Linda Flower Interview

Josh Mehler: Dr. Flower, welcome to FSU. We are so excited to have you here.

Linda Flower: Thank you. I have been so nicely treated.

JM: Oh, good. We try to be nice.

Christine Maddox: We start off pretty general. We're curious about how you got into writing or literacy studies.

LF: That has a lot to do with the state of rhetoric and literacy studies at the time I finished my degree -- I did a dissertation on Dickens and had a great time. I got a job as a fill-in person for the department head at CMU and so I had a nice year there and I was finishing my dissertation and teaching there and Tim had a new job at the University of Pittsburg. So, we moved to Pittsburg. When that year was up I needed to find a real job and they weren't offering ones in the English department. But, at the business school next door there, decided that since Horton and Harvard had business writing programs, they needed to start one, too. I had almost no knowledge of business writing and from what I could find out in the field it seemed to be genre studies -- which were a great yawn -- and these were Masters students in professional writing who were going to go off and make megabucks after their MBA's -- these were MBA students in a pretty high-powered business school. I started teaching this course that people didn't have to take for credit. They only came if they saw it as really useful. That was a really good challenge. So, I started figuring out, besides these genre things, what I could teach that would really make them think that there was some substance there. So, I started going to the psychology and linguistics lectures. I was finding things in linguistics about how passes effect processing time by a good number of milliseconds. That seemed to be a basis for making some kind of recommendation, but it wasn't quite enough. Then I started listening and finding out about the work in cognitive psychology and problem solving. Dick Hayes had done some work with designers and [Herb Shiner] had done a lot of work with chess players. So, there was an interesting research agenda there about problem solving and thinking. And, that certainly made sense to me. So, it was really a process of partly educating myself and then Dick Hayes and I started talking and so we kind of just started seeing where it would go. We would get together every week and talk about issues in writing and so I started looking at problem solving patterns and finding a way to teach that. I think it was because of the exigence of having to teach people who weren't having to learn what I had taught as a TA at Rutgers, which was how to be a literary critique -- and I think there was a really good challenge. I started writing the problem-solving book as a textbook there because I kept trying to find ways to find really useful things that would teach people how to think their way through some of these problems and so that's what got me into looking at literacy and rhetoric. That, and Richard Young's *Rhetoric, Discovery, and Change* that somebody there at CMU was teaching from. It was an amazing kind of coincidence that opened a really interesting door. So, that's how I got into teaching in rhetoric.

JM: Interesting. So, tagmemics as well?

LF: Yes. I didn't really do much with tagmemics. But, yeah.

JM: It's an interesting sphere of influence.

LF: Yea. What Richard was saying there was that you start with a problem and that was what I was kind of channeling of Richard in our class discussion.

JM: The second question here is: in *Community Literacy* especially, you mentioned Wayne Peck as an influence on your more recent work and we were really interested in this relationship with Peck and also what other scholars in the field have influenced your thinking as well?

LF: Well, the relationship with Wayne was just another piece of wonderful serendipity because I'd been working with the standard subject pool at the college -- the sophomore and so forth. Wayne had done his Harvard MDiv and he was the director of the Community House and the pastor of a Presbyterian church on the north side and he decided to get his PhD in rhetoric. So, that's how I got do know him. We went to a national reading conference in Tucson and we took a dawn walk together. This was this wonderful event in which he convinced me that instead of studying Carnegie Melon students, why not study the young people he was working with on the north side? That seemed like a really good idea because I knew the CMU students were going to do fine. But, these kids might not. So, could I take the very things I was teaching at Carnegie Melon and make them work in a place where it might make an even more valuable difference? Out of that we started piloting things and trying out things. So, he's been a good friend and a continued inspiration. We work together on supporting each other on things that we're doing. But, I think the miracle for me was for to be able to work with him and Joyce Baskins on the north side. This brought together what I could do and the real incredibly wonderful and different strengths the two of them had. It was just a really good synergy. I think that's hard to replicate. I think that was a marvelous opportunity.

JM: I get the sense in the book that you realize that was a rare experience and that you deeply appreciate that create spark.

