

Laboring Literacy: Rhetoric, Language, and Sponsors of Literacy in Workers'  
Education in the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, 1914-1939

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## Prologue

From the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library on the New York University campus, students can get an excellent view of New York City. The 12-story building is constructed in such a way that the ceilings in the north-facing study rooms on every other floor are roughly ten feet tall. These rooms have five large slab window opening that gives studiers sprawling views of uptown Manhattan. Anyone studying in the library can look out and see the Washington Square across the street and the Empire State Building (which is 29 blocks away), all the while surrounded by books, collections and busy researchers trying to make sense of them. The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives on the tenth floor on the south side of the building. Between the study rooms on the north side and the archives on the south is a large open atrium. From time to time, when my eyes get strained from reading, I take a short walk out to the hallway overlooking the atrium. The railings between the atrium and the hallways hold up panes of Plexiglas that reach to about six feet high. From any place I walk in the hallway, I can see the Empire State Building. The Elmer Holmes Bobst building was built in 1972 and was designed so occupants could see parts of upper Manhattan, including the Empire State Building. Incidentally, I am in this library because of an event that happened one block north, on Washington Place in the Brown Building, a NYU building that houses biology and chemistry laboratories and at one time housed the NYU School of Dentistry. On March 25, 1911, it was the site of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire where 146 poor, young, mostly female immigrant garment workers died because they could not get out of the sweatshop conditions in the top floors of the building as it burned.



The relationship of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire to where this study seeks to go will be clearly spelled out in the following pages. However, in short, the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire helped unions in United States shed light on unsafe work conditions in garment and other industries. In the garment industry, poor Italians, Jews and other “undesirable” immigrants banded together to boost the membership of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). This organization set up an educational program to teach immigrant and first-generation American workers about history, economic, labors, and social issues, and the English language. The ILGWU’s Educational Department’s purpose was to educate workers and their spouses to participate in democracy and advocate for their fellow workers and themselves through the Union. All of this was done in the backdrop of tightening federal immigration restrictions, cultural conflicts, and uncertain economic times but with a common connection through labor.

## Introduction

“Among [Americans] the majority lays down the laws about languages as about all else. Its prevailing spirit is manifest there as elsewhere. Now, the majority is more interested in business than study, in trade and politics than in philosophic speculation or fine writings. Most of the words coined or adopted will chiefly serve to express the needs of industry, the passions of politics, or the details of public administration.

Language will spread out endlessly in that direction...”

Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840 (479).

When I read this passage from De Tocqueville, I am struck by the way he addresses “the laws about language” as an issue of language in general rather than English alone. He argues that commerce and economics—concerns of the majority—drive language attitudes. I often wonder if he is right. Language seems to be one of the most intimate cultural markers a group shares. Agreed upon language allows a people to exchange ideas, debate and create, and hopefully from that unspoken agreement about language, the culture can flourish. At the same time, the history of the United States exhibits heterogeneity in language attitudes. As Krapp observed in 1925, even though individuals have been interested in regulating English usage conformity since the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the venture had been a failure. In the absence of regulation, Krapp observed, “standards of speech have become more regular and severer than they

formerly were” (viii-ix). Language in the United States continues this trend. The expectation that individuals master a particular type of American English literacy continues to dominate not only cultural debates, but also education policy, health care management, and in the case of 2012 Republican Primary debates, issues of national security.

If De Tocqueville was right, that issues of business, trade and politics were the chief drivers of American language development, why are issues pertaining to literacy development in workers relatively absent from those contexts? Would people who want to engage in these components of American life not assimilate to the new language conventions? More importantly, would training in language conventions represent a training in particular types of *rhetorical* conventions? While these questions are both answerable and debatable, they lead to larger questions about the role of literacy in American society. As individuals who study literacy understand the term as complex, it is also incumbent to figure out what the “literacy” of public debate is.

While De Tocqueville was not a scholar who studied literacy, I believe he offered an important insight that inspires my research; that in the American approach to language, business, trade and politics shapes how literacy is discussed. Business, trade and politics intersect in several areas of American life, but what strikes me the most is how they intersect to pump the economic engines of American life.

When I think of language issues, I think of my own family: of the English-speaking Irish of my mother’s side and the Sicilian and Neapolitan-speaking southern Italians of my father’s side who came to America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I think of some of my great-grandparents who never learned English, and their children who had to

straddle two (and sometimes more) linguistic and cultural worlds in an effort to assimilate to American culture. Yet, I am not interested in performing an ethnographic study of my own family. Too many resources exist that can give me a more clear picture of what the United States sounded like when it spoke about literacy.

My research centers on the intersection of literacy and rhetoric in an effort to explain how the two concepts inform each other. I know that I am using terms that have many meanings in different situations, so I will use the following pages to offer some context for my own research.

As many definitions of literacy exist as texts about literacy. Selber (2004) discusses different types of literacies (functional, critical, and rhetorical) in describing how educators can identify student aptitudes with literacy in digital environments. Canagarajah (2006), Horner and Lu (2007), and Horner and Trimbur (2002), to name a few, have pushed composition studies to reconsider the privilege of English as the lingua franca of composition studies. These articles have serious implications for literacy studies as well. Graff (1991), Brereton (1995), and Enoch (2008) have offered interesting historical portraits of literacy that continues to complicate our present ideas about the term. Brandt (2001) develops issues of literacy further by identifying the role of those who sponsor the literacy of others. She writes, “Seeing who was sponsoring whose literacy, how, for what, and to what degree made it possible to apprehend deep structures of literacy inequity—stratified systems of sponsorship that usually stretch far beyond individual families or schools to affect access and reward for literacy.” It is in this space she identifies where the social interactions that supports literacy becomes an important subject of inquiry. Moreover, Brandt points out how literacy has a strange economic

nature, observing, “As sponsors compete with each other for dominance, they often use literacy as the grounds of competition as they try to gain the upper hand.” The economic component of literacy, that is, the ability for sponsors to compete for “dominance” and gaining an “upper hand” is something that I need to develop on my own. For all the important work that those like Harvey Graff have done on the economic issues of literacy, they often focus on the individuals developing their own literacy and not so much on the social structures at work that reify *particular types* of literacy.

At present, the economics of literacy with regard to English are apparent in the way English has been established as a “Global Language” as linguist David Crystal (2003) describes it, or a “Lingua Franca” to Jenkins (2007). Approaching the topic of literacy more closely, Prendergast (2008) analyzes the material effect of English as economic lingua franca and its economic implications through ethnographic work in Slovakia. Issues regarding the economics of literacy in the English language complicate many aspects of public policy, especially in Universities. In response to the needs of both citizenship and industry, the university system, through its pedagogies and accessibility, reinforces particular literacies while obscuring where those values lay. For example, as a university decides to place a greater emphasis on computer literacy, it may make itself inaccessible and create hardship for students who may not have access to a home computer. While English is the seeming lingua franca of civic, industrial and educational life, changing demographics complicate English’s primacy.

Like Prendergast, I theorize that literacy often becomes defined by commerce and economics. Not just now, but in the past as well. The survival of Greek as opposed to a host of languages as the main trading language after the fall of the Greek city-state, and

indeed well into the Roman Empire, was the result more of a cultural diffusion through trade rather than a more bellicose conquest (Bonner, 1977, p. 45). The role of French in Canada and Africa, Dutch and Arabic in Africa, Spanish and Portuguese in Central and Latin America, and English in India and North America were certainly enforced through the barrel of a gun, but the language itself acted as a sort of economic and cultural capital that persisted long after the colonizer had left. Those economic traditions continue today.

Presently, only a few areas in literacy research have investigated a systematic approach to exploring the intersection of literacy and economics. Some researchers have touched upon the subject tangentially. Brandt (2001) spends a portion of her research exploring the “sponsors of literacy” in part by examining how some literacy practices are shaped by economic exigencies. Brandt’s work examines the development of literacy in particular individuals as her research is composed mainly of one-on-one interviews in which people discuss how their individual literacy practices evolved. I am interested in how literacy research may examine programs organized during a great migration of people to the United States, particularly in the early twentieth century. As immigrants, especially those from Russia, Poland, and Southern Italy, came to America, they formed neighborhoods in large cities where an individual might live without much need to learn English. In some cases, immigrants without much in common, let alone language, would find each other in commerce, working side-by-side yet not able to communicate. This was a common issue in the garment industry in New York City.

Research in literacy based on historical archival materials is nothing new. Harvey Graff’s research (1991) explores how conceptions of literacy and the supposed benefits of literacy (such as enhanced job prospects and the opportunity for upward social mobility)

does not necessarily hold true in larger contexts of racism and bigotry. Although he writes at length about literacy, his research generally focuses on 19<sup>th</sup> century Canada, which is an exploration of only one sort of economic system and is not able to examine how changing economic systems change community literacy values. My research will expand upon this research to look at literacy in one particular social and economic context.

Prendergast offers substantial research regarding the intersection of literacy and economics, she places her focus more on the advent of “Global Englishes,” which is to say, English as it appears mainly in countries where English is not the primary language. Prendergast presents a workable framework through which I can understand some nuances in the connection between literacy and economics by composing research that frames “literacy” as a subject in and international situation of English. The English language in this context has its own sort of economic currency. It allows access to certain economic contexts in places where English may not be the language of governance, but operates as an economic lingua franca because of multinational corporations, research, arts, and other reasons. I find the location of English as having its own economic currency as particularly interesting, and when I think of individuals coming to America with little knowledge of English in the early 1900s, I begin to wonder how different their contexts are from the individuals Prendergast studies. Can the definitions and functions of literacy change across these contexts?

This study helps explain the reason there seems to be myriad definitions of literacy both inside literacy research and in the language of public discourse. My argument is that changing economies, as evident through changing labor forces, change

our definitions of literacy. As the United States moved from a manufacturing economy to a service and technology economy, the basic definitions of literacy changed which has in turn altered how reading and writing is dealt with in formal education, later especially at the university level.

