the topics, reinforcing the abuse and misuse and blindness of power and its effects. If we engage controversial topics but stick with scripted roles,<sup>16</sup> we achieve predictable and unproductive results for dominant and non-dominant populations. *How, then, can we work with young people to engage difficult and important issues facing our communities in ways that interrogate the values and power underlying the work of individuals and structures, as well as the relationship between the two, and determine wise rhetorical actions for just ends?* I contend that one way forward is by re-casting secondary English courses to prioritize rhetorical studies, and to focus, in particular on *phronesis* and *techne*.

### **Phronesis for Contemporary English Education**

As I have discussed in previous chapters, *phronesis* is the study of human affairs with an emphasis on values and power. It focuses on practical knowledge and practical ethics. It involves judgments and decisions about how to manage in each particular circumstance and how to do what is ethically practical (or to practice what is ethical). Of course, what is ethical – good or bad – is always chosen in relation to certain values and interests in order for good and bad to have meaning. Thus, *phronesis* is concerned with deliberation about (including the questioning of) values and interests with an orientation toward action. It is, thus, pragmatic, variable, and

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<sup>16</sup> Scripted or dismissive moves include the ones Hess outlines and the ones Flower notes, including side-stepping, discounting others’ perspectives, blaming others, repeating sound bites and re-circulating simplistic solutions.

context dependent. (For more on phronesis, see Flyvbjerg “Making Social Science Matter.”)

*Techné*, which is with the concrete and indeterminate, is bent on bringing something into being. As we saw in chapter 1, Aristotle reminds us ...that an art that studies “how to bring something into being that is capable of being or not being” (1976, ss 1140a1-23). That is, *techné* is not concerned with necessity or inevitability but with possibility, and it chases a particular goal. Thus, *techné* “aims at an end other than itself, but this is impossible in the case of action [*phronesis*], because the end is merely doing *well*” (Aristotle, 1976, ss. 1140a24-b12). Throughout this dissertation, I have theorized the interplay between *techné* and *phronesis*: “Phronesis concerns the analysis of values – ‘things that are good or bad for people’ – as a point of departure for managed action” (Aristotle); *techné* bends wise action toward a desired outcome and works to invent tools and paths for transforming limits and barriers into opportunities for accomplishing the desired goal (Atwill). *Phronesis* keeps *techné* in check, and vice-versa. *Phronesis* interrogates values; *techné* makes sure values remain value-able by doing something useful. According to Brent Flyvbjerg in his study of contemporary social organizations and public policies, *phronesis* asks:

- Where are we going?
- Is this development desirable?
- What, if anything, should we do about it?
- Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
- What possibilities available to change existing power relations, and is it desirable to do so? (Flyvbjerg “Making Social Science Matter” 33)

As we saw in chapter 3, the *stochastic techne* – a *techne* concerned with accomplishing ends that fit a local public’s (Long) values – asks:

- What is the work that needs doing?
- What existing models can we call on?
- What is keeping the work from being done?
- What can we construct or invent to get the work done anyway?

Important to both *phronesis* and *techne* is ongoing dialogue about the “how” and the “why” of social life. Both *phronesis* and *techne* need others to test what is offered against their own experiences, to argue when what is offered doesn’t fit, and to join public discussions by offering better interpretations – and better judgments, goals and tools – that can then benefit from further discussion (Bellah et al., 307).

In this chapter, I offer one version of dialogic practices to scaffold rhetorical education around *phronesis* through critical inquiry, inventing *techne*, and contemplating and taking social action in and out of the secondary English classroom. Here, I aim to cast imagination for what it might look like to teach with *phronesis* in view, and I aim to offer some tools to scaffold critical inquiry with an eye toward contemplative social action. The distinct literate practices I will discuss and make visible are:

1. Framing the *problem space*
2. Teaching *strong rival hypothesis stance*
3. Accessing and valuing *situated knowledge*
4. Scaffolding *theory-building*
5. Determining and testing *wise rhetorical action*

To dramatize each of these practices, in the following sections I draw on classroom discussions and assignments from a First Year Composition course.

### **1. Framing a Problem Space**

When we do the work of confronting issues, we must first determine what issues confront our local communities and, of those, which ones to confront with young people. After all, “[N]o pathology can be confronted if it remains in the shadows, if we don’t find a way to make it visible” (Wise 74). However, we cannot know in advance the issues that need confronting. Across the United States, it is not only more private issues related to bullying and sexuality that remain “in the shadows.”<sup>17</sup> Even concerns that gain nationwide media attention might remain “in the shadows” locally among the young people we are teaching. In the fall of 2010, when Arizona’s anti-immigration legislation was garnering national attention and heated criticism and the National Council of Teachers of English was pulling out of its contract with the city of Phoenix to hold its annual convention there, white pre-service teachers in a course I was teaching at Arizona State University claimed, “That [discrimination, racism] doesn’t happen anymore. Maybe in the South but not here.” Clearly, then, we cannot know in advance the particular issues – or versions of issues – that may come up among the young people in our classes. We can, however, build some terrain to explore. However, this is not merely a matter of centering curriculum on

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<sup>17</sup> While some states are legalizing same-sex marriage, others, including Minnesota and Tennessee are working to ban talk of homosexuality in schools. Minnesota’s largest school district, Anoka-Hennepin school, revoked a policy demanding teachers to be “neutral” about homosexuality, a policy that led many teachers to simply avoid any talk of homosexuality in the classroom even when issues of anti-gay bullying arose when nine students in the district committed suicide because of harassment about their sexuality (Erdely “One Town’s War on Gay Teens” and “Minnesota School District Ends Policy Blamed for Anti-Gay Bullying”).

conceptual themes. Instead, we need to frame a problem space that young people will find relevant, important, and compelling: our problem-posing needs teeth. Authentic problem-posing demands that we feel the weight of the problems we pose – that we feel real angst over the way things are and recognize that our simple answers and scripted sound bites don’t do justice to the complexity of the issue and don’t offer viable options for moving forward. You’ll know you’re on to a rich problem space when young people are beating you to the punch and asking, “*So, what do we do?!<sup>18</sup>*” Only then will our teaching be humanizing in the most Freirian sense of the word as it invites young people to the work of *phronesis* – to engage in the interplay between interrogating values and inventing alternative paths, practices, and destinations. Teaching that aims at *phronesis* invites collaborative, intercultural, interdisciplinary inquiry around public or yet-to-be-public issues of shared concern where our responses (our actions or in-actions) have consequence. Ultimately, scaffolding *phronesis* is about co-constructing a space of ongoing critical inquiry and invention with students. And it begins with creating a dialogical classroom in which learning is a generative act and our literacies are “used to immerse teacher and students in an ongoing reflective conversation with the texts of their lives” (Fecho, *Teaching* 8) and the issues that confront their communities (Paris).

Framing a problem space involves:

- Constructing a dialogic classroom by supporting robust, relevant critical inquiry

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<sup>18</sup> For more about teachers as provocateurs, readers might consult Bob Fecho’s work about “water pistol transactions” in *Teaching for the Students: Habits of Heart, Mind, and Practice in the Engaged Classroom* and Jane H. Aiken’s work “Provocateurs for Justice” about provoking students to desire justice and to commit to justice.