LM: You know, I've talked to other people, too, that had a lot of things going for it, people like Dave Coogan who build real connections in a community. You'll notice that the project is going to keep morphing. The kind of thing you do, it's not -- Jeff Grabill argues for going institutional and Paula Mathieu argues for doing street literacy -- and this is somewhere in between. This is finding a set of colleagues and readapting your ideas, transferring them, taking what works, and putting it in a new context. It's much more like a kind of sustained inquiry. I think that's certainly a kind of replicable model.

JM: Absolutely. One of the things that I noticed about this book is a comment that really stuck out for me, talking about moving from students in the university environment to the teenage writers. You make the distinction that there is a kind of change in the academic

environment with the students, but then, there is some sort of genuine change in the teenage writers.

LF: I meant generally larger social change.

JM: Yea. I just thought that division was very interesting. One of the questions I had in regards to that section was, is there a possibility for an equivalent general change in the academic environment that echoes what you see in the teenage writers?

LF: Yea. I must have misspoke. I think that if you're looking at places where your work might make a bigger difference for someone, I think it makes a difference for Carnegie Melon students. I think that was a useful approach to our Freshman Writing Program that was kind of organized around that. But, I'm looking at people who have got it going, who have all this support and stuff. I could continue to do my research with improving things for university students. But, it looked to me like given the chance I had to do research, I was a co-director of the National Center for Writing and Literacy with Berkley at that time, and so I had this opportunity to put this research and a set of questions and a situation that hadn't been really studied and partly to just show the potential and the kind of intelligence and what these kids could do, which their schools were not telling them they could do. It seemed to me a place where, if you wanted to make a difference, I had an opportunity to work in a place that was going to make a bigger difference.

JM: I love that. I think that's great. Thank you very much.

Katie Bridgman: Our next question is: how about life experiences? How have they shaped your thinking?

LF: What does that mean?

KB: I don't know. I guess it means, are there any life experiences that stand out -- like your experience with Wayne Peck – maybe other experiences that lead you to working more in the cognitive area? Or, even with your more recent work?

LF: Ok. I'm trying to think about what is significant about this question that would be useful to anybody. I mean, what immediately comes to mind are all of the horseback packing trips with graduate students. Those were wonderful life experiences, talking about ideas and riding in the woods in Colorado. But, I don't think that's what you had in mind.

KB: You went horseback riding with your graduate students?

LF: Well, it became kind of a thing. The people who worked with me eventually started coming because we would go on horseback riding trips every year in northern Pennsylvania. We did one and John Ackerman came on one with us in Colorado as well. That was a really nice way to talk about rhetoric over a campfire, you know, and a few beers … What do you really need out of this? What would be useful?

KB: Well, I don't think you really need to worry about how useful it is. I think this is giving us a broader perspective maybe.

Martha Canter: We're looking for worldview. What has shaped your thinking?

LF: Wayne Peck, clearly. Wayne Peck and Cornell West have been tremendously influential in my thinking. That prophetic pragmatism. And finding a kind of moral core or calling that combines rigorous thinking -- like Tim, I'd been part of a church when I was a kid and then suddenly I got to this age of accountability that says, I can't believe this theology. I'm sorry. -- and then working with Wayne and finding a kind of progressive theology that had that sense of a call behind it. That has been a tremendous force for me of that intellectually challenging side of that and being part of a church that is, Wayne's the pastor and right now we're taking a lot of leadership in the city on LGBT issues as well as working with his project on telling our stories with our kids. That's one of those things that sustains you in saying what matters. That and Dewey and Cornell West, I think, have been really influential in my thinking.

Tim Flower: You also learn from the kids.

LF: Yea. And it was really great seeing those kids in the literacy center -- we call them writers. The decision makers group we call Scholars. For me just being able to cross a real cultural boundary and feel welcomed and being a learner. I'm just so lucky to have had that experience. That affects your sense of what you need to know.

LF: And uh... I think...I'm just so lucky to have had that experience I guess, but that effects your sense of what you need to know, and that other discourses, other ways of talking, and that really goes into the public deliberation work as well, I think. Well, I don't know if I've got good like experiences

[laughter]

JM: somehow we doubt that.