### **Identifying the Proper Area to Research**

The way I choose to explore the intersection of economics and literacy is to examine the literacy practices of immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I choose this timeframe because it represents the beginning of the height of the manufacturing economy, which would employ many immigrants, some of whom experienced institutional discrimination, but were nonetheless compelled to learn English so they could take advantage of the benefits of moving to the United States. By looking at how the immigrant literacy experience operated during the manufacturing economy, researchers may come to understand how today's service economy and its dependence on immigrants reshapes our definitions of literacy. I believe speaking and reading English would no longer seem to be enough to qualify as "literate," but skills in highly specialized literate practices such as genre-specific writing and computer fluency establish a new baseline for "literacy." One interesting component of this development is the idea that literacy is shaped by technology, but this will be for later chapters.

One important distinction I must make about my research is that I frame the economic periods (manufacturing and service) through types of labor that define that economic period. I think understanding labor, particularly immigrant labor, is my way into understanding how literacy and economics interact. One interesting discovery I have



already made in my research regards the precarious relationship between labor unions and literacy. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) worked hard to restrict immigration by Southern and Eastern Europeans and Asians who were seen as less desirable members of their union than native-born Americans or northern European immigrants. One tool in restricting immigration they endorsed was the Immigration Act of 1917, which called for a literacy test to be administered to new immigrants. A literate workforce did relatively little for the union functionally; officially, the AFL claimed that it sought to represent all Americans regardless of the type of labor (skilled or unskilled) they performed. However, the literacy test was designed to maintain a certain type of worker in the unions, and literacy was used as a barrier to entry into the American economic system. These workers were labeled at the time as being from “undesirable races” (Hourwich, 1912).

Certainly, not all unions in the first half of the twentieth century opposed immigration. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union maintained progressive policies that included an educational program that aimed specifically to the mostly immigrant makeup of its membership topics relating to social and labor issues, economics, and the English language. In this context, the Union became what Brandt (2001) called “sponsors of literacy,” meaning individuals who assisted in the literacy development of others. I hope to offer a new framework through which literacy and rhetoric may be seen in tandem. I hypothesize that to teach literacy is to also teach rhetoric, and that the context of literacy learning as it is defined by a sponsor of literacy tempers or enhances a learner’s ability to engage different rhetorical situations.

To explore my hypothesis, my research is driven by three research questions relating to the operations of the ILGWU's Educational Department:

1. How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department?
2. How is literacy defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy?
3. How is literacy defined by the economic realities of students of literacy programs?

My research seeks to understand how sponsors of literacy define literacy, and how their curriculum executes upon these definitions. Moreover, I seek to understand the interaction between rhetorical and literacy training, to understand whose rhetorical situations, the sponsors' or the students', is represented in the educational program.

## **Methods**

My research methods will be historiographic and archive-based. Research in rhetoric, composition and literacy has a long history of archival research making large impacts in the field. Most notably, Graff (1991) offers me a robust framework to examine the literacy through qualitative and quantitative approaches. Other scholars, such as Russell (2002), Berlin (1987), Enoch (2008) and Glenn (1997) have made substantial contributions to the field through archival research, collecting not just otherwise uncollected histories of writing teaching and research, but also problematizing previously misunderstood assumptions.

My research draws from the collections of the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, the Martin P. Catherwood Library at Cornell University, and the New York Public Library. This study uses archive-based research methods but also proposes a thorough methodological discussion about archival research that has become more robust in recent years. Most recently, Ramsey et al.'s edited collection *Working in the Archives* (2010) is a major volume written and edited by composition and rhetoric scholars that addresses the theoretical and practical considerations of archival research. *Working in the Archives* builds upon an otherwise scattered array of scholarship that addresses some theoretical (in some cases, romanticized) concerns in archival research. Working with an array of documents from many sources, I have used what I have read to manage what I have found; recorded the findings carefully, and in some cases, discarded otherwise useful material because of difficulty authenticating the authorship or date the document was written. Archival methods are certainly more complex than simply entering a library on a lark with a computer and magnifying glass in hand; it needs to be focused, but allowing for sustained curiosity to allow for serendipitous discoveries as well.

## **Organization**

The dissertation is organized in seven chapters and an introduction. The outline is as follows:

Chapter 1: Research and Theory in Literacy Studies

Chapter 2: Theory in Rhetoric, Language and Power

Chapter 3: A Brief History of Needlework in the United States, the ILGWU, and its Education Department

Chapter 4: Research Methods

Chapter 5: Description of Materials Collected

Chapter 6: Analysis of Materials Collected

Chapter 7: Implications of Literacy Sponsorship, Writing, and the Rhetorics of Literacy

Chapter Outline:

Chapter 1: **Research and Theory in Literacy Studies.** In this chapter, I survey contemporary research in literacy. I focus much of my attention to the work of Deborah Brandt, especially her work on “sponsors of literacy.” I expand upon her definition of literacy, and examine how other scholars define and research literacy throughout American history. This chapter sets up my theoretical understanding of literacy, as well as forecasts the theory that drives my later analysis.

Chapter 2: **Theory in Rhetoric, Language, and Power.** In this chapter, I examine the works of selected rhetoricians and philosophers about the relationship between rhetoric, language, and power. I choose to examine the writings of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian to establish a theoretical foundation for rhetoric and the rhetorical education. I try as much as possible to differentiate the contexts in which those thinkers wrote from my own context, but argue that certain elements of their theories are applicable to this study. I examine Gramsci for his writings on workers’ education, which relates directly to this research, and his calls for a “proletariat intelligentsia.” The chapter then explores Bourdieu’s text *Language as Symbolic Power* (2003), paying attention to how language provides access to power, and how enculturation into certain language norms impede or provide access to larger discourses. I close by arguing that literacy and rhetoric have similar qualities in their relations to language and power, and that any literacy development is development in a certain type of rhetorical thinking.

Chapter 3: **A Brief History of Needlework in the United States, the ILGWU, and its Educational Department.** This chapter offers an overview of the needle trades in American history. I start with the invention of the sewing machine and the rise of standardized garment sizes, both of which changed the labor and economics of garment manufacturing. The chapter moves on to describe the rise of the ILGWU, and several successful strikes that strengthened its position in the garment industry and expanded its membership. The chapter then describes the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, which acts as a turning point in the ILGWU's organizational apparatus, begins an even larger expansion of membership, and ultimately allows for the organization of the Educational Program. The chapter concludes with a description of the first twenty-five years of the Educational Department, describing its place, and controversy within larger ILGWU politics, as well as how the organization operated.

Chapter 4: **Research Methods.** This chapter explains my approach to researching the first twenty-five years of the ILGWU's Educational Department. The chapter opens with a critique of how other scholars in composition studies have treated data from archives primarily to construct narratives rather than closely examine the data itself through other methods available in social sciences research. I use the work of other scholars as inspiration for developing my own research methods for archival research, and I address categories laid out by Smagorinsky (2008) to explain my research methods and data coding.

Chapter 5: **Description of Materials Collected.** This chapter shares my findings from multiple trips to three libraries in New York. The chapter breaks down each Course Announcement and describes their contents thoroughly. The chapter closes with

spreadsheets containing my coding schematics, and categorizes and codes different parts of each Announcement.

Chapter 6: **Analysis of Materials Collected.** This chapter puts together the analytical framework from the first two chapters, the history from the third chapter, and the collected data from the fifth chapter together to address the three research questions I identified earlier.

Chapter 7: **Implications of Literacy Sponsorship, Writing, and the Economies of Literacy.** This chapter concludes the study. It begins by assessing implications based on the analysis through the research questions. The chapter closes by examining areas of further research and inquiry, and outlines areas where I plan to extend the research started in this study.

### **Going Forward**

This study, like many studies before it, examines a small slice from a large and complex history. My focus on particular sorts of texts from a relatively brief period in American history cannot fully capture the political, social, and economic factors that shaped the writing of those texts. However, the research is still robust and thorough, and comes closer than anyone has before to addressing this topic utilizing the tools provided by social science research. In this way, I hope this text enhances the general discourse on power, language, rhetoric, and most importantly, literacy.

## Chapter 1: Research and Theory in Literacy Studies

In her book, *Literacy in American Lives*, Deborah Brandt provides a definition of literacy that I find useful in foregrounding how I want to explore the topic of literacy:

For the purposes of this study, literacy skill is treated primarily as a resource—economic, political, intellectual, and spiritual—which, like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially gains the seekers. To treat literacy in this way is to understand not only why individuals labor to attain literacy, but also to appreciate why, as with any resource of value, organized economic and political interests work so persistently to conscript or ration the powers of literacy for their own competitive advantage. (p. 5)

I quote Brandt at length because of the complexity of her definition. It is nuanced. As we will soon see, it differs vastly from definitions of literacy popular audiences and researchers have used for many years. Moreover, recent scholarship expands her definition and continues to reshape how researchers and popular audiences conceive of literacy. If I were to make a family tree of the ideas for this project, Brandt's definition of literacy would be the trunk. Her interest and research in the economic and political dimensions of literacy opened doors of inquiry that has allowed composition and rhetoric scholars to look well beyond the classroom. Literacy is contested and claimed, not only in how it is defined, but also in the substance of what it is.

This chapter will move in through four phases: first, it surveys modern research and definitions of literacy that have generally made up the scholarly conception of the term. In an effort to contextualize how definitions of literacy have functioned outside

scholarly research, the chapter then moves to chart changing definitions of literacy from the colonial America through the early twentieth century. This chapter pays special attention to how literacy became a contested political topic, particularly using literacy tests for immigrants. The third section builds upon some observations about the politics of language and explores the way literacy is shaped by expanding global contexts. The chapter finishes by returning to the work of Deborah Brandt and recognizes how emerging responds to some of her past work. In particular, I focus on Brandt's discussion of sponsors of literacy and how their roles contribute to ways learners understand literacy. This chapter closes looking ahead to how literacy and rhetoric may inform each other, which I discuss with more depth in the next chapter.