- Drawing on multiple perspectives and diverse situated accounts
- Engaging shared concerns that are public OR yet to be public
- Considering issues where something significant is at stake
- Relying on distributed cognition and fostering cognitive dissonance

### **Examples from ENG 101: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons**

For example, in a First-Year Composition course, I framed our initial problem space at the intersection of capitalism, creativity, and the commons<sup>19</sup> as we considered the following overarching questions related to “meaningful, humanizing work.”

- What is the nature of cultural work<sup>20</sup>? What work/good does it do? Why does it matter?
- Who are cultural workers? (West)
- What is the relationship between creativity and commerce?
- How do we engage in creative work in ways that nourish us materially and spiritually?
- Where do you and your work fit? How do you see yourself fitting (or not) into these schemas...
- What is the relationship between work and responsibility to others?

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<sup>19</sup> For more about the commons and intersections and contradictions with capitalism, see Lewis Hyde’s *Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* and Laurence Lessig’s *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*.

<sup>20</sup> For more about what Cornel West calls “cultural workers,” see his piece “The New Politics of Difference” in which he discusses shifting roles for artists, critics, and committed practitioners and basic political, social, and existential challenges these new cultural workers face in their pursuit of progress and justice in a world that is increasingly fragmented.

To begin dialoguing together, we look to what others are saying about these questions and we begin to develop shared language and questions as we respond to the readings and to each other. In our initial conversations, we're in the realm of *phronesis*, where we are listening for and interrogating values and power underlying the work of individuals and of systems. In an FYC class, we jig-sawed excerpts from three different texts to frame a *problem space* for us to explore:

- Introduction to Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soul Craft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* – The introduction narrates Crawford's move from an academic think-tank to a motorcycle mechanic. Crawford begins making the case for seeing manual labor as more engaging intellectually than the “ghostly” kinds of cubicle work that school often prepares young people for.
- Introduction to Lewis Hyde's *The Gift* – In the introduction, Hyde explains the difference between a gift economy and a market economy and focuses particularly on the ways the gifts of our creative work are co-opted and tainted when they become products for sale. Hyde raises questions about the value of creativity – not only market value but more importantly social, relational, spiritual value.
- Introduction, fast capitalism excerpt, and Motorola example in Gee, Hull, and Lankshear's *The New Work Order* – The introduction explains shifts from old capitalism to new capitalism; the fast capitalism excerpt characterizes the primary changes in managing and motivating workers; and the Motorola example makes visible how these Discourse changes play out in one factory in California.

Each of these readings lets us talk in related but distinct ways about interest, values, power, and exploitation. These readings chart some terrain that centers our conversations and concerns in palpable ways around *phronesis*.

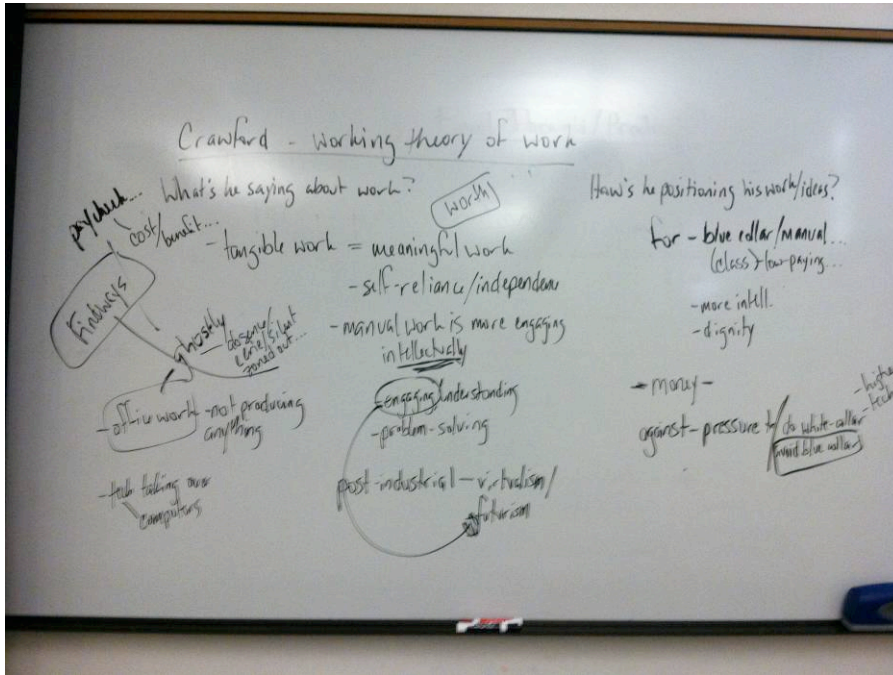


Image 6. Discussion of Crawford



In the ways we divvy up the readings and discuss them in class, we rely on distributed cognition, dialogic thinking, and cognitive dissonance.

At the end of these discussions, students are asking, “So what do we do?” It is this question that puts us in that space of contemplating social action and inventing possibilities. We begin to explore, with a real sense of purpose: Given these tensions (and would we and others name these tensions and in the same way as the authors?), how do we and others respond, and for what purpose, for what good or harm? And so, we consider the following questions:

- What makes for meaningful work?
- What hinders meaningful work?
- And who is doing meaningful work?

In our move toward *phronesis*, I am trying to get us to move into the realm of building situated working theories<sup>21</sup>, and so I introduce some short clips of documentaries to move us into dialogue about what people are up against and what people are up to as they attempt to speak with, speak for, speak against others. I will say more about *phronesis* and situated knowledge later in the chapter, but here, I want to note that short film clips that show people in action as well as Facebook or other social media transcripts that freeze-frame people’s interactions offer the “type of concrete, context-dependent knowledge that research on learning shows to be necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts” (Flyvbjerg, “Case Study” 303). Further, in working with young people to become experts at

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<sup>21</sup> For more about situated working theories, see Linda Flower’s “Teachers as Theory Builders” and *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*.

considering and taking wise rhetorical action, these kinds of “case studies” are invaluable because, “in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist *only* context-dependent knowledge” (emphasis added, Flyvbjerg 303). The closeness of the case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details are important for the development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behavior cannot be meaningfully understood as simply a series of rule-governed acts. In introducing different situated accounts, I take on a role of *provocateur*, a teacher “who probes, prods, asks incessant *why* questions, poses problems, throws curves, plays ‘devil’s advocate’, and stimulates frustration and conflict all in an attempt to ‘bust bubbles and plant seeds’ so that tidy and stereotypical explanations are unmasked and discarded” (Sandy “Effective”).

In our discussions, as students venture tentative working theories and find themselves resistant to the work that some people are up to (students typically resist the ethics of the white “Condo Vulture” and the methods and effectiveness of the African American woman interacting with a white carpenter boarding up a foreclosed home.) In these conversations, we begin to make visible our individual working theories of “cultural work” as we consider motivation, self-interest, degree of impact, methods of speaking up or for or with or against, and so on. It is as students engage with the clips, the readings, each other, and me that they work to discover what they have to say and work to offer and test even tentative ideas in compelling ways. And I am working to draw out and name distinctions among our developing theories as we verbalize what matters to us about a particular interaction we’ve viewed. Now, we begin to see our writing with and for each other as inquiry, collaboration, and argument related to shared questions and concerns.