KB: What first drew you to the study of language?

LF: I started in chemistry in high school and college because it was the only hard course in high school and I thought "well this is obviously the thing to study" [laughter], and uh...but I got in this advanced chemistry course and we were learning theories of atoms and stuff and I couldn't see the practical applications and I wanted to add, and then I started taking these literature courses and this was so much fun and it was like this great big secret that I could do this fun stuff and then they call it a major.

[laughter]

And then I was going to go to England but then I got itchy feet and so I went to Boston after my first few years and I just, I needed to see the world and look at the Atlantic ocean; I read

too much Thoreau and Emerson [laughter] and, uh, Tim had driven across the country on his motorcycle--it was destiny--we were destined to meet in the...we were working in a bookstore together--

TF: The Pacific Ocean to the next…

MC: You met at a bookstore in Boston? That's awesome.

LF: Yeah, in Harvard Square. We were both working in this Harvard Square bookstore.

TF: But we didn't hit it off at first, because I was a professional, you know.

LF: He had managed a bookstore at Stanford

TF: I was a manager at a big Stanford bookstore and all that, so [laughter]. And here is Linda, who wanted to *read* books [laughter] for god's sake,

LF: I'd hide up in the...

TF: She'd sneak around, she'd go up in the [unclear]

LF: I wasn't the best of employees. [laughter]

TF: On her last day there on Saturday, I surprised myself and her and asked her out for lunch.

LF: Uh-huh. Well the rest is, the next day he just showed up with the motorcycle and we went out in the woods and that was, that was it. There's a life experience for you.

KB: Yeah, that's a good one. [laughter]

LF: And he was...he was...we supported each other through graduate school--

TF: Yep.

LF: ...like I think many people do. So he did his, and, I was working in publishing and I felt my mind going dead, and that was a life experience, I said, "I've got to get back in school."

TF: That's right.

LF: You know, I think that is why a lot of us are here, just want to be perpetually in school and studying.

MC: Yeah. Absolutely. She's looking at me right now. [laughter]

LF: [laughing] No I'm not!

MC: But you're right; you're absolutely right.

LF: Yeah.

MC: So, next question we have on our list is what classes do you teach, which are your favorites and why? I know you mentioned in Dr. Fleckenstein's class earlier that you teach academic classes still, so--

LF: Oh, yeah. Well, Process of Reading and Writing, that really does the cognitive work where we learn how to collect data on what readers are actually doing and making out of this constructive work of these readers; and, then in the second half, we collect data on ourselves as writers, over a project that expands for the whole period of the second half of the course. So, people are collecting thinking-aloud protocols, planning tapes, and rhetorical reading kind of things. That is the most the most fun because people are really discovering neat things and learning to collect data and see what they get out of them.

MC: So that's the graduate level course?

LF: Um...no. I've got PhDs...I love mixed classes. I've had sophomores in that class, and it's a little rough going for some people, but right now I've got computer scientists, psychologists, linguists, and I've designed it in part for professional writers as well. And that kind of crossover of people with different kind of connections to research and the kind of writing they do is really neat because you see people looking at their own strategies and assumptions that they bring with them.

The other course I teach is the literacy course, and um, that one starts out with reading Walter Ong, and you know, the great divide theorists, the great leap theorists, and Jack Goody, Scrivener and Coles--kind of blowing them out of the water in terms of, you know, literacy is not the only thing. I'll have them read James Gee; we use Ellen Cushman's wonderful anthology; so we really look at those kinds of issues--Shirley Heath--and then we start doing the decision makers project about mid-way through, so it takes about maybe about a third of the class days to that, but it's really kind of taking literacy and looking at people's different kinds of literacy, and doing a final project on what accounts as literate achievement, because the debates about literacy, they're really around what matters that you could do with this, and people just have radically different notions. And so, my students have done different projects on, you know, different kinds of marginalized literacy, including things like reading the racing forms, which turns out to be really complicated. Or, uh...literacy people bring to kind of social work kinds of things, what do you need to know; or how to do crits in design, or how do you enter the literate discussion of being an opera singer. and all the kinds of things, the topoi and the ways that you learn a discourse of doing, thinking, believing, you know the kind of James Gee stuff. Then we work on decision making with the scholars. That's a great deal of fun.