### **Literacy (un)defined**

If there is one consistent issue in settling on a firm definition of literacy, it is in scholars' aversion to actually defining the term. Scholars such as Cargile Cook (2002) and Selber (2004) speak of multiple literacies, suggesting literacy operates with some sort of understanding of a particular context. Their work complicates literacy; Cargile Cook suggests that the layers of literacy that should inform technical communication pedagogy have some sort of scaffold structure; a student cannot reach a new layer unless he or she masters the lower layer first. Likewise, Selber's multiliteracies suggest the same sort of tiered structure of literacies evolving in the digital age, albeit he identifies fewer literacies than Cargile Cook. Both Cargile Cook and Selber have much to offer in the context of understanding reading and writing practices in their respective contexts. However, both descriptions (and they are mostly descriptions, not definitions) are rooted in rote skill



abilities in each context. Literacy is not described as something larger than the contexts they inhabit, and become prescriptive descriptions that can identify an individual's deficiencies and faculties in tightly defined contexts.

Harvey Graff (2011) observes that the moves toward multiple literacies while perhaps helpful in some ways, also potentially fragments knowledge. He observes, "Mirroring the march of specialization and fragmentation, seeking to gain from their association with its advancement ("scientifically," for example), they exacerbate the very problems of learning and knowledge that—rhetorically, at least—they claim to confront. In doing that, the promise of both alphabetic literacy and its analogs, and of multiple literacies risks self-destruction with the loss of its own integrity and potential critical contribution. (p. 31)

In an era that values fracturing specializations of labor, knowledge, and economies, it should be of little surprise that literacy becomes compartmentalized to isolate and identify micro-level concerns. Anthony Giddens (1991) observes this era of fragmentation is what essentially makes the modern condition. Bruno Latour (1993) sees this sort of fragmentation as a part of human culture since early man, when urbanization and specialization of labor settled the nomadic people and compartmentalized the value of knowledge. The point here is not to recognize if literacy is a "victim" of some vision of modernity, but to interrogate the values that underlie the drive to cloud an overarching understanding of literacy.

Consider an individual who complains about the lack of high school graduate's computer literacy, but the concern remains ambiguous. Is this about skills? If so, what is the baseline for these skills? As some software becomes obsolete, how can educators

know when to replace literacy standards that were associated with one type of software with another? How can educators be sure the new software will continue to be relevant? This is a small sample of questions, and they are purposefully simple and reductive in their nature. Nevertheless, they begin to unravel the challenges of the multiple-literacy agenda.

Before I address modern definitions of literacy, it is useful to remember what makes the “literate” in the first place. At a base level, something that is literate tends to represent words and signs that exist beyond the spoken word. They are usually written somewhere in a sign system that is decipherable to members of the same community. Walter Ong (1982) writes extensively about how the move from an orality-based culture to a textual and literature-based culture fundamentally changed human interaction. Jack Goody’s *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977) posits that the advance of literacy fundamentally changed human thinking. Scribner and Cole (1999) investigate the ways in which literacy affects the psychology of non-literate minds. In each of these cases, the understanding of literacy is rooted in an ability to understand symbols that have some linguistic currency as a means of communication, but all also point to the practices of literacy being more complex than mere skill attainment.

Literate culture was not without its detractors. Socrates, most famously through Plato’s *Phaedrus*, chastises those who write for faint-mindedness. John Durham Peters (2002) reads Socrates’ rebuke of literate culture in favor of “dialog” (that is to say, oral culture) as primarily a fear that without dialog minds cannot engage each other, rather the emphasis of communication becomes one of how well ideas are disseminated, not their

ability to be vetted in discussion. Yet, Peters challenges Socrates' objection to literate culture:

Dissemination is far friendlier to the weirdly diverse practices we signifying animals engage in and to our bumbling attempts to meet others with some fairness and kindness. Open scatter is more fundamental than coupled sharing; it is the stuff from which, on rare, splendid occasions, dialogue may arise. Dissemination is not wreckage; it is our lot. (62)

In taking on the macro-level concerns of how communications fundamentally spread, Peters posits the effort to spread information is something that is innately part of human behavior. This is a controversial position, but it helps to theorize literacy as a resource. The "literacy as resource" position put forth by Brandt understands the interaction of literate bodies to disseminate information through a currency of language.

Brandt's definition of literacy, which I identified earlier in this chapter, is one of the few places where a scholar has been bold enough to offer a thorough description of the term without breaking it into component parts. As a resource, literacy can be a skill, but it can also point to the knowledge of when and how to use that skill. One may teach a manicurist how to change timing belt in an automobile, but without also teaching the conditions under which one would change the timing belt in an automobile, the skill may be misapplied, or unapplied to the point that the vehicle is beyond repair. Some might call this "automotive literacy," but to conceptualize all sorts of literacy as skills is to get away from a more comprehensive understanding of what literacy is.

Linda Flower, while using the sort of division of literacy that Graff and I would like to avoid in her description of "community literacy" (2008) rightly points out that

literacy has a profoundly rhetorical component. She describes literacy as “an action and a practice: a literate action taken to support agency, understanding and justice; and a rhetorical act built on the social ethic; and a strategic practice of intercultural inquiry” (7). I must admit that I am not sold on the full implications of her definition. As I will demonstrate shortly, definitions of literacy rarely purport to support “understanding and justice” or “intercultural inquiry.” Rather, it has been used throughout history as a way to marginalize large groups of people, and establish cultural hegemonies through language. Yet Flower’s definition is still helpful as a course of study because she acknowledges rhetorical acts, that is to say, acts of persuasion and understanding, as fundamental parts of literacy and literate practice.

While some other scholars have performed research exploring and defining literacy further, Brandt and Flower are most succinct in the context of literacy and writing studies research. This project, although it draws from research in multiple disciplines, is primarily rooted in literacy and writing studies research and for that reason; my work here will try as much as possible to maintain a fidelity to my own research position.

For now, there is some base understanding of what I mean when I speak of literacy in my own research. I utilize the element of resource from Brandt, but also recognize the rhetorical element explored by Flower. Yet to focus on just the few scholars of the last few pages would be to ignore the rich and contested history of literacy. What follows now is a profile of how literacy has shaped the United States, and how literacy would later become a point of substantial political conflict. This context will allow me to return to the work of Brandt with an understanding of the myriad ways in

which literacy became a part of the American character, as well as offer context for how researchers after Brandt expanded upon her work to explore literate practices in new cultural and economic contexts more closely

### **Literacy and Its Discontents**

From about 1600 to 1800 in America and Europe the standard for what was considered “literacy” was a simple measure of whether or not an individual could sign his name.<sup>1</sup> As Grubb (2007) observes, “Signature literacy is the only universal, standard, and direct measure available for the colonial period which provides a substantial quantity of evidence.” While the act of signing one’s own name may seem to be a low standard, Grubb explains that there is some consensus among researchers that this represented a “middle range of literacy skill, or roughly the ability to read fluently” (p. 273). Using data quantifying literacy by one’s ability to sign his own signature does not necessarily guarantee literacy in English, but the data nonetheless point to a culture of literacy in the American colonies. That culture of literacy belongs to a segment of the population with enough money to buy and maintain land, but more interestingly, this definition of literacy points to a place where literacy is associated with the ability to write.

Drawing upon his research, Grubb observes, “the United States was born literate.” Grubb observes that the level of literacy was higher in America in this period than it was in almost all of Europe, the exception generally being Scotland. Moreover, the high literacy levels were not confined to the northeast, but throughout the colonies down into North and South Carolina. Perhaps just as interesting, high literacy rates, while usually

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the male pronoun here is intentional; all of the resources Grubb examines measure “adult male literacy.”

higher in urban areas, were also relatively high (over 60%) in rural areas as well (p. 278). While trying to explain a cause for the strong literate tradition of the United States, Grubb postulates that many of the immigrants who came to America were much more literate than their fellow citizens back home. The literate tradition of America may well have started when literate immigrants passed on the value of literacy to their children themselves or provided their children with teaching from professional instructors (p. 279). However, merely passing on the value of literacy to the next generation may not have been enough to explain the large expansion of literacy across the American colonies. Grubb ultimately postulates that market forces, especially the high demand for literacy by the time the second or third American-born generations enter the labor market, may have been a factor in the expansion of literacy.

However, at this point the ability to perform sound research on literacy becomes difficult, as one would assumedly have to be able to operationalize literacy by far more than signing his name in order to be considered “literate.” Grubb acknowledges that research into literacy in seventeenth and eighteenth century America becomes more difficult as different venues for literacy acquisition became available. While for a time parents may have transmitted literacy to their children, many churches, schools, and places of work also provided venues for people to become literate. Grubb reports that “servant contracts negotiated in Philadelphia for the children of German parents frequently stipulated the method of education to be provided by the employer” (p. 290). In early America, it is already quite clear that the context of literacy acquisition was complex and expansive.

There is substantial research available regarding literacy practices through much of American history. Lockridge's (1975) work explores the social context of literacy in New England. Anne Ruggles Gere (1997) explores the "extracurriculars" of literacy through research on how magazines and other popular media encouraged women to write and create writing groups after the Civil War. Damon-Moore and Kaestle (1991) performed similar research into the work of mass-circulation magazines. These works, while useful and enlightening, tended to focus upon texts written for an elite, urban and often white female audience. While progressive with respect to gender, issues such as race, non-English literacy practices and rural literacies are covered elsewhere. McHenry and Heath (1994) survey African-American readers and writers in the post-colonial period through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, describing a rich and complex literacy and literary culture. Greene (1994) presents a history of literacy in North America starting with the work of Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century. Greene's history describes the Spanish language supplying many "firsts" for literacy on the new continent; the first recordings of births, deaths and marriages were done in Spanish Florida, the first basic grammar text was in Spanish, and that Mexico City had a printing press culture as early as 1539 (237-41). Nord (1995) explores the literacy changes after cheap published books become available to a small rural community in New Jersey in the mid-1800s. The books were religious tracts distributed by the American Tract Society telling evangelical narratives about the dangers of sin and the redemption offered through Christ. These books offered people an ability to practice reading and became the sort of popular fiction people today might lament as "simple-minded" and "trashy." Yet, in all of the research I have just listed, a common thread appears in which literacy practices are treated as

diverse, contextual and reaching beyond the mere functional ability to read. The social components of literacy are what perpetuate the sorts of societies that make literacy count for something beyond rote ability; they advocate for a communal ability. Why, then, is the emphasis placed on rote ability? Why does function define literacy?