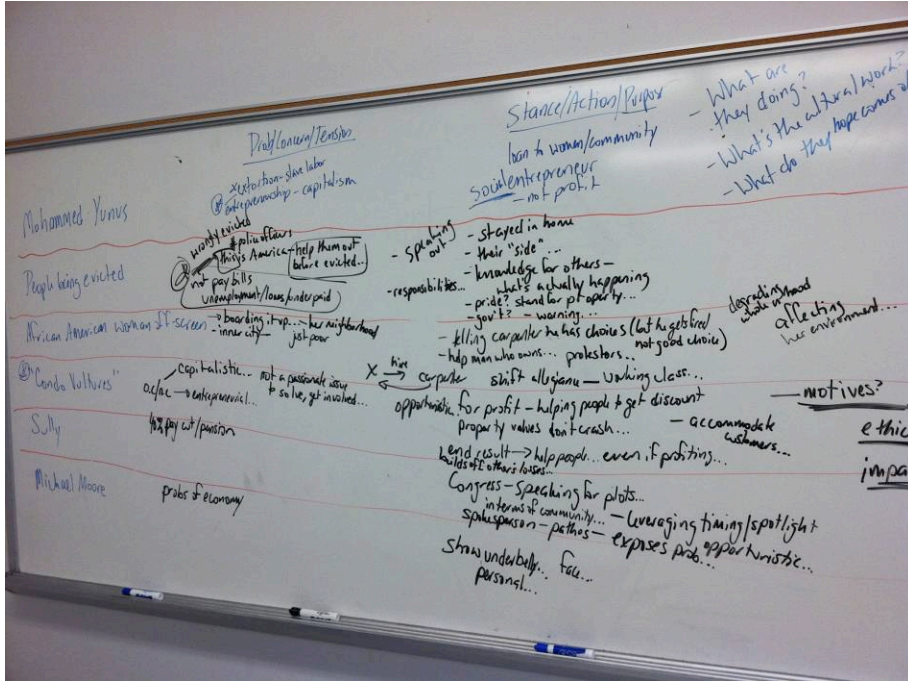


Image 9. Range of Cultural Workers in *Capitalism: A Love Story*

## 2. Teaching a Strong Rival Hypothesis Stance

By playing the *provocateur* and by introducing a range of individual and collection stances and actions from *Capitalism: A Love Story*, I am enacting a version of a *strong rival hypothesis stance* (Flower, Long and Higgins) and inviting students into that stance as well. Once we've juxtaposed several different kinds of actions and considered how we might value them, we next look more closely at one scenario so that we can consider multiple interpretations and ways of understanding and valuing one person's actions.

## Examples from ENG 101: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons

In First-Year Composition, we read Lisa Dodson’s interview with “Bea” in *The Moral Underground: How Everyday Americans Subvert an Unfair Economy*, in which Bea, a middle class manager of working class employees at a Big Box retail store, recounts a time she “mixed up” an order of prom dresses to provide one for an employee who couldn’t afford one for her daughter. In class, we work in groups to consider different “readings” of the situation: How might Gee, Hull, and Lankshear see this scenario? What about Dodson? And the people involved – Bea; Bea’s boss; Nancy, the employee who received the dress? We’re working to name as many strong rivals as possible *and* to get specific about other people’s accounts. Next, I ask students to jot down their own readings and be able to give us a quick version. We hear from each student in the class, without responding to each other, and I write on the board using their own words as much as possible and getting them to help me position their interpretations in relation to the others we’ve discussed so far. (In the photo below, the blue ink marks students’ individual interpretations while the black ink shows group conversations we had earlier in class.) In this way, we’re making visible our own divergent pet theories. Then, we turn to taking strong rivals into account.



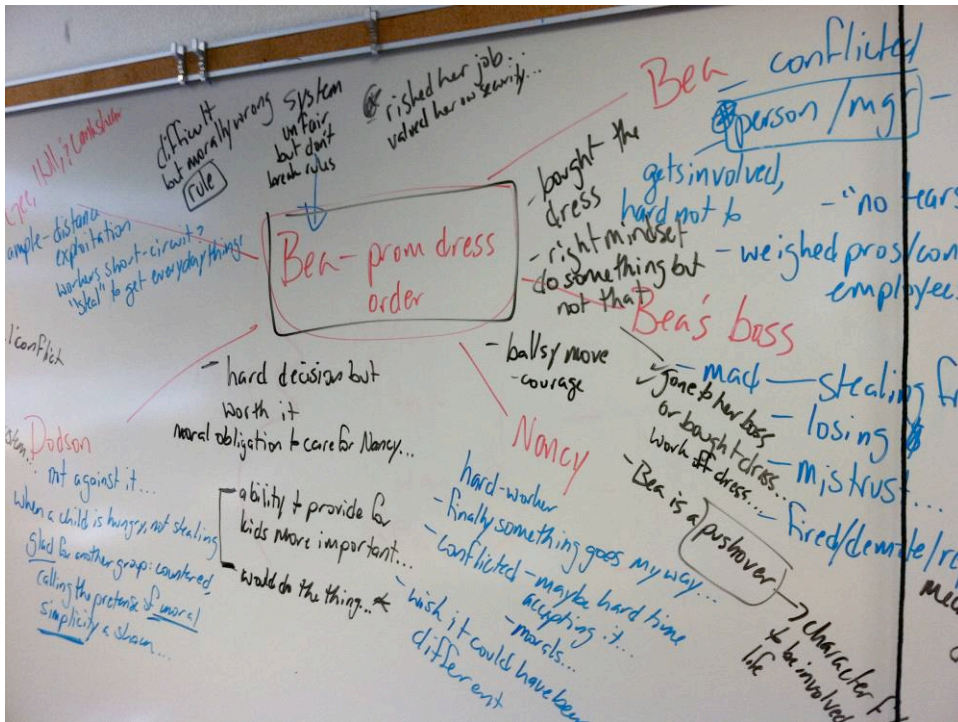


Image 10. Discussion of Bea in *Moral Underground*

In considering strong rivals, we often play a kind of intellectual “game”: *If you were to take Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (or Dodson, Bea, Bea’s boss, or Nancy) into account, how might your perspective shift?* Now, with these more complex and rich understandings in mind, what is my revised working theory?