Another course I really like is Environmental Rhetoric. We read a lot of--Jimmie

Killingsworth's book is really good--and so I use that and kind of a history of whole environmental rhetoric. So if you're ever interested in a course like that, that's a great kind of foundation. But we read Aldo Leopold, and John Muir, and Thoreau, and then we get into all the public debates. Right now it's around fracking and coal gas exploration. So we look at Josh Fox's *Gasland*; so we've got a whole spectrum of things. But then people have to write, as a consultant, and look at the various rhetorical strategies people are using to build arguments in this arena and help somebody; usually people hook up with a non-profit. It's not necessarily, it's not like an internship, but they write for, like the Sierra Club or the mayor's office that hadn't figured out how to really teach recycling. So they try to--they're studying a set of rhetorical strategies that they really learn how to both see these and use them. So, they're trying to do something useful.
And I'll talk this afternoon about the leadership [unclear] change course, that's with the think tanks.

JM: Wow. Fantastic.

LF: I know. Oh! and The New Public Sphere! Oh that is so much fun. That's Habermas...

JM: Right. [laughter]

LF: You know, we kind of get through that stuff and then we start looking at local public spheres and deliberation, and people find a local public and actually study what they're doing and looking at questions like "is deliberation really possible?" and, "how do people create these local publics and deliberation?" So that's the kind of public sphere theory.

MC: So you teach two...three--two...?

LF: Two and two. So, it's just kind of, rotate around.

[laughter]

CM: What are you thoughts on evaluating students in your classroom when they produce writing, or they're going out into the community? How do you, I guess see yourself? Because you are an authority figure and at the same time trying to empower them to do this really meaningful work?

LF: So, which kind of students are you talking about? Are you talking about assessing? Because it varies a lot on what they're trying to do. So you're thinking about...well, tell me a little bit more about what you're...

CM: You mean what level student?

KB: Or like the writing they do.

CM: Well, I guess I'm not sure. I was just thinking that at some point you have to evaluate those students' performance in the classroom.

LF: Oh, absolutely.

CM: And I was curious to how you do that; what your thought are.

LF: Yeah. I cause pain. [laughter] Yeah, I mean, I have pretty complicated rubrics for writing, that I really expect people to kind of name problems and do that kind of analysis and then use....um....really um...like in the process course I was asking them to read some theories and then turn them into a tool for research and really show what you could discover by looking at a text with this theory as a way to uncover how it was working. And so I just gave about half the papers back and said, "let's try this again." [laughter] And it could have been--we had interesting discussion of whether it was my assignment, or the task representation problem. Of people not really using it as a tool to go discover something. Because I've got a pretty strong demand that you don't summarize information and you don't repeat theory. You really use it in a way that teaches us all something. So I've got a very, I think, strong sense of rhetorical significance. You know one way that really supports that is having people give short presentations about, ah, "what's going to be the point?" You know, it's like you're giving a professional briefing as a consultant, you give your analysis and your kind of key diagnosis of what the issues are, and then they decide if they want to hire you as a consultant. So, I've put a lot of emphasis on things like considering alternative points of view, building arguments, so all of these courses, they kind of have two strands of people. In fact one of the papers I use a lot is having people in the first half of these course is to write a dialog on like the one folks are working on is what actually, what counts as literacy? Well, that's going to depend on where you are. But to bring three or four of these theorists that we've been reading or researchers, and get them to talk about what counts. And so, the idea is you need to be able to really understand their claims, to apply it, and talk in their voices, even if you can, and then to get them to talk back to each other with things they may not have said.

So, you know, I guess I'm really interested in people using this knowledge and I try to assess that sort of. So, I think I'm pretty demanding on papers having significance and real good analysis.

CM: Thank you. So, our next question asks, "what's on your nightstand?" We're curious as to what kind of books?