One possible reason literacy became formalized is through the advent of the academy. Halloran (1990) writes extensively about the movement in writing education through the early part of American history to 1900. In this context, he notes the way writing instruction is rooted in classical rhetoric. Students were taught writing through the understandings of what had been a discipline most clearly rooted in oratory. Over time, the oratorical element of writing instruction was silenced and writing became its own sort of discipline, yet still heavily influenced by classical rhetoric. As time went on and a competitive middle-class society rose in nineteenth-century America, society began to place a new emphasis on the necessity of speaking and writing in standardized, proper English to determine who belongs the once exclusive upper-class. Schools such as Harvard, “by attempting to impose a ‘hyper-correct’ dialect on the generally privileged students...may actually have strengthened the linguistic obstacles to upward mobility” (167). Changes in language and class structure influenced education standards.

It is important to note that shifting structures in education and literacy definition are not without other benefits. As Walter Ong (1982) writes, the rise of literate culture over oral culture includes all sorts of new consequences not only for communication between people, but it also has the ability to fundamentally change the way the mind works and how consciousness is structured. Ong is careful not to assign overarching values to these changes, but finds the relationships between orality and literacy to be



important and complementary. Such benefits of writing may have been apparent to the professors and schools Halloran investigates, but there is no explicit mention of educational leaders urging for a more comprehensive writing curriculum because it will improve student scholastic achievement. Literacy in this context remains a functional component to other academic endeavors.

Halloran observes that the expanding middle class also brought with it a new interest in science, commerce, and industry that in turn created a new cultural value: professionalism (167). As Halloran notes, “in contrast to the communally-sanctioned wisdom that had once been the province of the citizen-orator, the knowledge of the professional was morally neutral—in essence, a commodity that could be exchanged for money, and thus a means of advancing one’s personal fortune while also serving the public good” (168). While it might seem strange to focus so much on the formal schooling of the middle class when the population I will research is poorer and in a different social situation completely, I mean to bring up the way in which education and literacy became “functionalized.” While the function of writing in American education had once been to learn, and understand rhetoric, arts and speaking, the function of education, and writing along with it, became a means for personal exploitation. This is not to suggest that rich students at Harvard did not exploit their positions in life through writing, but the expansion of the middle class meant this new conception of the value of literacy spread further than the upper-strata of society. The advent of professionalization in education codifies the elite status of literacy through a greater part of the public.

Alexis de Tocqueville corroborates Halloran’s observation about the expanding middle class’ interest in commerce, industry, and the possibility of economic ascent in

some part in 1849. De Tocqueville, a Frenchman writing about his time in America where he explored American democracy and culture observed the following with regard to the advent of an American language:

Among [Americans] the majority lays down the laws about languages as about all else. Its prevailing spirit is manifest there as elsewhere. Now, the majority is more interested in business than study, in trade and politics than in philosophic speculation or fine writings. Most of the words coined or adopted will chiefly serve to express the needs of industry, the passions of politics, or the details of public administration. Language will spread out endlessly in that direction... (p. 479)

He argues that commerce and economics—concerns of the majority—drive language attitudes. I often wonder if he is right. Language is one of the most intimate cultural markers a group shares. Agreed upon language allows a people to exchange ideas, debate, and create, and hopefully from that unspoken agreement about language, the culture can flourish. De Tocqueville notices something different about the way in which the English language has evolved in America. He notes that, while many cultures log new words, the Americans create new words that "...are generally taken from the jargon of parties, the mechanical arts or trade." He goes further to mark that in a democracy, there is a "continuous restlessness" that "leads to endless change of language as of all else." He remarks, "the genius of democracies is seen not only in the great number of new words introduced, but even more in the new ideas they express" (478). De Tocqueville writes about language and democracy, but it is perhaps astute to understand the role of economics in his theory of language development as Grubb observed. If indeed the

trajectory of language development follows the arc of industry and trade, then the relationship between language and economics requires closer attention. Moreover, it may help fill in some of the holes in Grubb's research.

Yet literacy and language existed through much of American history in a constant crisis of identity. Harvey Graff spends much time at the beginning of his *The Literacy Myth* explaining how, despite the seemingly high value western culture has placed on literacy, researchers, public officials, and educators alike have had great difficulty in codifying a single definition to describe "literacy." Such ambiguity in definition has made research on the topic difficult; twenty researchers may use twenty definitions of literacy based on the way literacy data were collected. The myriad definitions of literacy often lead to diverse theoretical perspectives on data, and make analysis and research difficult. Graff himself, while embracing a more functionalist definition of the term still voices concerns for what even a broad definition may omit: "Literacy is rightly assumed to be a tool and a skill, but we must ask, what kind of tool and for what use? (p. 5)." Suffice to say, when Graff asks that question, he is probably not thinking of literacy as it is used to read literature or perform plays. Much of Graff's work examines the economic consequences and factors relating to literacy and illiteracy in the nineteenth century in parts of Canada. Graff's research finds that illiteracy did not result in "paralytic poverty" (123) and that for many illiterate skilled laborers, literacy did not impede their economic prospects. In the context of some cases Graff investigates in nineteenth century United States and Canada, literacy provided a negligible, if any, advantage to a skilled laborer in terms of earnings (220). This is not to say literacy had no value whatsoever, or that the same results would be true in today's labor environment. To be clear, Graff examined a

labor market dominated by localized, industrialized skilled labor, wholly dissimilar from today's globalized, and service oriented labor economy. Rather, Graff's findings call into question the common assumption that literacy has some direct correlation to economic well-being. This assumption needs to be continually revised.

### **Literacy Tests**

The use of literacy tests in the history of the United States has two definitions; literacy test used as part of Jim Crow Legislation across the United States to dissuade and legally omit African Americans from voting after emancipation and tests were used to keep undesirable immigrants from gaining entry to the United States. The literacy tests of the Jim Crow variety were outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This section will focus on the later literacy tests, tests that continue to exist in a more opaque capacity today.

The United States congress upon several occasions through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century attempted to pass laws establishing basic literacy tests for new immigrants as a prerequisite for entry into the United States. Prodded by a group formed in 1894 called the Immigration Restriction League, Congress passed laws in three years establishing tests for Basic English literacy. The first such bill was passed in 1897 and was vetoed by President Grover Cleveland. Congress passed a similar law in 1913, only to have that law vetoed again, this time by President William Howard Taft. Taft replied to the senate with a note explaining that he was persuaded by his Secretary of Commerce and Labor, Charles Nagel, to veto the bill. He enclosed Nagel's letter along with his veto statement. Two parts of this statement are particularly telling. First,

We need labor in this country and the natives are unwilling to do the work which the aliens come over to do. It is perfectly true that in a few cities and localities there are congested conditions. It is equally true that in very much larger areas we are practically without help. In my judgment, no sufficiently earnest and intelligent effort has been made to bring our wants and our supply together, and so far the same forces that give the chief support to this provision of the new bill have stubbornly resisted any effort in looking to an intelligent distribution of new immigration to meet the needs of our vast country.

Remembering Harvey Graff's arguments from the *Literacy Myth*, this passage from Secretary Nagel would seem to reinforce the idea that literacy abilities are not reflective of surefire advancement in economic conditions. Surely, the jobs the immigrants took were probably exploitive (see chapter 3 for more about this) but literacy was not a basic barrier to entry to limited economic opportunity in the United States.

Secretary Nagel is even more candid later, speaking more directly to the inherent racism in the immigration act:

A careful examination of the character of the people who come to stay and of the employment in which a large part of the new immigration is engaged will, in my judgment, dispel the apprehension that many of our people entertain. The census will disclose that with rapid strides the foreign-born citizen is acquiring the farm lands of this country. Even if the foreign-born alone is considered, the percentage of his ownership is assuming a proportion that ought to attract the attention of the native citizens. If the second generation is included it is safe to say that in the Middle West and West a majority of the farms are today owned by foreign-born

people or they are descendants of the first generation. This does not embrace only the Germans and the Scandinavians but is true in large measure, for illustration of the Bohemians and the Poles. It is true in surprising measure of the Italians; not only of the northern Italians, but of the southern.

One note of interpretation here: when Secretary Nagel speaks of “Bohemians and Poles,” his is likely referring to Jews. This passage advocates for the more recent waves of immigrants, particularly Jews oppressed in Eastern Europe and Russia and southern Italians (including Neapolitans, Sicilians and Calabrians of the *mezzogiorno*). Secretary Nagel had a personal connection to the struggles of the more “undesirable immigrants”: his first wife who had died in 1889, Fannie Brandeis was Jewish of Bohemian ancestor. Nagel’s brother-in-law through Fannie, Louis Brandeis, would later join on the Supreme Court in 1916 as an associate justice under Chief Justice William Howard Taft. There is more to say about the plight of the southern and eastern-Europeans in the Immigration Act later in this project, but for now a return to the fate of the literacy tests.

Congress attempted to supersede the President’s veto, but was unsuccessful, as the *New York Times* on February 19, 1913 reported: “The House of Representatives, with a Democratic majority of nearly a hundred, sustained the President's veto of the Immigration bill to-day after the Republican Senate had overridden Mr. Taft's disapproval of this important measure. It was on the rock of the literacy test provision of the bill that this legislation went to smash.” The vote in the house was still close, failing by merely five votes.

Congress again passed a law restricting immigration, the Immigration Act of 1917, which established not only a literacy test, but also placed a ban on: “unless

otherwise provided for by existing treaties, persons who are natives of islands not possessed by the United States adjacent to the Continent of Asia...” along with bans on a variety of types of persons, including, “idiots,” “imbiciles,” and “persons who have been convicted of or admit having committed a felony or other crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude” among others .

The so-called “non-Asiatic” provision was the most notable part of the law, but the law set a strict standard for a literacy test, prohibiting

All aliens over sixteen years of age, physically capable of reading, who cannot read the English language, or some other language or dialect, including Hebrew or Yiddish: Provided, That any admissible alien, or any alien heretofore or hereafter legally admitted, or any citizen of the United States, may bring in or send for his father or grandfather over fifty-five years of age, his wife, his mother, his grandmother, or his unmarried or widowed daughter, if otherwise admissible, whether such relative can read or not; and such relative shall be permitted to enter. That for the purpose of ascertaining whether aliens can read the immigrant inspectors shall be furnished with slips of uniform size, prepared under the direction of the Secretary of Labor, each containing not less than thirty nor more than forty words in ordinary use, printed in plainly legible type in some one of the various languages or dialects of immigrants. Each alien may designate the particular language or dialect in which he desires the examination to be made, and shall be required to read the words printed on the slip in such language or dialect.