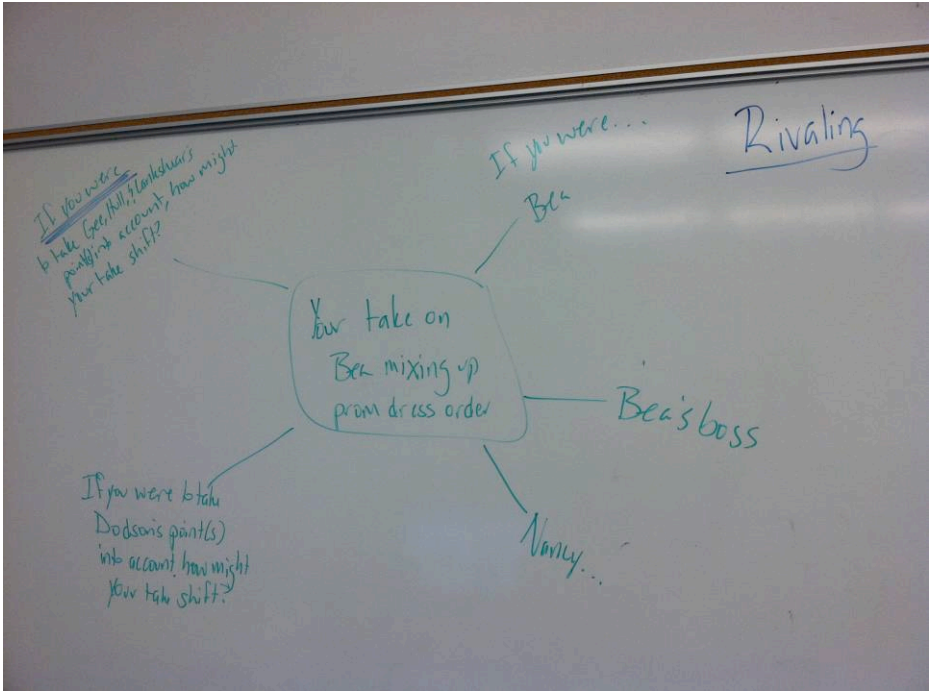


Image 11. Rivaling

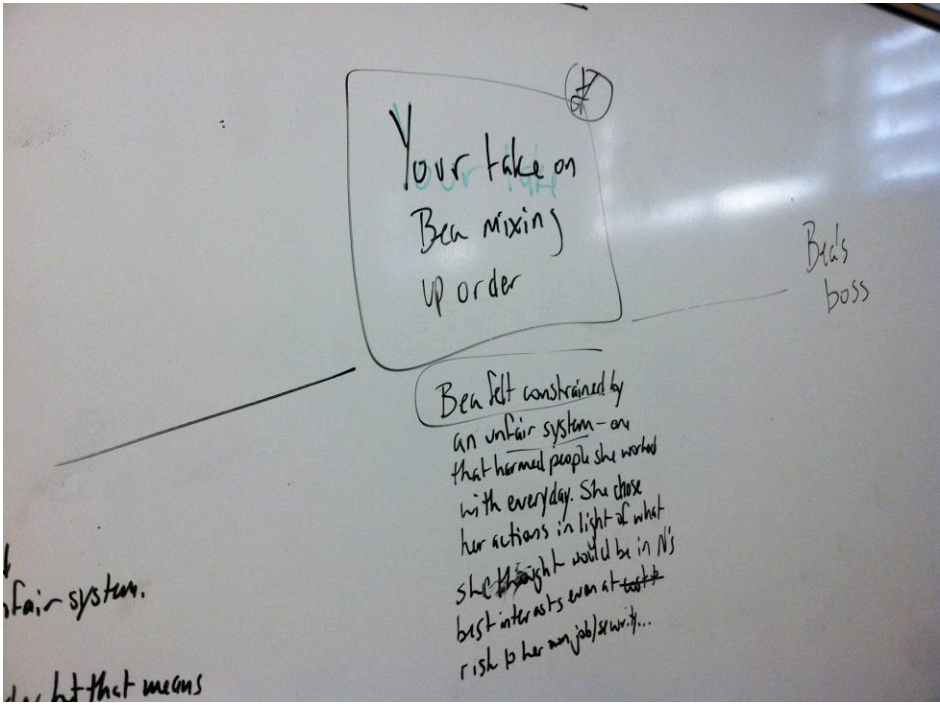


Image 12. Students' Starting Points and Pet Theories

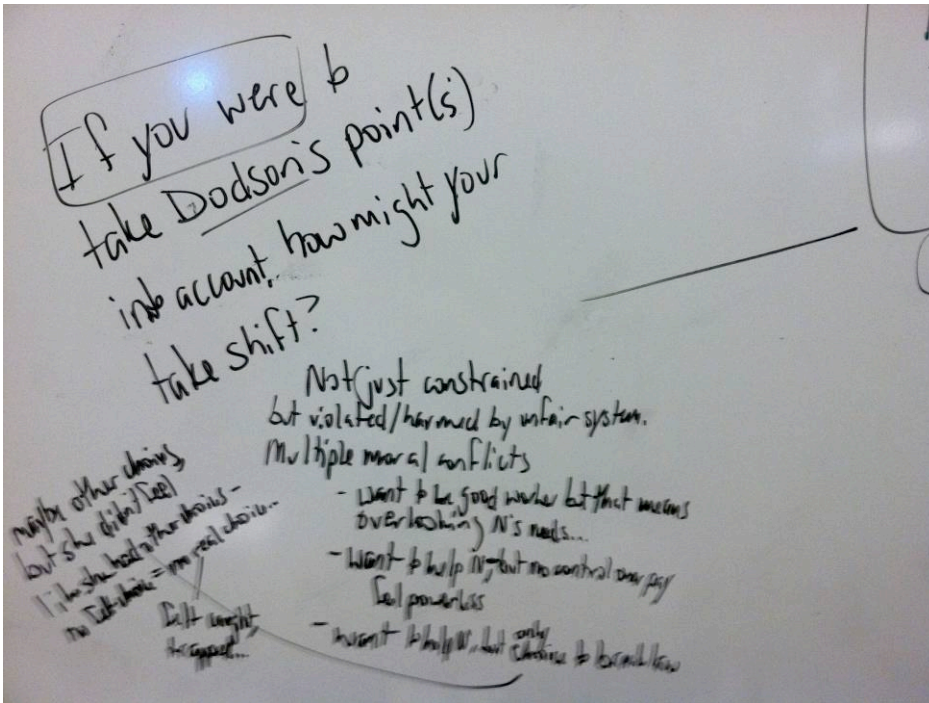


Image 13. Revised Thinking

### 3. Accessing & Valuing Situated Knowledge

Early on and throughout the class, we continue to talk about accessing and valuing people’s local knowledge and expertise, including their personal experiences that may be markedly different from our own.<sup>22</sup> We attend to situated knowledge and value personal experience narratives as an integral and much needed part of *phronesis* for several reasons:

*To support democratic participation.* Democracy is built on the principle that “a broad spectrum of citizens can deliberate about shared problems and possibilities” (Higgins and Brush 695). However, as activist rhetoricians Lorraine Higgins and Lisa Brush note that at least two dynamics thwart full democratic participation. The first

<sup>22</sup> Importantly, commonality is neither a point of departure for deliberation nor what makes our stories valuable. Rather, we rely on Iris Marion Young’s understanding of the value and work of narratives.

is that the *polis* is disappearing. With expert discourses circulating in fragmented and hierarchical sound bites and eclipsing the discourses of everyday people, there are fewer opportunities for conversations beyond the margins of our own families or neighbors, and these conversations or the people having them aren't often "perceived as capable or expert enough to contribute anything valuable to public debate" (Higgins and Brush 695). Listening to, reading about, writing about, and talking about personal experience narratives of a wide range of people and valuing them as a needed and important part of public conversations lets us re-cast the classroom as a *polis*.