(laughter)

LF: yeah, well, right now I've got Bill McKibben's *Eaarth*, actually I've got a--I've also got a pile by my reading chair--Howard Zinn's, uh, uh, the history of uh..what is that?

JM: *The People's History*?

LF: *The People's History,* yeah, right. And I've also got a book on the Adirondack's, because we go to the Adirondack's to kayak every year.

MC: Nice.

LF: And it was a, uh, Arpita Gerstner who was a physician who came and hunted and lived on an old island in the Adirondacks every summer. And it's this wonderful diary, so, ah...and there's always a lot of nature.

MC: Is this going back to your Thoreau?

LF: Yeah, yeah. Well not necessarily literature. I mean, I really like natural history so there's always a kind of pile there.

JM: We all have that pile.

LF: Yeah!

MC: "I'm going to read that someday."

LF & JM: Yeah.

CM: Do you take notes on what you read, or write in the margins, or ...

LF: Oh, absolutely. I can't imagine..

TF: ...you should see some of...

LF: ...having a Kindle. It's just beyond me.

CM: (laugh)

LF: You too?

MC: I agree. Same.

LF: I've got to have a book.

MC: I don't really like library books for that reason.

LF: Yeah, I've got to write in it. I've got to unwind. Yeah, and I've got to have a piece of paper. You know, what's often plagued me a lot when I was trying to, ah...

[Tim, speaking aside; Martha replying to him aside: conversation unclear]

LF in response to Tim's comments: ...yeah, we fight over that. He doesn't write in books, he just turns the pages down, which drives me nuts.

[laughter]

LF: And, ah, it's a sacred object.

MC: You have to write on it instead.

LF: Yeah, you have to write on it, yeah! And uh, you know, and one thing that used to cause me all kinds of trouble, I'd be trying to read things, and working generally on a project, and I couldn't get through the book before I had to go write something.

TF: Yes.

LF: You know and these, these books were often just, ah, you know they just kind of jumpstart your thinking. So I often spend time reading a little bit and you know you sit and think a lot, and you have to have a tablet so you can write things down…

KB: Next up is, what do you think is the most important question that students in Rhetoric and Composition should be asking?

LF: Oh, Katie! I have no idea!

[laughter]

LF: One of the most important question? Uh, what are you going to do with your work? Why do this? Uh, aside from of course, the secret that we want to be in school, and it's a wonderful thing to get to do. I think that's one of the hardest things when you're a graduate student, is to get out of the student-absorber learn mode and to see yourself as a person whose got something to do. And that's clearly a sense of rhetoric and it's production and to see why your work matters, and there are lots of places it could matter that aren't necessarily anything like working with…[unclear]…So, I think that is an essential question. You know, another thing I think is really important is the sense of rhetoric as more than the analysis of text but also the production of text. I don't know, I'm just talking about the things that are really motivating for me. So, what's the most important question? Because I can imagine somebody saying how to move into the 21st century and digital revolution and so forth, but that will take care of itself. I'm not sure that's something we need to worry about. I don't know…what do you think?

KB: Um, what do I think? Well, I think that we do have some questions around who is writing their [unclear] as our means of writing have changed. And we have tools [unclear] also the whole production of [unclear].

MC: Last question on this list, where do you see the field of literacy studies and rhetoric and composition going?

LF: I'll tell you, just to be very honest, I never really enjoyed the people who make a career of looking at their field and talking about where it is and what it should be doing. I kinda want to say, get on with it! You better not put that in…(laughs)…I guess, where the field is

going never interested me a lot. I mean, by your work you shall be known. You know, kinda, do it. And if you want the field to go in a certain way, which I would say I do, what you've got to figure out is how to be persuasive about that. Which I don't think…well, I guess I would like to see it go…looking at connections across different cultural, racial, and socioeconomic differences in a way that values really different perspectives and that can kind of resuscitate this sense of deliberative engagement, and that's on the one side. And on the other side is really supporting the agency of people who have so much insight into the problems that are plaguing us and we're not very good at knowing how to do that collaborative listening, and it seems to me that's something rhetoric could be really good at, is teaching our students how to, I don't want to say be good citizens because that's a whole different paradigm, but how to have the intellectually though empathy that Kristie [Fleckenstein] talks about. And, I guess I would love to see us supporting students in enterprises like that. And it includes how do you use different technologies and media tools to do that, but I think it's also just at the heart of getting people to think seriously about their ability to make a difference in the world and to see that they can.