A few components of this legislation reinforce ideas pertaining to literacy from earlier in American history: the interest in literacy was only insofar as it was that of males.

Particularly, the literacy test only examines males at an age that could participate in the labor economy. It is worth noting at this point that there was a large vote of support from the American Federation for Labor. While in a large part composed of first and second-generation Americans (and a few immigrants from Northern Europe), the AFL believed that the onslaught of foreign labor was undercutting their own members, supplying unskilled individuals to the labor market, and would be more difficult to organize due to their inability to speak English. This was not the position of all labor unions, however. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was gaining in popularity after the Triangle Shirtwaist fire of 1911 and was primarily composed of southern and eastern European members who would have been targeted by such literacy laws. No available evidence suggests the organization took an active role in protesting the literacy test legislation, however, they may not have needed to, as many members were likely literate in their home tongue.

The literacy provision of this law was one component of a larger effort to establish quotas on undesirable immigrants. The irony was that in practice these tests were designed in large part to dissuade illiterate immigrants, while in reality large groups of the immigrants arriving in the United States were literate. As Gabbaccia (1988) reports, in the context of southern Italians, the price of passage was so high that only individuals and families of some economic means (even limited means) could even afford to arrive. Many of these immigrants were urban, from mercantile, not labor trades, and through their enculturation already able to read and write.

Much of the work of the literacy tests were based in incorrect assumptions about the literacy rates of incoming migrants. The previous migration wave, one that involved



the Irish in the early nineteenth century, was overwhelmingly illiterate by American standards. The gatekeepers of the early twentieth century merely transferred the earlier prejudice of how to deal with undesirable immigrants by incorrectly transferring their assessments of the old immigrants on the new. Unfortunately, they would discover that the literacy tests did less than intended, and the quota system would have to be more far reaching to keep out the new European immigrants than the tests alone.

Of course, literacy tests alone did not create hardships for those coming to America. Yet there is a pattern of using language as a barrier to entry, both politically and physically, that continues to this day. Today, the type of English spoken and the context in which English is used transverses oceans. In the next section, I offer a short survey of how the ascension of English as an economic lingua franca has affected political and educational policy around the world and in the United States.

### **English, Literacy, and the Economic Lingua Franca**

The political power of the English language goes deeper than policies enacted by legislatures. David Crystal argues that today English operates as a “Global Language,” attributing its status to two factors; the historical reach of British Colonial power through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the United States becoming the leading economic power in the twentieth century (59). English provides access to culture, trade, and knowledge today. Arguably, every inhabitable continent in the world contains a country where a majority of the population speaks English. Of course, speech alone is not necessarily literacy, but it is still notable that Crystal estimates well over one third of the world’s population is, in theory, “routinely exposed to English” (67). The growth of English over the last two

centuries has led to structural changes in both language and trade, necessitating new avenues for educating the large majority of the world in English.

Xiaoye You (2010) writes extensively about the way the English language became taught in China. He points to the result of the First Opium War in 1840 in which the British victory over the Chinese resulted in a number of ports and the island of Hong Kong becoming the property of the British Empire. The treaties pertaining to the First (and later, Second) Opium war were written in English after 1862, “creating a large demand in within the imperial government for translators who could make sense of the documents” (15). The Qing government established the Tong Wen Guan (Academy of Interpreters) in 1862, which primarily taught English but would later add French, Russian and German to the curriculum. You remarks, “the acceptance of English as a school subject was a reluctant choice made by the Chinese, a choice that was emblematic of a feudal society struggling to respond to the worldwide expansion of colonialism and capitalism” (15). You interestingly identifies the influence of economic and colonial forces in China’s “reluctant” acceptance of English learning early; by the 1990s, the open-door policy and the introduction of market economics makes China a seemingly more enthusiastic participant in the growth of global English.

In the 1990s, China enacted new educational policies calling for stiffer controls and assessment of English proficiency for nearly *all* college graduates. You notes, “starting in 1987, college students needed to pass another standardized test, the College English Test (CET) before graduating from college” (138). Perhaps in a bit of irony, the teaching of English composition itself is commercialized. Much in the same way American students may buy books or take classes to prepare for standardized tests such

as the GRE, LSAT or MCAT; Chinese students spend swaths of money to prepare for the CET. It is almost laughable to consider the same sort of capitalist market forces that moved a Chinese government to reluctantly establish an English language school in the 1860s is today a lucrative business venture for the government and semi-private Chinese enterprise.

While You's history of English composition offers an important understanding of the cultural and economic components of English growth in China, his book primarily focuses on the ways in which English literacy and Chinese identity encounter each other. China is a nation of a long, rich literary history, and the presence of English in Chinese culture is an intrusion upon that legacy. The presence of English is treated as a necessity of political power and, more so later than earlier, market economics. Catherine Prendergast's *Buying Into English: Language and Investment in the New Capitalist World* (2008) addresses more directly the economic ramifications of the English language and English literacy.

Prendergast's research explores the present near necessity of English-language learning in Slovakia. Prendergast observes that lessons in English "did not teach the deeper logics of capitalism, including the fact that the global knowledge economy's reliance on information—finding it, peddling it, hiding it, distorting it—meant that English... would always be manipulated and controlled by the more powerful players in more powerful countries" (3). Yet, despite this important power dynamic, Prendergast acknowledges that English language learning and literacy still offer any cohort of Slovak students a "leg up" in the world economy, even if their country continues "to be cast as 'backward' in the development narrative, even as they joined the European Union and

even as a corporation in Western Europe, America and Asia set up shop in Slovak towns where the labor force was educated and inexpensive” (3). Prendergast’s identification of English as a sort of “investment” is astute in this context: as people learn English, the doors of opportunity open and the “investment” may be “cashed in” for economic gain.

The challenge with Prendergast’s metaphor of literacy as investment is an assumption that the investment will yield a return. While in many contexts English literacy may pay some return to language learners, systemic sexism and racism may supersede the possibilities literacies hold. If an economic metaphor helps explain literacy, it may be better to think of literacy as a currency than as an investment. In this metaphor, literacy is a means of exchange; it has a value that is redeemable for access, information, and culture. In political contexts, currency is a resource that is sought after and becomes valuable in its scarcity. Hernandez-Zamora (2010), in *Decolonizing Literacy*, explores how colonial impositions of literacy have shaped the political realities of the Americas, particularly in the context of modern Mexico. Hernandez-Zamora argues that in cases such as Indian Removal in Mexico and the United States, the currency of language assimilation to the colonist was a means of control. There was a currency in literacy, but the currency was in a particular *type* of literacy. Indeed, “illiteracy” was used in many contexts to create an identity of a dominated people as uncultured and in need of the education system of the dominant culture. This created a paradox: “while portrayed as ‘illiterate,’ ‘unskilled,’ or ‘uneducated,’ these groups have historically been excluded from the educational institutions of the dominant literate society. Thus, when they are urged to become literate they are somehow required to get their heads back into the lion’s mouth” (30). To return to the currency metaphor, it is helpful only insofar as capital is

understood to have a value contingent upon who will cash it. The literacy practices of Indigenous people in Mexico and the United States lacked currency in the colonial expanses of their respective states and as such their lack of currency was read as a poverty of mind—it set up an immediate inability to communicate, but also applied a stigma to those people and literacy practices which edified institutions engaging in systematic discrimination against entire races. Literacy is clearly seldom an issue of rote technical ability; it is immersed in contexts of economies and power.

This section has been primarily interested in establishing the importance of English literacy and how English corresponds to economic opportunity. While English education has upon occasion been recognized by states as an investment that will reap immense economic returns, the examples I present here are taken from the context of institutions embracing English. In the history of the English language, English language learning and literacy have been tightly controlled to mitigate the possibility of individuals transcending their situation. Such examples will be more readily available in chapter four, when I discuss the history of the ILGWU and its Education program. Yet for now, there is clear evidence that literacy in English has some currency in the world, and like any currency there are contexts in which it behooves powerful institutions to create barriers to English literacy acquisition.

## **Brandt**

Few people studying literacy cast as long of a shadow on the topic as Deborah Brandt. She has studied literacy for her entire career, amassing several books, chapters, talks and articles in the meantime. This section will survey just a few items from Brandt's

vast canon, and will primarily focus upon how her understanding of literacy became defined, refined and expanded. This section tracks her writing about literacy from 1996 to the present, ending with her work on sponsor of literacy.

Brandt's first book, *Literacy as Involvement* (1990) establishes her interest in treating literacy as a fundamentally social act. Brandt writes,

Functionally speaking, literacy is the most social of all imaginable principles—hypersocial, actually, because it epitomizes the role of culture in human exchange and condenses into the channels of reading and writing some of the most crucial of our enterprises. To read or write is to trade heartily—inescapably—on commonality and collectivity. That is why being illiterate in a literate culture is so isolating. To be illiterate is to be without important means to trade with others. (1)

It is interesting here that Brandt does not define literacy through rote skill. Rather, she is interested in social context. She writes this book to affront what she views as “antisocial views of literacy,” a view that language is de-contextualized and self-referential rather than immersed among people. It is an understanding of text as rising above embedded meaning (2-3). The audacity of Brandt's view to those who might agree with the “antisocial” understanding of literacy is in the new diversity a social view of literacy suggests. Rather than one, overarching and “formalized” language, literate practices are immersed in everyday experiences. Moreover, those experiences embed different meanings and values in language.

