

Public Pedagogy in Composition Studies: Studies in Writing and Rhetoric, by Ashley J. Holmes. National Council of Teachers of English, 2016. 201 pp.

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The public turn in composition studies set in motion institutional efforts to cultivate sustainable partnerships between university writing programs and neighboring communities. In her landmark 1996 essay, “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” Ellen Cushman urges composition instructors to renegotiate the academy’s position within the local public to “establish networks of reciprocity” (7). Cushman advocated for those in rhetorical studies to take their teaching and scholarship public as a form of ethical citizenship that is responsive to public needs. Ashley J. Holmes’ *Public Pedagogy in Composition Studies* builds on and extends Cushman’s initial call to take our theories and methods to the streets by drawing on rhetorical theories of place and affect to conceptualize the public work of composition. In three institutional case studies, Holmes’ firsthand engagement with faculty, graduate instructors, and WPAs delivers a vibrant portrait of the complex and shifting dynamics always at play between institutional and public stakeholders. Further, the book targets institutional administrators and instructors by offering readers practical next steps that advance student learning in local publics.

Public Pedagogy begins by recognizing the achievements of those in composition studies whose scholarship has made great strides in theorizing the public work of composition pedagogy—Paula Mathieu, Christian Weisser, Eli Goldblatt, Linda Flowers, Shirley K. Rose, Irwin Weiser, Nancy Welch, and Peter Mortensen. It is true that many composition scholars and instructors already practice public pedagogy; however, Holmes argues that the lack of consistent discourse used to describe this pedagogical approach in journals, conference presentations, and books (e.g., service learning, civic engagement, community literacy, social action, etc.) may lead to missed encounters to engage in generative discussions about the many ways writing programs structure public engagement (4). In response to this problem of language, she invokes the interdisciplinary term “public pedagogy” to define the contours of a public pedagogical approach that is not limited to the service imperative (5). She envisions public pedagogy as a rhetorical practice, one capable of rupturing thematic binaries that tether academics to inauthentic learning and binds “real world” contexts with authentic learning (23). In this way, public pedagogy strikes a harmony between learning through public engagement and understanding these public encounters in the space of the classroom. Inspired by

Carol P. Hartzog's *Composition and the Academy*, Holmes' research design crafts a comparative analytical method to investigate writing instruction at Oberlin College, Syracuse University, and the University of Arizona (7). Though the scope of the comparative study is limited to only three institutions, Holmes explains that these case studies allowed her "to delve deeply into a close analysis of how each program was going public and then make comparative claims about how public pedagogies function in different institutional and programmatic contexts" (9). Her research data, drawn from site visits, instructional and institutional documentation, and IRB-approved interviews with administrators, faculty, and graduate instructors, yields rich and vastly important insights about the value and place of public pedagogy in U.S. higher education.

The second chapter analyzes the ways institutions create room for students to embark on meaningful learning experiences by moving beyond the traditional classroom and going public. The chapter draws inspiration from Elenore Long's taxonomy of five pedagogical approaches articulated in *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics*. The five approaches—interpretive, institutional, tactical, inquiry-driven, and performative—serve as a launchpad as she contributes her own pedagogical approach that attends to the role of place in understandings of the public sphere (35). To ground her approach, the chapter cites primary research gathered from instructor interviews to trace how a faculty member and two graduate teaching assistants design writing courses around a public pedagogy at Oberlin College, Syracuse University, and the University of Arizona. Spanning scientific field-based writing, campus service-learning advocacy, and campus spatial analytical writing and research, Holmes provides readers with dynamic examples of public pedagogy *in action*. While some of these examples do not adhere to a strict *service* imperative, she broadens Long's pedagogical categories and advocates for an approach centered around public place, arguing that she wants to "teach composition in ways that prompt students to interact with unfamiliar publics, to write about issues that are meaningful within their local public contexts. . . . [T]o do this work effectively, we must be mindful of location, relocating and re-envisioning our classroom spaces in more public ways" (56-57). Perhaps the greatest takeaway from this chapter is her proposed model and complimentary illustrations that offer composition scholars and instructors a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between location(s) and educational objectives (60-61).

Chapter three targets administrative stakeholders and offers Writing Program Administrators rhetorical strategies to navigate institutional constraints and effectively re-invent writing programs that aim to go public. Her strategies are derived from firsthand interviews with WPAs and are intended to be replicable in a wide variety of institutional contexts. Her comparative

analysis of WPA strategies calls into question misguided assumptions about knowledge-making in academic and public contexts that continue to sustain toxic and unproductive tensions that pit the university against the community (66). The chapter, instead, advocates for ways WPAs may embrace “morphing” as a rhetorical administrative strategy to make adaptation a key component in curricular development that responds to emergent public and institutional demands (72). The concept of morphing implies that writing programs must continuously renegotiate and balance emerging community partner needs with shifting institutional programmatic needs, a point she observes in Steve Parks’ “next step courses” at Syracuse University (84). A willingness to brave the unknown becomes, as Holmes demonstrates, a key administrative tactic for sustaining a writing program that harnesses the productive power of public pedagogies.

The next chapter describes a feminist research method to model how writing programs can revise and construct new narratives that give place to public pedagogy. She emphasizes how past institutional histories continue to hold meaning for present institutional encounters with public pedagogy. This chapter urges writing programs to consider how university mission statements and programmatic goals historically and rhetorically underwrite the present relationship between the university and local publics (97). Further, Holmes argues that “composition specialists should look to their institution’s histories in order to construct narratives that carve a place for public pedagogy within the work of writing programs and courses” (99). To illustrate her proposed argument, she examines mission statements from each of the three universities in her case study and offers a thematic narrative for the historical place of public pedagogy at each institution. Further, she draws on the affordances of feminist historiography to advocate for the value of historical narratives as a catalyst for garnering institutional support for public work in composition programs (100).

The book concludes in chapter five by gesturing to the affective dimension of public pedagogy. Writing programs must pay attention to students’ affective responses to their public engagement encounters, she argues. In her previously published essay, “Transformative Learning” (2015), Holmes explores case study findings similar to those presented in the fifth chapter but focuses her attention on the ways affect has been undertheorized in service-learning pedagogies, thus maintaining binaries that pit cognition against affect. Building from this premise, her fifth chapter aims to theorize the affective dimension of public pedagogies, even beyond service-learning instruction. The chapter highlights some of the unanticipated risks involved when we ask students to take their learning public. She invites instructors to reflect on how they might respond productively to these affective encounters. Perhaps most telling is her

description of a University of Arizona business writing course that involved a surprising conflict between a student and community partner (142-49). Holmes untangles the layered web of emotions felt by student, instructor, and client and prompts readers to reflect on the ways affect structures public pedagogy. The chapter proposes that writing instructors adopt what she calls a feminist reciprocal model of care, which invites instructors to decenter classroom authority and remain transparent with students and partners (150). The strength of this chapter lies in Holmes' honest and careful reflection on the sometimes-risky affective work of public pedagogy, a point that often remains invisible in writing program labor.

One of the great achievements of *Public Pedagogy* is the depth and scope of the book's comparative research project. Each chapter is grounded in rich primary research that illustrates the place of public pedagogy in public and private institutional contexts. Scholars, administrators, and instructors interested in cultivating institutional frameworks that foster sustained public pedagogies will surely find this book an immensely rewarding and intellectually engaging book. The book makes strides in pushing forward new theoretical models to rhetorically respond to the productive force of affect when we situate writing instruction in public.

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Works Cited

- Cushman, Ellen. "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change." *CCC*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1996, pp. 7-28.
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- Long, Elenore. *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics*. Parlor Press, 2008.