JM: Alright, well thank you for those. Now, this looks intimidating, but it's really not. So, we all met a week or so ago and talked about this interview and your work and a few of your texts and we had a discussion about the trajectory of your career and we came up with this list of questions because we are genuinely interested in your answers, so I guess we'll just go around the room and I don't remember who came up with what question, so…first of all, how has your conception of the rhetorical situation changed?

LF: What rhetorical situation?

JM: Your definition of the rhetorical situation…

LF: Oh definition.

JM: …changed since your 1981 conception of it with Hayes?

LF: What was the conception of it then?

Josh: Good question…

CM: We talked a little bit about how the rhetorical situation is kind of part of the rhetorical problem that is constructed by students, so there are goals, inner and outer directed goals that go into that. I think at some point you talk about the monitor that we have inside of us. So, we were wondering if you still fully support that model of the rhetorical situation or if there are changes you made in your mind along the way.

LF: Well that model, those little boxes and stuff is a kind of standard cognitive process model that is trying to show interrelationships between cognitive processes so the monitor is one of those. So that was a place to name what really mattered, and you can see what that became was a template for research. And so we started doing work in planning. So I did a bunch of stuff looking at planners and that's where the collaborative planning work came

out of, and we started doing some work on revision, because, what's really going on there? And I think a better name for the monitor stuff…what's really interesting to me is the stuff at the level that can be pushed up to consciousness. And cognitive researchers are not interested in that but I'm interested in that as a rhetorician in the place where people can bring the work they're doing up to, can recognize the conflicts in their own thinking, can bring it up to that negotiated construction where they are trying to figure out what do I want do here? You're aware of this you want to say or that I just don't understand this yet or those people over here are saying that or I want to write a paper…(laughs)…we were talking about this paper that is behind the talk today and how long I've been writing it because it's, it has a lot of scholarly stuff in it and I read it and I think, "Oh, who is going to keep their attention on this?" So rewriting it as a talk, so I've been really doing a lot negotiated construction around this paper and how to incorporate research from these other areas and thinking people are just gonna say, "Ohh…" So, that issue of metacognition is, I think, a really important part for me. But when Dick [Hayles] and I started doing that, it was cognitive modeling and the kind of social issues and writing as a social process really hadn't started then, and so I think you'll see that what has expanded in the work that followed is a focus on not only the rhetorical situation but also social and cultural forces and the way people are trying to deal with those, so unlike a cultural theorist, I'm not looking at those as determining forces and trying to study them. I'm interested in what people do with them and how people represent them to themselves and to what extent…you know, an ideology may exist out there, but to what extent is it actually an active part of trying to compose? Because that's a very different question. So I would say what's really changed is expanding this integrative social cognitive process with a focus on the writer. That's at the center of my vision. For somebody else it's going to be the social situation. For somebody else it's going to be the genre or the text and looking at the intersection of that thing. For me, it's the writer and so you can see that that thread goes through the work in deliberation and problem-solving and decision-making and mentoring. And just expanding the context of just the rhetorical issue that are out there. So, you know, the environment is one of those things…I've always loved natural history and outdoors and stuff and so this was probably back 5-10 years ago, and I realized, "I could teach a course in this and call it Environmental Rhetoric!" And Jimmie Killingsworth has written a really good book to give me a start and, so I think that's a little bit off the topic, so there are these wonderful exigencies and wonderful opportunities and so I guess I look at research into an inquiry into something that is fascinating.

CM: So you still use think-aloud protocols with your students. So you still see that, like you did during this time, as a valid way at getting at a writer's processes and trying to bring some of those ideas to the conscious level?