Today, scholars would consider this obvious, but the cultural location of Brandt's work on writing and literacy research, still relatively young in its identity as a discipline, was revolutionary for its time. Brandt was not necessarily fighting to tear down the

structures of de-contextualized textual traditions, but that “generative social contexts in which reading and writing are practiced as part of everyday life, the contribution of the hands that turn the pages” must be recognized as well (126). It is worth noting that Brandt was not necessarily the first person to argue for the social component of literacy. Levine’s (1986) *The Social Context of Literacy*, explores the topic with considerable depth, although he believes the socio-cultural dimension of literacy is a part of an orthographic system. Levine’s interest is more in how literacy becomes defined in different dominant social systems through history. He does not take the sort of approach to literacy research, that is to say, from the perspective of an education researcher that Brandt utilizes. Likewise, Goody (1977) and Szwed (1981) offer ethnographic approaches with varying degrees of engagement with the social element of literacy. Brandt’s substantial contributions to literacy are primarily in the context of the exhaustive interviews and research that went into her later publications. Nonetheless, her earlier work on literacy sets a tone for a thread she continues to follow.

In 2001, Brandt released perhaps her most famous book, *Literacy in American Lives*. The book is a sweeping study of 80 individuals, born between 1895 and 1985, and their experiences with literacy. At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Brandt’s definition of literacy that she uses for the book at length. In that definition, she calls literacy a “resource.” She explains this further by sharing a philosophy of the tools of literacy and their social contexts: “Reading and writing occur instrumentally as part of broader activities (for instance, working, worshiping, governing, teaching and learning, relaxing). It is these activities that give reading and writing their purpose and point” (3). The practices of literacy give meaning to literacy. Literacy cannot be monolithic or

defined by skill unless it is recognized as being a part of a context that *gives it meaning*. This is in essence an epistemological concern, one that resists seeing the skills of literacy in a void and seeks to draw out what literacy *does*.

Brandt's interviews, then, focus on the contexts in which individuals both learned and continued to engage with literacy through their lives. She examines the conditions in which literacy practices of her interviewees had to change. While speaking to four generations of members of the May family, Brandt observes how "each of the Mays developed literacy within key moments of economic transitions in their region. These transitions routed opportunities for reading, and writing, defined the shifting value of their skills, and in turn affected the way they practiced and passed on literacy to the next generation" (101). Not only is the generational and family context of the family's interpersonal literacy development interesting, but also Brandt makes a clear connection between how economies affect literacy training and practices. The topic of the connection between literacy and economics is one that has already been established in this project through the observation of how cultures that encounter English have had to fall or thrive when facing new currencies for literacy. Brandt, however, comes before that research and is able to narrow the social and economic implications of literacy practices to a small social network (a family), even down to the practices of individual members.

Brandt's interest in literacy and economics would continue beyond *Literacy in American Lives*. In fact, there would be two distinct yet closely related threads that she examines in her book and her further research: literacy and economics, and sponsors of literacy. I will discuss each of these in reverse order, as her writing about sponsors of literacy is discussed earlier in her scholarship.



One of the most important contributions of Deborah Brandt's body of scholarship is her research on what she calls "sponsors of literacy" (1998). Brandt describes the concept as rising from her interviews: she began to notice trends wherein individuals, both explicitly mentioned and latent, "appeared in formative roles at the scenes of literacy learning" (167). Brandt lists the sorts of people who could be considered "sponsors of literacy," such as older relatives, parents, teachers, clergy, bosses, military superiors, editors and influential professional writers. Although the assistance of sponsors is at times an essential component of literacy practice, Brandt also acknowledges the power of the sponsor. "Most of the time, however, literacy takes its shape from the interest of its sponsor...obligations toward one's sponsor run deep, affecting what, why, and how people write and read" (168). The power of the sponsor is closely linked with the literacy learner's political position as well. "Poor people and those from low-caste racial groups have less consistent, less politically secured access to literacy sponsors...Differences in their performance are attributed to family background or to particular norms and values operating within different ethnic groups or social classes. But in either case, much more is usually at work." To illustrate a sponsor of literacy, I would point to Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundaries* wherein teachers like Mr. MacFarland and Dr. Carothers take the young and poor Rose under their wing and fed him a steady diet of books, writing and discussion to rouse his interest in researching literacy himself. Likewise, Reynolds (2005) identifies how mass-market magazines situated (and sold) colleges as primary "literacy sponsors" in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to high school graduates aspiring to become middle class professionals. The literacy sponsor is certainly a powerful figure; he or she is able to

impart knowledge and teach skills that will elevate the socio-economic prospects of otherwise socially immobile people.

Just as well, Brandt's research suggests that it is easy to observe literacy being developed with sponsors as part of an existing social structure, not necessarily revolutionizing that structure. Brandt observes the effect of literacy sponsors in two ways: "They help to organize and administer stratified systems of opportunity and access, and they raise the literacy stakes in struggles for competitive advantage." Moreover, "Sponsors enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones" (178-9). The power of the sponsor varies by context. Presumably, both Brandt and Hernandez-Zamora would acknowledge the teachers who forced English learning on Native children as being "sponsors of literacy," even though there could be debate regarding the destructive influence of that practice. Nonetheless, the term offers a helpful vocabulary in understanding not only the power of social contexts in literacy learning, but gives a name to the human element other than the mere "receiver" of literacy.

One of Brandt's recent contributions (2005) to literacy focuses on understanding literacy in the context of the knowledge economy. Brandt writes, "The knowledge economy is associated heavily with brain power, creativity, and other so-called human capital. It is also associated with processes of learning, communication, and social networking, almost always technology enhanced" (167). Brandt researches the roles of writing by knowledge economy workers such as attorneys, lobbyists, web designers, and accountants, to name a few. She explores the meditational means of writing in a knowledge economy. Interestingly, she sees how writing sometimes becomes a labor

practice that individuals will not be listed as “authors” for. For instance, a web designer creating a webpage does not get to take an author credit for the job; rather he is representing, mediating, and the ethos of the company through his labor. As Brandt writes, “This captures the process by which literacy serves the needs of a knowledge economy, as writers function as tool-making tools. Indeed, from a production perspective, the mediational work of writing becomes quite pronounced...” (178). The discussion of the labor of writing, the interactions between literacy and economies continues work in understanding the social elements of literacy practices. While she does not necessarily discuss sponsors, they loom large as clients, supervisors and teachers who have reinforced an approach to literacy wherein the writer his or herself has become, perhaps unwittingly, a new sort of sponsor: one who develops the tools of literacy for clients. Brandt discusses these ideas elsewhere (2009), but her focus remains on the role of individuals and sponsors of literacy. One notable omission in her work is an exploration of the roles institutions shape literacy practices. While primary, secondary, and post-secondary education usually become the locus of literacy research, several institutions, such as the ILGWU’s Educational Department, warrant investigation as sponsors of literacy as well.

This section only briefly touches upon the important work of Deborah Brandt on literacy scholarship. However, I have highlighted a few components that are essential to my formulation of literacy. First, perhaps obviously, literacy is located within a deeply social context. As individuals practice and acquire literacy tools, it is usually done in a context of social necessity. While many people may read or write for pleasure, this experience comes after an individual has a sufficient handle on the functional

components of literacy. Literacy in this sense is functional only insofar as the user understands literacy's social value. Second, sponsors of literacy may be both edifying and oppressing, but their common traits are their access and political capital that shapes how literacy learners understand and encode values in their own writing. Finally, literacy practices are closely connected to economic and labor concerns. The work of a writer, already understandably immersed in a social context, is likewise part of larger, more disjointed contexts as well. The next section will expand upon research some have done to understand the social component of literacy better.

### **Evolving Definitions of Literacy**

For some time in literacy scholarship, literacy's definition was contingent upon the type of data that was available to judge literacy rates in the past. Only recently has literacy become defined by its own terms. I have already identified Brandt's description of literacy as the way I use the term throughout this project, but Brandt's definition is hardly the only one. However, scholarship seems uninterested in codifying definitions, perhaps because to think in that way is to seemingly "fence in" literacy. This project proceeds understanding that the definition of literacy may be up for revision from time to time, but also believing that definitions are important in establishing workable frameworks for research.

The assumed relationship between literacy and economic advantage is what Hamilton describes as, to use Charles Taylor's term, a "social imaginary." She writes, narratives of literacy are embedded in broader narratives of contemporary social and moral order... Taylor suggests that social imaginaries are not explicitly argued

like theories, but are carried implicitly through images, stories, and legends as unquestioned assumptions that frame our understanding of ourselves and others, and which give familiar significance to features of the social world. (p. 7)

Taylor identifies three main modern social imaginaries that persist through North American contexts; the economy, the notion of public space as a forum for citizens to communicate, and the ideal of a self-governing and sovereign democratic population (8). Hamilton does not believe literacy itself is a key component of the social imaginaries Taylor describes, but she observes literacy's place in both encoding and being defined by these imaginaries. Literacy is commodified by the modern economy, existing as a form of currency and functional and high-value good that should be traded and nurtured for the public good. Literacy offers a common language and communication apparatus that allows public space to operate, and those who lack the requisite literacy skills to enter the public space and debate the issues of the day are doomed to the margins indefinitely. Finally, Hamilton observes that literacy "is seen as one of the key technologies of governance and self-governance that produce ideal citizens in a democratic society" (9). The sorts of social imaginaries Hamilton identifies through Taylor have substantial implications for post-colonial research, but I will cut her work off here for now and acknowledge an important component of her theoretical work—that literacy can best be understood by the context of the systems in which it operates. This sort of understanding of literacy makes base function a component of a complex and more social whole. At this point, literacy cannot be understood through rubrics of function alone.

## Chapter 2: Theory in Rhetoric, Language, and Power

The primary theoretical concern of this project is the rhetorical nature of literacy. The previous chapter argues that the connection between rhetoric and literacy is close, so much so that this project seeks to understand exactly what that relationship looks like. Theoretically, this work relies upon the work of five individuals; Aristotle, Marcus Tullius Cicero, Quintilian, Antonio Gramsci, and Pierre Bourdieu. I choose these thinkers for two reasons. In the case of the classical rhetoricians (Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian), I want to establish a baseline of understanding the role of rhetoric in learning, particularly as it may be germane to literacy. I acknowledge that the political economies of Ancient Greece and Rome would not provide the same access to literacy education as New York City in the 1920s. Moreover, the role of writing as a literacy activity is controversial in their time. However, they have much to offer about the general quality of rhetoric and education.