*To interrogate value and power.* The second dynamic Higgins and Brush say is thwarting full democratic participation is that subordinated groups are not only excluded from public discourse but also dismissed as people not worth hearing. And so they are left with a seemingly impossible task: construct a *counterhegemonic public* (Fraser, *Unruly* 167) and "connect enough with the rhetoric of others to be intelligible and persuasive, yet [...] rebut rather than reproduce commonsense understandings" (Higgins and Brush 695). In public debates where subordinated groups are vilified, dismissed, or otherwise not taken into account, those who are marginalized "must constitute themselves as characters in political drama capable of bridging chasms of expertise and privilege that separate them from the sites of deliberation and power" (Higgins and Brush 697). Moreover, because dominant discourses attack character, or *ethos*, as a way of dismissing already marginalized perspectives and justifying punitive policies, personal experience narratives enable subordinated rhetors to re-construct their *ethos* as well as the contexts in which they act. As *phronesis* is concerned with deliberation about and interrogation of values and

interests, personal experience narratives, thus, provide concrete cases that foster more full deliberation about the issue at hand, interrogate dominant discursive practices that “govern how listeners or readers receive ideas and claims” (Higgins and Brush 697), and offer alternative interpretations for understanding people’s situated actions, which are always context-dependent.

*To support moral deliberation.* Writing about the ethics of life writing, Paul Lauritzen suggests that there is an ethical imperative for us to include situated knowledge in our deliberation:

All serious moral reflection must involve a dialectical movement between general principles and concrete cases and that proper moral deliberation involves attending both to rules and to the affective responses of particular moral agents facing particular decisions. (19)

Situated knowledge serves as rich, experientially-based resources for interpreting and problematizing familiar abstractions and stock solutions to problems that have not yet been fully understood. Everyday people often have something to say about institutional discourse that isn’t usually part of the collective social knowledge; moreover, they know something about the gaps between the professed intent of specific public policies on the one hand, and how they play out in lived experience on the other. Concrete cases and personal experience narratives offer first-hand accounts of the ways individuals have directly experienced how a given institution, its policies, and its practices play out in day-to-day life (Lauritzen 19).

It seems clear, then, that “[...] if we are going to deliberate with the fullest range of facts available, experiential narratives may prove to be indispensable” (Lauritzen 24). However, the reason for situated knowledge isn’t merely to glean

information to make our organizations run more smoothly. Far more significantly, eliciting and circulating people's situated knowledge of how institutions impact their lives are matters of social justice (Branch; Cushman; Long; Sauer). As Cornel West argues, the dignity and efficacy of everyday people often hinge on their ability “to attenuate the institutional constraints on their life-chances for surviving and thriving” (4).

*To develop cognitive flexibility.* Sociologists contend that cognitive flexibility yields “a habit of mind that permits one to assess the needs, motives, and actions of a great variety of different people simultaneously” (Granovetter 205). It is this kind of cognitive flexibility that is needed in order for individuals to take on “complex role sets” and thrive in large organizations. Conversely, it is a lack of cognitive flexibility that limits our ways of relating since cognitive flexibility is developed, in part, through “connect[ing] with others who are significantly different from one another” (Granovetter 204).

The more homogenous and monolithic – the more normative – we perceive our world to be – whether we’re thinking about language, culture, religion, or ethnicity – the more implicit and, thus hidden or even invisible, our ways of thinking, speaking, and perceiving are. This is not a phenomenon that is necessarily characteristic of one particular segment of society, however. According to Mark Granovetter, “[i]n American society [...] upper-class individuals as well as lower-class people may suffer a lack of cognitive flexibility” (205). Likewise, David Halberstam has suggested that our social structure itself and the ways it often segments people creates inflexibility in the form of arrogance and a sense of infallibility. Hence, cognitive inflexibility can create ethical and relational inflexibility. Linguist H. Samy

Alim notes one way cognitive inflexibility has been connected to ethical and relational inflexibility: “After decades of linguistic evidence and research trying to convince the larger public that the language variety of African-Americans (known by linguists as “African-American Language” or “African-American Vernacular English,” AAVE) is systematic and rule-governed, the only people we have managed to convince is the DEA” (“Why the DEA”). Cognitive inflexibility, then, can serve to reinforce systemic bigotry of any stripe and maintain negative (false) stereotypes that are tied to identity markers.

Cognitive flexibility is also related to developing a sense of self as a unique individual and also as a person-in-systems. Our cognitive flexibility an impact not only our “somewhat-consciousness” but also our sense of “double-consciousness” (Du Bois). Michelle Grijalve, Mollie Blackburn, June Jordan and others have noted the sense of illegitimate shame that some individuals of non-dominant groups feel about their linguistic, cultural, ethnic, sexual, or gendered identities – a sense of shame that is developed through relating with others who are cognitively, ethically, and relationally inflexible. We cannot “protect diverse students from cultural domination, absorption, and social marginalization” (Leonardo 23) if we do not work toward developing cognitive and linguistic flexibility among *all* of our students.

*To develop rhetorical repertoires.* We will not understand how a rhetoric of performance actually works if we neglect the critical process that translates it into action. That is, “the great challenge that faces a rhetoric of performance is moving from ‘describing what is possible’ to building actionable plans, . . . to translating a good *in-principle* theory to a *working* theory” (Flower 90). As Flower notes, “the challenging process of constructing and revising a working theory is at the heart of

*doing* (rather than just describing) the rhetoric of performance” (91). How, then, can young people become expert in the rhetoric of performance that prizes *phronesis* – wise rhetorical action that interrogates values and power – and *poesis* – invention and intervention bent toward an alternative end-in-view? One way is through the use of situated accounts and localized case studies. Analytical rationality is severely limited in its ability to bring about the best results for the *exercise* of a performance, whether we’re talking about the performance of teaching, researching, or rhetoric. Rule-based knowledge and systematic theories can be valuable, but prioritizing them in secondary English instruction flips the real aim of learning language on its head. The highest levels of language and literacy learning are reached “only via a person’s own experiences as practitioner of the relevant skills” (Flyvbjerg 303). In the realm of human affairs – that is, in the domain of rhetoric – we have nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge” (303). Accounts of situated knowledge, or case studies, can offer a kind of “virtual reality” in which to plan and test “virtual action.” As Flyvbjerg acknowledges, “Students can safely be let loose in this kind of reality, which provides a useful training ground with insights into real-life practices that academic teaching often does not provide” (312). Significantly, this kind of context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity (Flyvbjerg 303), and developing expertise takes time and lots and lots of experience. As Flyvbjerg explains:

True expertise is based on intimate experience with thousands of individual cases and on the ability to discriminate between situations with all their nuances of difference, without distilling them into formulas or standard cases. Experts do not use rules but operate on



the basis of detailed case experience. This is *real* expertise. The rules for expert systems are formulated only because the systems require it; rules are characteristic of expert *systems*, but not of real human *experts*. (312).

#### 4. Constructing and Testing Working Theories

For young people to learn “to discriminate between situations with all their nuances of difference” (Flyvbjerg 312) and to determine and take wise rhetorical action in those situations, they must engage in the productive knowledge-making that comes from experience, from constructing working theories of particular rhetorical situations and putting those to the test.