LF: Actually what I use much more now, I think think-alouds are great research tools, but I use collaborative planning a lot, so it's like a condensed, it's like a planning process on steroids, where you're trying to do it in a focused period of time. You've already done some of your work and you're getting prompted but you're also getting…a way to look back at your own planning. Because I ask people to tape these or GarageBand these…planning sessions so they can look at their own strategies in planning and look at things that are working and how they are using their own planning practice and can make it better by

level of preparation they have or doing it before they're too far along—that sort of thing—or noticing if I'm really talking about my point or just rehearsing my topic knowledge, um, so I teach it in the process class because I want to give people the research tools. But I use collaborative planning on my other classes because I want to give and support that meta-knowledge.

MC: We talk about this one question all the time…in considering the different spaces of community literacy and the space of the academic classroom, how do you see one informing the other? We have this constant conversation here in reading groups, in every class actually…how do we inform…

LF: We need Josh here, to explain, yeah, you're doing to tell us about spaces, right? Is this your question? Did you come up with this?

JM: Ah, It probably is…because that was my earlier question as well, sort of, leading to this one…I'm sure it was.

LF: So when you mean "the spaces of community literacy" what things are you really thinking about?

JM: Well, I think I was probably thinking about…you make a distinction between the "town" and the "gown" in your book, which I like. And so, it seems that in the space of the "gown" there are certain affordances and in the space of the "town" there are different sort of practices, and that sort of thing.

LF: Absolutely.

JM: You are someone who traverses across both sides, and I'm wondering if your experiences in the space of the "gown" influences and talks to the space of the "town" and does it reciprocate?

LF: Well, the first one is really easy because, when I work with community literacy or with the kids come [unclear] Decision Makers or in the nursing homes, you know, where we use think tanks or those kinds of things, I come as a rhetorician. And it's very funny because you see the students who are being the mentors, especially at the Literacy Center, they just wanted to be cool, they wanted to fit in so badly. You know, they wanted to be accepted by the teenagers, and the teenagers kind of had their own—some of them knew each other—and so, it wasn't that easy to get in and earn your cred there. But I position myself very much as an academic with a real strategic…now look what you can get when you learn to do this [unclear] one--now come on try it! And so, in that space, I really bring a kind of academic critical thinking, name it, take control of it, you know, and in the same way, what the community stuff—well, I think it's just changed *me*—but it's the same issue that when I started in the business school, is that it gives you a way to put writing in some kind of context where makes a difference. Because I think that, I mean, I have my students write to clients all the time in graduate courses and they're not in professional writing and they're thinking: "what's this client stuff?" But, for me, I keep trying to tell them: it's a heuristic.

You know, if you're writing not to me—please don't write to me! To somebody who needs to understand this concept, how do you teach them the idea of stasis in a way—that probably wouldn't be the example-- teach them a rhetorical strategy that's going to make their environmental website better and how do you teach them to use representative anecdotes, you know, so you borrow something from Burke, and so embedding the theory and research in a place where somebody's going to use it.

In fact, Wayne [Peck] does this amazing thing, he writes these incredible sermons every week, you know, it's amazing that he does that, but, last week, every time he brings up some issue about something being operational, he'll kind of look at me, you know, because it's kind of a key word…Although the other day, he was using hetereoglossia, and he says "Linda"—this is the middle of the sermon—but he was using this concept in the sermon. That sense of embedding rhetoric in really different communities of practice and the literacy, of course, just makes it so clear. I like Scribner and Cole's sense of "literate practices" and you realize the ones that you have skills in and other people are so talented and what the affordances are of those. So I think that that's a really important part. And also, I think, as a teacher, you keep asking: what's this going to do, what are people going to be able to do when they get out of this class? So it's not a closed circle, exactly, of learning what I feel comfortable teaching, I mean, I still, [unclear] because you can only do what you can do, but still, I think that that's a really important, the effect of those spaces. I don't know, what do you think would be another way to think about that?

JM: Well, I think why it comes up in our class, in our reading group and why we are questioning it is because, as of now, our program doesn't have the opportunity to cross that "town" and "gown" division and we are really interested in—here we are teaching in a classroom environment, can we start to take the techniques that you have in your book and apply them in the classroom environment and achieve that "transformational more" in a classroom environment? Or are we limited by the fact that we are *in* a classroom?