The more recent thinkers (Gramsci and Bourdieu) are noticeably not rhetoricians. However, each contributes to a complex element of this research. Gramsci wrote about the role of worker education and how such programs could lead to a “workers’ intellectual tradition.” Bourdieu, in his *Language as Symbolic Power* offers a comprehensive examination of contexts and institutional implications to language use. Bourdieu’s work foregrounds an understanding that language has situated meaning, and provides certain access to different types of speakers. This concern is particularly germane to the expansion of English language learning. While some other scholars may supplement the work these five, the work I discuss here assists in establishing a

theoretical tradition to understanding the connections between rhetoric, language, and power that influences how individuals think about literacy.

This chapter starts by identifying the ways in which each of these thinkers theorized rhetoric, education, and language, and how their work could come to help me better theorize literacy. At the end of the section, I offer a more thorough consideration of why I believe theory about speech may be helpful in understanding a rhetorically-informed approach to teaching literacy and writing. For now, I will simply forecast that for all of the discussion of speech that these theorists engage, they all make clear that rote skill in speech does not alone lead to excellence in rhetoric. In some cases, rote ability is subsidiary to work and thinking in other, seemingly unrelated, subjects.

The ability to communicate would seem to be taken for granted by most of these theorists. Questions of access to institutions will not arise in earnest until Gramsci and Bourdieu come along. However, I believe that in expounding on the objectives of rhetoric and the rhetorical education these thinkers actually offer a revolutionary understanding of how language, education, and rhetoric are inextricably linked. For the purposes of this study, although the work of the ILGWU education department may have been for the intellectual, social, and psychological growth of its members, the more ambitious goal may have been the implications of the curricula on a more general rhetorical education. No student is forced to take on a rhetorical education, but there is certainly something to be said for the fact that such an education was made accessible to these students in the first place. Those who may want to go on and engage their political surroundings (that is, the usual locus of rhetorical activity) could, and the rhetorical education of the ILGWU education department would be assistance in that endeavor.

This chapter theorizes and describes the rhetorical education in history, theory, and pedagogy in an effort to define the sort of education the ILGWU education department chose to engage. This objective admittedly shades my reading of these thinkers, but in exploring their work, my fidelity is to their ideas of the strength of a thorough rhetorical education and not the ways their social positions shaped who they thought could (or in some cases, *should*) be able to engage with the political contexts of their times.

### **Aristotle**

I draw upon Aristotle mainly because I believe his definition of “rhetoric” is necessary to establish early in this discussion of theory. Aristotle defines rhetoric in his *The “Art” of Rhetoric* as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (p. 15). It is simple, precise, and useful for my considerations here. I will not spend too much time here refuting his writings elsewhere in his book, as I would not agree with many of the assertions he makes later. Rather, I will briefly explain the utility I see in his definition.

Aristotle’s interests in the “possible means of persuasion” and rhetoric affirms the distinct social and communicative roles of rhetoric. Rhetoric is a social art, and cannot exist, so it seems, unless the one practicing this art is made to stand before an interlocutor. Moreover, since the means of persuasion are “possible,” it is not prescriptive but exploratory. One must learn through situations, trials, and errors in an effort to understand persuasion better. Importantly, all of this is done “in reference to any subject whatever.” This does not suggest that the rhetor needs to be a polymath (well, perhaps it



was, but I will get to that a little later) but rather, as I understand the definition, the “any subject” speaks to the breadth of rhetorical utility. Aristotle writes, “This is the function of no other of the arts, each of which is able to instruct and persuade in its own special subject.” Rhetoric’s “rules are not applied to any particular definite class of things” (p. 15). The utility of rhetoric is written into its definition.

Aristotle’s primary contribution to this chapter is his definition of rhetoric. My understanding of what makes something *rhetorical*, and how I analyze a rhetorical concern comes through this prism. Using Aristotle’s understanding of rhetoric, I believe rhetorical concerns are those topics that individuals want to persuade about, but perhaps have not studied or executed yet. In the context of the “rhetorical concerns of sponsors of literacy” in my second research question, denote the topics the sponsors of literacy must deal with themselves and in turn think about as they teach rhetorical and language skills to others.

## **Cicero**

While Aristotle offers a useful and broad definition of rhetoric, Cicero, in his *De Oratore*, offers a more thorough examination of the role rhetoric plays in civic and political engagement. *De Oratore* represents an address to Cicero’s brother, Quintus, and explains many of Cicero’s views on rhetoric in sharp contrast to those (we can infer from Cicero’s writing) from Quintus. For instance, it was Cicero’s belief that rhetoric and eloquence “is dependent upon the trained skill of highly educated men...” yet we are led to believe that Quintus thought differently; he believed that eloquence should “be separated from the refinements of learning and made to depend on a sort of natural talent

and on practice” (7). Cicero’s viewpoint expends upon his insistence on the role of training through education, not natural talent alone, on the quality of an orator. Rhetoric may seem to be an art that is without a preexisting branch, but in fact, Cicero observes rhetoric “has its sources in more arts and branches of study than people suppose” (13). Indeed, to Cicero, the study of rhetoric is bound in the study of other arts. One cannot rely upon rote technical competence of oratory alone. Cicero argues that “a knowledge of very many matters must be grasped, without which oratory is an empty and ridiculous swirl of verbiage” (13-5). This position on the relationship between rhetoric, language, and education is not unique to Cicero alone. Indeed, Gramsci and Bourdieu offer similar observations about language and power, and how education seemingly bridges the two. This is not to speak of Quintilian, the eternal pedagogue whose interests in rhetoric go without a need for introduction. Yet Cicero’s opinions on education, rhetoric, and language are noteworthy because of how clearly he establishes this relationship in *De Oratore*.

In Book I of *De Oratore*, Cicero recalls a dialogue that was reported to him between Crassus and some of his friends about the nature of politics. It should be understood that Crassus plays a rhetorical role himself, as Cicero is using Crassus to illustrate his own points to Quintus. Crassus identifies that even in the realm of politics, there is no greater skill in politics than oratory, and that nothing in politics can move without a skilled rhetor. Crassus asserts, “the wise control of the complete orator is that which chiefly upholds not only his own dignity, but the safety of countless individuals and the entire state” (p. 27). Indeed, in Crassus’ opinion, rhetoric is what controls the state, and there is no greater art to master in the course of human political affairs than

rhetoric. Yet this assertion is not meant to be dismissive of other courses of study. As one of Crassus' friend's observes how the operation of the state seems to happen without the clear hand of a great rhetor behind it, Crassus is compelled to perfect his assertion. In a shortsighted view of rhetoric, it may seem that good oratory alone might have little in common with the movements of politics. Yet the well-trained and thoughtful orator ought to engage in a field of study so great in depth that distinctions between the other branches of study come together. Crassus asks, "If, on the other hand, you narrow the idea of oratory to nothing but the speaking in ordered fashion, gracefully and conspicuously, how, I ask, could your orator ever attain so much, if he were to lack that knowledge whereof you people deny him the possession? For excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter he speaks about" (p. 37). This is the theoretical linchpin to my theoretical position that rote linguistic skill offers us little in the way of truly understanding if an individual's language training prepares them for participation in democracy. Rather, a thorough education in many topics, of which linguistic competence is one element.

Rhetorical training, as Crassus says, is similar to the training of the poet. Crassus observes that the poet, like orator, "sets no limits or boundaries to his claims, such as would prevent him from ranging whither he will with the same freedom and license as the other" (pp. 51-3). Another similarity between the poet and the orator is the seeming a-scientific approaches to their work. At least, in a strict sense. Crassus is asked by his friends if rhetoric can be boiled down to a science, that is, can a set of rules be developed that will predict an outcome based on previous observations? Just as the science of astronomy may help one predict where the stars will be in a few days, could rhetoric help

an orator properly predict the way an audience will receive an argument? Crassus reluctantly concedes that if rhetoric cannot offer the same sort of rigor in experimentation that the sciences can. However, Crassus affirms that what rhetoric does offer is a framework of strategies that can be adjusted through the experience of the speaker (p. 77). It makes sense that an orator who holds an expansive body of knowledge of many topics may also be able to develop his own frameworks in the service of developing such rules.

The positions of Cicero affirm the relationships between language, education, and rhetoric, yet I cannot write of Cicero without addressing the barriers that Cicero sees to oration in the first place. Crassus mentions that “natural talent is the chief contributor to the virtue of oratory” (p. 81). Crassus believes the capacity for invention, exposition, voice, and memory may be taught on some level, but that the individual who suffers from deficiencies in these categories is presumed to have a deficiency as an orator. While I will agree that there may be some credence to what Crassus says, in the context of modern oratory the chief contributor of *being heard* as an orator has a greater interest in access than talent. As Cicero was writing, those who were born to the proper homes were presumed to have a sort of natural talent of their own. It was in their property, their names, their tributes to the state that they were allowed to become active member of the polis and likewise able to hold sway over the decisions of the community by already being recognized as a component of that institution. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we may see some of the same ways institutions operate.

I want to illustrate Cicero’s larger point by describing how his conception of language skill might have operated in the early twentieth-century. It would not be

difficult to imagine the immigrant from eastern and southern Europe, whose mind may be as sharp as that of any native-born American, but whose so-called “natural talents” were in the wrong tongue. Moreover, moving across an ocean and having to deal with new institutions and persons speaking more languages than at home (not necessarily English alone) is sure to have some bearing on the way “natural talents” become appraised. Cicero is not concerned with the language of immigrants, and as such offers no critique of Latin (or Greek, for that matter) for what elements of access they provide speakers. For Cicero, the ability to speak is its own power.

Indeed, it is more important here to return to Crassus’ wise observation about the true power of oratory. Namely, that “excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter he speaks about.” This is the sort of spirit that this discussion of theory seeks to borrow from Cicero. While the faculties of speech are important, the move toward excellence in speaking, (as well as civic participation) is bound to how well the orator speaks and what he or she knows. More specifically, what he or she knows about the subjects that are of the immediate concern. This is why a broad education seems to be a hallmark of a truly rhetorical education. The ideal Ciceronian orator must transcend him or her self to take on a multitude of subjects as theirs, in addition to the eloquence of speech. What we may call a rhetorical education may also be one that involves more than rhetoric alone.

