

Peck, Wayne C., Flower, Linda, & Higgins, L. (1995). Community Literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, 46(2), 199-222.

This piece is a review of some of the work done at the Community Literacy Center on Pittsburgh's North Side. The CLC is/was a collaborative effort between the organization and Carnegie Mellon University (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 200). The authors define community literacy as "action and reflection—as literate acts that could yoke community action with intercultural education, strategic thinking and problem solving, and with observation-based research and theory building" (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 200).

The authors identify three kinds of literacy that can deal with the differences between groups of people: cultural literacy, which mostly tries to minimize and assimilate differences; the literacy of social and cultural critique, which openly addresses differences in power and deals with it through tactics of resistance and oppositional rhetoric; and community literacy, which supports a genuine, intercultural conversation (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 203-205).

As Brandt's piece (1999) may be seen as pessimistic, this piece might be seen as too optimistic, with everyone in perfect harmony with each other. The people who are taking advantage of the CLC's programs are portrayed without much dimension: the young black males are only described as rappers or potential/future gang members (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 202, 213, 220) and the ideas of literacy seem somehow to take a backseat to the ideas of just being more like the university students who have come to this community center to help.

I will admit to not being critical enough while reading this piece initially: I was too willing to happily believe that this community center was a perfect place where everyone's experiences were valued but where everyone also made the right decisions. While participating in and listening to our class discussion, I was disappointed both in my critical reading skills and the blindness provided my privileged social space, which had both contributed to my not realizing some of the faults in this piece.

[Evans, Charlotte J.](#) (2004). Literacy development in deaf students: Case studies in bilingual teaching and learning. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 149(1), 17-27.

This piece examines the literacy instruction of Deaf students at the Manitoba School for the Deaf and looks at the strategies used by instructors that support a “bilingual/bicultural approach” to their literacy instruction. Evans first presents extensive context for the study by explaining the ways that bilingual/bicultural literacy education operates, both for hearing and Deaf students. After a description of her methods, Evans then presents her findings.

Evans’ findings focus on the inconsistencies she sees between the pedagogies used at the school and understood tenets of bilingual/bicultural instruction, and how those inconsistencies should be addressed. She sees more explicit teaching methods and word based instruction instead of the discourse-based language structures that are characteristic of effective bilingual/bicultural instruction. The instruction was frequently given in meaningless sections and Evans sees this instruction as leading to less engagement on the students’ parts. She also calls for larger, rather than smaller, class sizes, so that students have more chances to engage with peers.

Evans continually claims that the study focuses on the students, but it’s difficult to read the piece in any other way than focusing on the teachers and the pedagogies, rather than the students themselves. Her multiple references to the teaching methods, class sizes, and teaching assignments far outnumber mentions of the students themselves. As only one student in the school is introduced by name or discussed specifically (Evans 19), with no mention of how that student responds to or engages with the pedagogy, it seems that despite Evans’ claims, her understanding is primarily of the role of the teacher, rather than of the student.

As I embark on a teaching career (and potentially also a researcher career), I hope that I never lose sight of the importance of the students’ experiences and viewpoints. Without students we would not have teachers or teacher research. I imagine that it’s easier to focus on what one has control over, which can sometimes feel like just the teacher side of things, but it’s vital to listen to students and their experiences. I would hate to be the students (or the parents of the students) in this piece, who must have known they were being studied, and then to read the article and see themselves hardly represented at all.

Heath, Shirley B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. (excerpted, Chpts. 2 & 6)

In the first of these excerpted chapters, Heath gives her readers detailed descriptions of the ways families in the communities of Roadville and Trackton “get on” in the Carolina Piedmonts in the 1970s. Beginning with Roadville, she presents in a somewhat narrative and naturalistic way a portrait of their lives.

As she introduces us to the families and familial relationships in Roadville we get some ideas of the worldviews of the residents, such as Sue’s intention to provide her children with an education so they can “do better” (Heath 34) and Mrs. Macken’s view of the mill life as “backwards” (34). We learn about the similarities and differences of the “oldtimers”, who fondly look back at their time at the mills and long for the community that life used to create, and the new generation who, like Sue, expect their children’s education will provide them with a life other than the one the mill can provide (Heath 36).

Heath then briefly discusses issues of education from the parents’ and children’s points of view. Parents may appreciate what education can give their children but at times resent its presence as something that will take their children away from the ways of life they know (Heath 42). The children view their education as a requirement that they choose not to engage with more than necessary (Heath 44). But as the children begin to come of age, they gain some of their parents’ viewpoint of education as a way to something better (Heath 45).

This piece clearly was groundbreaking in several ways, as indicated by her references to the orality/literacy debate (Heath 36, 44), but it does have ethical problems. Heath doesn’t at all indicate her own positionality or the possible effects she has on the residents as she observes them. She also takes a few opportunities to editorialize in ways that seem unnecessary, such as telling us that Annie Mae is “huge” and that she chooses not to walk to town on a hot day because “she must drag her 200+ lb body about” (Heath 51). This shows that while this piece was to lead the field down an important road, we still had a long way to go.

If I’ve learned anything about ethnography, or really thus far in my graduate studies, it is the importance of recognizing one’s positionality. We must be aware of the lens through which we must view the world and the effect that lens has on what we see. I would hope that Heath asked her participants to look over her notes and her drafts, and correct any misconceptions or errors they noticed, but I fear that she would have felt that this not only would cross some kind of separation between the researcher and the researched, but that her conclusions were over the heads of those about whom they were drawn. I will strive to not only see myself in my research but share it and its responsibilities with my co-researchers, my students.