Like any of us making judgments and taking action in a given moment, young people’s working theories are firmly grounded in their experiences—specific scenarios that come to mind, vignettes of talks with peers or family, images of earlier action, evidence of past consequences (good or bad), strategies for dealing with uncertainty, assumptions about themselves or others, and interpretations of all these things (Flower 15). It is these logics, often unarticulated, that we need to engage with students. Without denying the enormous shaping force that material conditions, ideology and discourse have, teaching that fails to seek out the logics of their performances – as they see it – robs people even more of their sometimes-fragile opening for agency (Flower 96).

Initially, the logics that undergird young people’s understandings of themselves and others may well be hidden or unexamined and may constitute more lore or conditioning than a well-reasoned working theory. Careful investigation of situated accounts—and the detailed nuances of those accounts—can make visible

our and others' hidden logics, allowing us to test and rethink our working theories. In particular, accessing and engaging moments of conflict, contradiction, and contestation can reveal something about the voices or forces working to shape those interactions. Out of this engagement comes the opportunity to construct a negotiated meaning – to acknowledge rather than avoid difference, to embrace its contradictions, and to construct a meaning that is provisional but responsive – a current best effort at negotiated understanding (Flower 98).

Flower notes the importance of engaging students in constructing and examining our interpretations in order to consider and construct alternative practices. In her work with student writers, she found that the knowledge that made the biggest difference in performance was metaknowledge – the awareness that the tasks they do are according to the ones they represent to themselves. I contend that this is also the case in other places of rhetorical action and that our interpretations also govern the ways they relate. It is this metaknowledge that informs *phronesis*, which interrogates values and power, and *poesis*, which determines and tests action in relation to a goal. By articulating these hidden logics and interpretations, young people have the opportunity to recognize their situated working theories and construct alternative ones.

The work of *phronesis* – interrogating multiple accounts with conflicting values and versions of power in a situated moment – lets us see that the things others do that we find unexpected or inappropriate are guided by reasons we never glimpse, by an internal, informal rationale. Flower explains, “As [rhetors] enter a rhetorical situation [...] they entertain a host of ‘voices’ both metaphorical and

material that offer... language, ideas, and meaning. [Rhetors] may feel surrounded by the insistent voices of *multiple* discourses and their conventions” (98).

Making the dialogic nature of our interpretations and logics – and by extension, our interactions – a place for inquiry and invention foregrounds young people’s agency as rhetors. In engaging fine-grained case studies, they may come to experience – and thus realize they can choose among – the many ‘voices’ that inform their rhetorical options. In recognizing their situated theories as new constructions, these theories are revealed to be tentative and testable -- “a scenario of possibility that in being articulated, even privately, can be tested against what comes next” (Flower 15)

### **Examples from ENG 101: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons**

Not all classroom work – even activities that engage students around controversial public issues (Hess) – opens up space for constructing and testing working theories, for interrogating values and power, and for constructing alternative theories and practices. Take the example of debate (Fecho 17). As Bob Fecho reminds us, debate, which “encourages students to read, to research, to analyze, and to present it all in a public forum” is still “mostly about destruction. Debaters listen to the other team, not necessarily to learn from them, but, instead, to dispute, refute, and ultimately defeat their argument” (17). The problem, then, is that debates as they are typically enacted construct dialogue as a win-loss scenario, where there is no place for multiple perspectives; inevitably some perspectives – and the people with those perspectives -- are forced out of conversation. The unproductive irony is that “vanquishing the opponent also vanquishes the dialogue” (Fecho 17).

Linda Flower notes a similar contradiction in community outreach and service learning:

But a fundamental conflict remains unresolved when students (fired up with certainty for social change) confront the suddenly realized limitations of their own understanding. They find their academic agendas for service and action failing to connect to the alternative expertise of the community and to its own resilient cultural agendas. *They came prepared to act; they really needed to inquire.* (154, emphasis added).

What is needed is a framework for constructing spaces (Coogan) for listening (Ratcliffe; Clifton, Long, Roen), inquiry (Fecho; Flower), and intercultural collaboration (Flower).

The previous three sections – Framing a Problem Space, Accessing Situated Knowledge, Teaching a Strong Rival Hypothesis Stance – describe the ways I worked to create a space for students to construct, articulate, test what we might mean by “cultural workers”. Additionally, the writing assignments we engaged in over the course of the semester were also designed to allow students to make visible, interrogate, and negotiate alternative working theories of what everyday people might be up against and what they might up to in spaces of struggle.

In this composition course, three writing projects aimed at engaging students in the work of *phronesis*:

1. Profile of a Cultural Worker
2. Analysis of Cultural Work
3. Multi-voiced Inquiry

Perhaps the most important part of these assignments is that they ask “rhetors to name what exists, what does not exist, the site or extent of what exists, and what might exist in the future” (Coogan 164). These assignments provoke not merely description or critique but also *phronesis* -- an interrogation of values and power -- and *poesis* – a consideration of what our rhetorical choices *do* in the world, or more rhetorically precise, what kind of world our rhetorical choices *make* and how we might make alternative choices that create alternative worlds.

In ENG 101: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons, students engaged the three writing projects as places to construct and test working theories about cultural work. Here are some excerpts that demonstrate the kinds of productive knowledge-making they were doing that semester:

**Profiles:**

- Adrianna profiled a high school junior, Luis, who “had been living in the United States his entire life illegally.” Adrianna described his work organizing a march and texting high school students to walk out of class and join “la leche.” Luis carried “a sign that read ‘Ask me for my green card’ while leading a crowd of high school students down Central Ave as they made their way to the state capitol.” Adrianna, who remained at school and did not attend the march, closed her profile of Luis this way:

That night the news flashed clips of the protest in downtown Phoenix. Faces of young Latinos filled the screen. Some were in tears, while others yelled and chanted in Spanish. Shouts of anger came from those that were pro SB1070, directed at the teens holding their heads high as they approached the capitol. As I was about to change the channel, a familiar face came on the screen. “The issue with this bill is that it is targeting Mexicans, and making us the hated race in this state. We must remember that although we may be the majority of

immigrants in this state, we are not the only”. Luis has always gone out of his way to prove a point, and has always had an impact on our school. That day he made his point very clear: No matter what he had to do, he along with the rest of those opposed [to] the bill would not stand down.

- Writing about his father, Michael describes Graham’s work as “the project manager of a pilot project for reverse osmosis treatment of impure water”:

This pilot project treatment plant can desalinate water. Desalination is where the salt is taken out of salt water so that the water is drinkable or potable. The treatment plant is his own design and he has the specific osmosis membrane patented.

It may seem to most that safe drinking water is highly accessible in the United States. Although it is highly accessible, clean drinking water is becoming more and more scarce. The earth is seventy percent water, so the lack of drinking water may come as a surprise for many, but of the water on earth, ninety-nine percent remains undrinkable...

Graham, and his company are out to make sure that the ‘350 gallons that every household uses daily,’ does not cause the United States to have water scarcity issues. They intend to fulfill their goal by using the process of desalination. ‘There is a steady increase in demand for water and a slow decrease of the nations water basins,’ Graham says while explaining that the increased efficiency of water using appliances will not alone solve water scarcity.