LF: See, I don't think so. Because, some of the projects that I did I did because I had funding, and so I could do these as research projects. But I got to a place where I decided "I'm tired of chasing funding" and I'm going to do what I want to do without it. And so, the think tanks are, you know, I did some of them as more extended projects, but I'm doing them now in this Leadership course—a thing that I will be talking about--so that's an example of—so you'll hear about that—the other one that I brought was the Decision-Makers project and because I would love to see somebody else trying this. It's in the middle of the literacy class, so we're reading Ong—and I think I already mentioned all that stuff—but then, the students that are—and I think that some of them from the urban schools are some of the same ones that were at the Literacy Center, they have learning disabilities—they're diagnosed now—but I think one of the reasons the kids we were working with were so disaffected was because a number of them had difficulty processing information of one kind or another. So this project is a way for me to simply to get some lab space, they come in, and I'm able to get my students to work with mentors on our Scholars Writing about Decisions, to teach decision making strategies and to do an assessment because I've got this database now that's now completely transferable, and so they do pre- and post- kinds of things, writing about decisions and problem, and then I score them for reflective decision

making: the extent to which they have reasons, rivals, do they consider roadblocks? Do they conditionalize anything? Do they have any kind of reflective look at themselves? And so, they get this kind of score of a level, and then this program we have will turn it into pie charts and I can do pre- and post- and so I can take back this fancy assessment, that's got some statistics and graphs and things about growth in decision-making but the rest of the part of the program is really a series of prompts, a nice little multimedia thing, about people talking about decisions and learning how to rival and learning how to look at different options. So it's just embedded in the class. I brought the thing, it's up on the… I've got the multimedia little piece of it that's part of the website, it's loaded on the PowerPoint, after the talk, so if anyone wants to see it, I love to show you. I've got a library I've pulled together and guidebook for how to do it, so my students can work through this process just like there's a guidebook for doing the think-tank stuff. Ok, so that was a long—you know, I'm kind of getting on my high horse about it—but it's finding a way to embed something in your class, so you've got control over it, and you don't necessarily have to go to a community partner—although that's another…you know, finding a community partner and having a program that you do that you keep refining and you test out things and you make it better, as opposed to…because these can be so incredibly labor-intensive and that's why I do guidebooks and stuff because I like to develop a project to keep refining it, so I'm not spending my time doing social negotiations which you still do far [unclear] than you do anyway.

But, the way you can bring these students into your literacy class and do something with them where what's really critical is that they are the experts. They are writing about their own decisions, about their own lives—we don't get it—but we can help them think through how to look at that decision. And, these kids, I mean, they are facing some *real* decisions whether it's abuse, sometimes, or getting into fights, you know, is there any way out of it or problems with having a disability and do you want to reveal it to your peers? And how do you handle that? Of course, then you can't get help if you don't. So there's real substance there that people are working with.

And these are just two examples, I mean, you can think about ways that you have an intellectually substantive course and then how would I apply it, how would I bring something in. Steve Parks is another nice example, I wouldn't do this but, he's interested in writing, he's at [Syracuse University], he's the editor of *Reflections,* that journal on community literacy, and he's interested in working-class writers. And so what he does, he started out having students, Syracuse students, read working class writers but they kind of still dismissed them, even though there were some working-class kids in the class as well. But when he started, there's a collective of working-class—a writing group—when he started having these adults come in to his class and talk with his students about their writing and the students talked about *their* writing, and they were on this level of *equality-as-writers,* they started to suddenly see the kinds of things these writers were talking about. And he found a way to create that synergy.

JM: Fantastic.

MC: And he's at Syracuse?

LF: Mm-hm.

JM: Well, I think we're out of time. Maybe we can continue this conversation some other way.

[laughter]

LF: Yes, I see that you've got a little more to go here…

JM: Yes, we've got lots of questions and thoughts. But, Dr. Flower and Dr. Flower, thank you both for spending some time with us and answering our questions, we've really enjoyed it and had a great time. Thank you once more. Thank you for coming.