#### **Analysis:**

- In Jordanna’s analysis of an interaction where she and other high school musicians attended a meeting in which a district was considering cutting the budget for the arts, Jordy comes to this tentative conclusion:

We put it out there. In the end that’s all you have control over. Voicing your own opinion. Also, it is our job as the recipient to be willing enough to [reason] and hear the opposing opinion with an open mind. The tension and the struggle [are] beautiful but at the same time it can be crippling

and generative. We need not stick to the universal principle of [what we have in common] because it is the variety in opinion that creates tension and possibly change.

- Khushboo considered the values underlying a blood drive a Hindu

relative had organized on Christmas Day:

The meaning of this event is drawn into the spotlight furthermore by the actions taken prior to it. The planning of the schedule makes the participants really put in a lot of time and effort into this blood drive. Instead of simply showing up for the day and offering blood, the 30-40 day schedule, which is the length of time it takes for blood to recycle in the body, helps give the purest blood to the person in need of it. The blood drive being held on Christmas Day also enhances the religious meaning of the event. Hindus were celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ and the idea of offering (gifting) blood to people and God. Doing this meaningful work for unknown recipients has another message. Giving back with selfless work is knowing that nothing is going to be given back in return. Blood is your own creation, it is part of the body and with a blood drive it is given to a stranger. Following the schedule and preparing for it comes through to be even more meaningful because the conscious of taking time and staying on the schedule makes it a bigger deal that you did what was supposed to be done to give pure blood for a stranger you may never see. The participants were showing their care for human kind and potentially will save a life by caring and giving back.

### **Multi-voiced Inquiries:**

- Gennifer was confounded by the “high significance” and “low status” of teachers’ work. She asked: “If teachers play such a precious and priceless role in society, why are they regarded with such a relatively low standing from their own community?” She conducted her inquiry by drawing on several conflicting viewpoints from a variety of sources, including:

- Frustrated parent's point of view: Why teachers have a bad reputation: Because of the quality of today's teacher..
- General Public's POV: Why teachers have a bad reputation: Because this overall occupation is underestimated and believed to be easy.
- Activists against teachers unions POV : Why teachers have a bad reputation: Because of Teachers Unions..
- A misunderstood and unappreciated Teacher's POV: Why teachers have a bad reputation: Because America's society (parents, children, media) chooses to blame the teacher instead of looking at themselves.

She concludes her piece acknowledging that it is important to consider ways of improving education while expressing grave concern over the long-term effects of the waning status of the teaching profession:

Throughout my exploration on this topic, there is one feature that I have noticed. It is that teachers make an influence on humanity, but humanity influences teachers as well... If teachers continue to be looked down upon, not only will the reputation of teachers degrade, but the actual quality of teachers as well. This is an incredibly scary thought because aren't teachers the architectures of a nation's future?

- Chrissy was perplexed by the stories Jorge, a man who had recently been deported to Guatamala for a third time, told her. She used her multi-voiced inquiry to puzzle through some of the questions she had:

Jorge's story got me thinking: Why can people from some countries move with such relative ease from one country to another while other people risk their lives to leave "home"- at risk of death, imprisonment, and putting their families in danger? Why is this very question so loaded? That is, so complicated to ask, to answer, to wrap my head around?

Chrissy drew on the following perspectives in her inquiry:

- Perspective 1: Gee, Hull, and Lankshear's *New Work Order*



- Perspective 2: Dodson's *The Moral Underground*
- Perspective 3: Research about the conditions of citizenship laws in five countries (U.S., Canada, Guatemala, France, Afghanistan)
- Perspective 4: Interviews with college freshmen in her dormitory about their understanding of U.S. citizenship laws

After expressing frustration over citizenship requirements, like fluency or literacy in a country's dominant language, Chrissy concluded:

Jorge reminds us that some people never really get to experience their human rights because of the ways specific citizenship laws limits their life choices. These citizenship laws seem at least in part grounded in economics and designed to maintain privilege for those who already have a piece of the proverbial pie.

## 5. Scaffolding Theory Building

To scaffold our building of working theories, I work to foster a classroom in which inquiry is collaborative, knowledge is distributed, local knowledge is valuable, and articulating and testing our working theories is necessary and important. In constructing this kind of classroom, I incorporate at least three practices that specifically aim to scaffold our theory building.

### 1. **Inventing and adapting technai for accessing others' working theories.**

In our attention to readings, to documentary clips, social media transcripts, interviews, and so on, we are also trying to value and articulate others' working theories. I typically offer students some technai for getting started.

- For readings:
  - **Quotes** - 4-5 quotes that best represent the author's ideas
  - **Diverse voices – (be specific)**
    - Who is he speaking to and what is he saying?

- Who is he speaking against and what is he saying?
  - Who is he speaking for and what is he saying?
  - Who is he speaking with and what is he saying?
- **Questions/ Concerns** - What questions/concerns is he raising/asking?
- **Taking Stock** - What is the author trying to account for? What is he trying to protect? What does he say is at stake? What does he name as losses and gains?
- For viewings, we use a similar framework:
  - **Problems/Concerns/Limitations** - What questions, problems, concerns, limitations is the rhetor concerned with?
  - **Stance/Action** - What kind of stance/action is the rhetor taking and what is the rhetor hoping to do through that stance/action...?
  - **Cultural Work** – What aspects of a particular culture or local public does the rhetor see himself speaking to, for, with, or against?

2. **Marking students' invention of techne as they articulate their working**

**theories.** As students engage each other and the different situated accounts we're considering, I listen intently, paying attention to the moves they are making to articulate and distinguish among their working theories. Then, I offer those back to the students as a techne for continuing to access others' hidden logics and for constructing our working theories. Below is an example from ENG 101: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons. The first day of class I asked students to introduce themselves by answering the following the questions and drawing a graphic representation of their ideas: *What kind(s) of work are you interested in doing... and why... what are you hoping that work brings you, brings others?* As individuals introduced themselves, we wrote

down what people said and then, in groups, worked to categorize the ways we were talking about work and draw two tentative conclusions about our ideas of work. As students worked in groups and during our class discussion afterward, I listened for the ways students were theorizing – distinctions they were making, tentative conclusions they were drawing, connections they were making, binaries they were articulating, and so on. The next class I remind students of the moves they were making (and how and why they made those) and offer them back to students as a kind of *techne* for listening for others' working theories and for continuing to articulate their own.

- 3. Providing just-in-time support when students are on the cusp of articulation.** As students work to understand complex issues, they reach the limits of their current understandings, of sound bites circulating, of what counts for common sense. When they are struggling for words and can't quite say what it is they're concerned about and trying to understand, they are doing important and difficult intellectual work. This is where they are doing the rhetorical work of invention. In this space, when their own theories come up short, they need other theories as catalysts for constructing new working theories. In the First-Year Composition class, for example, this meant offering students notes on scholars' thinking about multiple local publics rather than one sedimented public, about trickster characters "de-forming limits into new paths" (Atwill), about constructing alternative discourses, about the ways conflict can be valuable, about competing and harmful versions of "empowerment" circulating in aid to Africa discourse. These additional readings or notes were in response to their interests and questions

and to what I heard them, even tentatively, trying to make sense of.

Importantly, these additional resources give them more voices to take into account and to speak back to, something that, on the cusp of articulation, they find themselves wanting and needing. That is, these other sources don't supplant their current best thinking but spur it toward a new construction, an alternative possibility.

4. **Pushing back against binaries and oversimplified “solutions.”** Drawing on h Cintron's analysis of dominant culture's push back against gangs and other poor inner city cultures, we talk about the binaries that Cintron sees showing up in institutions, organizations, and neighborhood life. Then, in the localized accounts we're exploring, we continue to interrogate what binary perspectives might be at play in a given moment for a particular rhetor. Finally, I challenge students to find other possible approaches to ways of relating.

**Ways you were working with data to create and test working theories:**

- a) **Start with (your own) existing knowledge or working theory**

Ex: Work = a job/career; Categorize empirical data in ways that fit this theory; overlook outliers and alternative ways of categorizing

- b) **Make connections to create a lens that gives us another way to see/think about \_\_\_\_ (in this case, work)**

Ex: We are motivated differently to do different kinds of work (jobs) [inventing a convention to make logical connections visible to an audience/us]

- c) **Make a comparison – (Work) \_\_\_\_ is X; it is also Y**

Ex: Work includes X; it also includes art and painting and dancing because those require effort too. Work includes endeavors that require (sustained?) effort, whether or not we get material/financial gain. Work might bring about other kinds of gain.

- d) **Draw a contrast – (Work) \_\_\_\_ is X; it is *not* Y**

Ex: If I write a book, get it published, and sell copies (make money), then writing is work. If I write the book but don't get paid, it's not work; it's a hobby, and hobbies are not work.

- e) **Show the relationships between or among...**

Ex: What is the relationship among motivation, work, and public and private good?

Ex: What does it mean that Justin framed architecture about aesthetics and livable spaces – what is the relationship he's drawing between work, usefulness/functionality, and beauty? What might this mean about the ways he views work – what it is, what it should be about, what makes it most pleasing/fulfilling (does he think it should be pleasing/fulfilling)? (model articulating a working theory)

What do we do with data that doesn't fit what we thought? Most often, we try to find ways to fit in our existing categories and favorite "pet" theories... but how might we approach the limits of our knowledge in ways that are expansive, ways that might invent new theories, shift old ones, even put our favorite ones to the test?

**Binaries at play (Cintron)**

System	Shadow
Clean/ Neat	Decaying
Precise Ordering	Ambiguity
Coherence	Disorder
Rules	Instability
Control	Emptiness
Mastery	Formlessness
Taming/Domesticating	Wildness
Confined/Framed	Unpredictable

**Alternatives to Binaries:**

**Rather than thinking:** \_\_\_\_\_ OR \_\_\_\_\_

1. Try these:

\_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_

To What Extent

Implications

Causes/Effects

Good/Harm

2. And tease these alternatives out.

**Consider:**

For whom

To what degree

In what situations

3. Explore areas of dissonance/tension.

4. Explore critical incidents.

## 6. Prophetic Pragmatism, *Phronesis*, and *Poesis*

My work with the Sudanese and this pedagogical framework aim to refigure social science research and secondary English education around *phronesis*, recognizing that contemplative social action is always a *stochastic* art. Extending Flyvberg's (303) approach to empowering and re-invigorating social science research, I contend that to construct a secondary English education that matters we need to do at least 3 things:

- 1) We must drop all pretense, however indirect, at a predictive, prescription pedagogy that emulates the methods and assessment models of the natural sciences because their approach simply does not work in the realm of stochastic arts and human affairs.
- 2) We must confront issues that matter to groups in the local, national, and global communities in which we live, and we must do it in ways that move toward *phronesis*; we must focus on issues of context, values, power, and wise rhetorical action.
- 3) We must effectively and dialogically engage with our fellow citizens of various local publics (Long) and carefully attend to their situated accounts and hidden logics. That is, we must focus on specific values and interests in the context of particular power relations and engage questions of alternative futures and alternative paths to those futures. Further, we must do this openly with young people in and out of school, with local publics, for local publics, sometimes to clarify, sometimes to intervene, sometimes to generate new perspectives, sometimes to invent

new tools, and always to serve as part of an ongoing effort to understand the present and to deliberate about the future.

In the framework I have sketched, much of our time is spent asking, *Given a complex understanding of this particular local problem space... and options available to me/us/others... what now?* Engaging questions and concerns that matter to groups in the local, national, and global communities in which we live, leads us to want to do more than critique. As Porter et al. remind us, “Critique needs an action plan” (613).

In ENG 101: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons, this meant that students worked to create tools for deliberation or intervention or offering alternative options or perspectives to address issues that mattered to groups they cared about. They produced texts that bridged in- and out-of-school civil and civic literacies (Robinson) in the following ways:

- Creating briefing books
- Collecting and circulating counter-narratives
- Creating workplace inquiries and policies
- Writing grant proposals
- Constructing “new ethics” in business practices
- Considering alternative options for gendered practices at home, school, and work
- Facilitating family and community conversations

I did not require students to construct these texts; rather, many of the students took it upon themselves to frame their multi-voiced inquiry in a way that would be useful in producing these kinds of texts that incorporate not only *phronesis* (interrogating



values, interests, and power) but also *poesis* (poetic world-making). Further, taking action within local publics puts them squarely in a space of contemplative social action, where they must consider the *stochastic techne*, take action, listen to the “back-talk” of a situation (Flower), and frame and re-frame action:

- What is the work that needs to be done?
- What models are available to call on?
- What keeps the work from being done?
- How might we get the work done anyway?

This rhetorical work of pursuing community health with local publics and confronting barriers to community health is precisely the work we need to scaffold with young people in our classrooms. The catch is we (and they) only learn to do this work by doing it; that’s the nature of phronesis. Expertise is built through our work with thousands of cases. This means that we not only need to frame our pedagogy of public literacies around taking wise rhetorical action but also that we need to frame teacher preparation for secondary English around taking and scaffolding contemplative social action.

### **Examples from Phoenix, Arizona**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Arizona conducted an open survey in 2011 asking, “What are the biggest health barriers/problems our community faces?”

The first six responses (image 14) are: A Particular Law; A Particular Law Enforcement Agency; Immigration; Racism; Discrimination; Deportation. These concerns took precedence over medical health, the economy, vandalism, theft, and unemployment. In Phoenix, then, part of pursuing community health includes



producer documents stories of African Americans in the Washington Park area of Mesa, AZ, during the 1960s.

**Puente Movement** – We are imagining ways of scaffolding Freirian circles with documented and undocumented immigrants in Phoenix around the Prison Industrial Complex and the criminalization of everyday life

In working with local individuals and organizations, I aim 1) to open up collaborative spaces for deliberation about *phronesis* and 2) to construct relationships that allow us to invite pre-service and in-service teachers, TA's, secondary and post-secondary students into the work of collaborative, intercultural *phronesis* and *poesis* about issues confronting our communities. Since we learn to take contemplative social action through intimate knowledge and experience with concrete cases, we must re-orient teacher education for the social sciences to include the messy work of engaging with communities in the work of determining and taking wise rhetorical action in locally situated contexts. And if we are to stay true to our communities (and to *phronesis*), which requires us to acknowledge and enter into highly unpredictable spaces where much is at stake, then we must embrace secondary English as a stochastic art.

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