A discussion about the rhetorical education should spend some time with the work of Quintilian, which is where this text moves to next. Quintilian offers a thorough understanding of what sort of curriculum the orator must take on for success. While some of the same socio-cultural assumptions exhibited by Cicero will be on display in

Quintilian's work, it is important to keep in mind that the breadth of the course of study he identifies is more important than necessarily *who* can endeavor to take it on. To this end, the rhetorical education remains expansive and difficult, but always oriented toward the participation of the pupil in the discussions of politics and governance that keep the social life of the republic moving.

## **Quintilian**

It is difficult to set forth a theoretical consideration in the service of a distinctly adult education program through Quintilian. Quintilian's most important work on the education of rhetoric, his *Institutio Oratoria*, mainly takes up concerns dealing with the education of children and youth. His instructions in the early part of the book deal with issues of nursing and parenting, as well as the importance of learning grammar and pronunciation at an early age. Quintilian also takes essentially classist positions about who *should* be educated (skewing toward the wealthy and politically connected). Just as with Cicero, the positions Quintilian holds regarding class is related to his context. There would have been little cause in advocating for the education of *capite censi* and slaves; they did not have access to the political discussions of the day. Even though their hands may have toiled for the Roman Republic, their words were muted.

Quintilian's social positions necessarily preclude his (and Cicero's, for that matter) inclusion in my research. Rather, their work is most helpful when it touches upon the ideals of the rhetorical education. For instance, one important distinction of Quintilian's work is his observations about the nature of rhetoric. For Quintilian, rhetoric is a *practical art*. Of the *practical arts*, Quintilian writes, "their end is action, it is

achieved by action, and once the act has been performed, nothing remains to do” (2.18). While rhetoric borrows from other categories of arts, (Quintilian identifies these arts as “poetic” and “theoretical”) the work of rhetoric relies upon practice. He writes, “rhetoric consists of action, for it is by this that it accomplishes what belongs to its duty.” With the “duty” of rhetoric so closely bound to “action” I believe that today’s scholar may make a syllogism wherein the access to this duty may be opened to accommodate contemporary times. If the duty of rhetoric in the time of Quintilian is action, then the study of rhetoric is only important to those who have access to executing those actions. If the duty of rhetoric in the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States is still action, the study of rhetoric is important to a far larger scope of people. As democracy has opened the door of who can participate in administrative action, so it has opened the door of who may be trained toward that action. The work of Quintilian is still useful to us today, even if Quintilian would not endorse who was provided access to the education he outlines.

One of the similarities between Cicero and Quintilian is their broad understanding of what could be included in the study of rhetoric. Quintilian writes; “I hold that the subject matter of rhetoric is everything which is submitted to it for speaking” (2.21). Quintilian quotes Cicero at length as he describes the objections that are brought to his assertion. However, Quintilian also makes a point to acknowledge the role of expertise in contrasts to the orator. Quintilian points out that the musician will know more about music and the architect will know more about building than the orator, and that the common illiterate country dweller may know more about his own case as he pleads before the court than the educated orator. The important distinction is that when the subject matter of rhetoric is everything submitted to it for speaking, it must be observed

that from in many cases the learned crafts ought not to need to be spoken for. That said, the orator who is instructed on music or building will speak better when acting *as orator* on the topics than the layman. The orator needs not be the master of all crafts and arts, but master of the topics about which he speaks. In considering pedagogy, the necessity is not so much in studying broadly for the sake of studying broadly; it is in part learning that which is applicable to speaking. Anything that rests outside the realm of what is a part of a case or oration is not being used as a practical art; it is instead a theoretical art.

While I have spent some time discussing Quintilian's work in his first two books of the *Institutio*, he does not discuss the role of studies outside rhetoric until the last book. It is in the 12<sup>th</sup> book that Quintilian observes the education of the orator on rhetoric to be completed and that the instruction is now, as he puts it, "swept out to sea." In addition, quoting Virgil, "sky all around, and all around the deep" (12.1). Clever chiasmus aside, Quintilian's students are now left to their own devices, as well as their own studies to pursue. They are to become "*vir bonus dicendi peritus*"—the good man skilled at speaking—but such a course is not one that can easily be described. Quintilian insists that a study of virtue is essential to becoming a good man speaking well, but also knows that once students are outside of his tutelage, such evolving self-instruction may be difficult to engage. One area Quintilian insists is a fine place to study is in history. It is in history where the orator can provide lessons of how things have transpired (12.4). Interestingly, Quintilian includes "the fictions of great poets" as well. In an instance of keen rhetorical insight, Quintilian acknowledges that while the works of the poets may be understood to be exaggerated or changed for poetic effects, the reverence with which people hold the stories, or the clear moral lesson from those histories are sometimes more important than



the factual chronicle of what happened. This is a judgment to be made about a particular audience, but the wisdom behind the suggestion is useful; the story a nation uses to tell itself about its character is important to its development. It behooves the orator to know which stories, historical and imaginary, shape that character.

It is in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the 12<sup>th</sup> book that Quintilian engages a long meditation on style it is worthy to note here that the considerations of style focus on the appropriateness of which style goes with which audience. He takes an interesting aside to make clear that, although he reveres the work of those who came before him in describing the correct style with which to address an audience, he concedes that the practical matters of a case or audience may require adjusting style to suit the age of the times. This concession is followed by acknowledging that one of the most foolish things that an orator can choose is set a particular type of style as a standard. In an attention to audience, the orator must remain vigilant to address the needs of the case and the whims of the audience first and not be so drawn into their own style that they forget the practical and actionable essence of the work they are supposed to be doing.

It is especially at the end of his *Institutio* that Quintilian's words warrant the most heed. Concerns about style—when to use which style with a particular audience—is reserved for the end of the curriculum. Indeed, it is the work of the orator to learn such distinctions by their own practices in trial and error. The education to that point has been to prepare them to study rhetoric alone, and in the process of practice.

Quintilian offers four important theoretical pieces to the work of this project. First, like Cicero, he affirms that the work of studying rhetoric is a practical art, one that is dependent upon action as its ends. This sort of position calls all further concerns into

the role of language and power together through speech. The study of rhetoric is essentially social, political, and action-oriented. Second, he continues the work of Cicero in identifying that that education of the orator must be expansive and include all subjects, but he makes the distinction that those subjects are worthy of study only insofar as they are related to speaking. It would follow that the rhetorical education values multidisciplinary, but only insofar as it is necessary to the orator's case. Third, the study of rhetoric includes a study of history insofar as it serves the orator to better understand the tales that raise the character of its audience. While the works of Virgil may be poetry and take license with facts, their revered role in the society Quintilian writes in cannot be denied, and the orator who is cognizant of these histories and their place in society benefits himself greatly. Fourth, and perhaps most tellingly, the last concern that an orator must practice in order to perfect is style. The orator's ability to read an audience's need for stylistic flourishes, plain speech versus authoritative diction, as well as the use of rhetorical effects must match the situation in which he speaks. This comes with the maturity of adulthood to consider these variables, and not an element of the pedagogy of the young.

### **Antonio Gramsci**

The work of Antonio Gramsci, while it comes from the same geographic area as Cicero and Quintilian, is a marked departure from their work for one key reason; he acknowledged the possibilities of adult education for those who were not in the upper classes. This is an important distinction, as I no longer need to spend time trying to make

excuses for the culturally-biased shortcomings of his predecessors in this chapter.

Gramsci's work is cognizant of the type of democracy readers might recognize today, and for that reason his work is especially resonant in its efforts to open access to a larger portion of the population than Cicero and Quintilian would have.

Of all the theorists mentioned so far, Gramsci is the closest to where the work of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union was politically. An Italian born in Sardinia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gramsci was attentive to labor issues brought about by the industrial revolution. He was especially attentive to the labor and cultural issues caused by Fordism, and wrote several entries in his *Prison Notebook* analyzing it. More importantly, he observed how hegemonies rise and the role that education of the middle and lower classes play in reinforcing oppressive hegemonies. While he does not discuss the topic of rhetoric overtly, his concerns about way categories such as "intellectuals" and "non-intellectuals" are established tell a lot about how ideologies about class come to inform ideologies about class and education.

Gramsci observes that traditionally, so-called "non-intellectuals" were allied with the laborers who relied on "muscular-nervous effort" while so-called "intellectuals" were better at the elaborations of the mind. To Gramsci, this was a false dichotomy. He observes that these two classes of persons could best be described as *Homo Sapiens* (man the thinker) and *Homo Faber* (man the maker). Each of these designations both identifies what an individual can (and perhaps to some, *should*) be capable of, and leaves little room for transverse. While Gramsci is primarily using his work as a mirror toward the Fascist Italian government that imprisoned him in 1926 and wrecked injustice across the

country, it would not be difficult to find similar parallels to how immigrants and lower classes were thought of in the United States. Perhaps during the present as well.

Gramsci believed that “each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is he is a ‘philosopher,’ an artist, a man of taste...”

(p. 9) Yet Gramsci’s statement is more interested in the proclivities of the worker, not his or her training. Indeed, he saw the need for workers’ education to cultivate the mind for a revolution in intellectualism. Gramsci writes, “In the modern world, technical education closely bound to industrial labor even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of a new type of intellectual.” (p. 9) I hasten to add that in all of my reading of Gramsci and the ILGWU, I have not found explicit references to either by the other. Despite this, given the involvement of Gramsci with various Socialist and Communist causes in Italy, and the many Italian socialists who would later occupy the membership of the ILGWU (especially Antonio Antonini’s Local 89), it is conceivable that a connection existed between Gramsci and the ILGWU. Yet in the absence of evidence, what Gramsci writes about the goals of a workers’ education is closely in line with some of the objectives the ILGWU outlines in its Education Department.

The goal of this research is not to expand upon coincidence, but to examine the theoretical relationships between literacy, language and rhetoric. Gramsci is not often aligned with the great thinkers of rhetoric, although his work on hegemony sometimes finds a home in the work of rhetoricians. Gramsci writes at greater length of what he believes is important for the “new type of intellectual” that he discussed earlier. Namely, “the mode of being the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in

practical life, as constructor, organizers, ‘permanent persuader’ [his emphasis] and not just a simple orator” (p. 11). Discussions of persuasion and the “orator” are forays into rhetoric. There is an expectation for Gramsci that the education of the worker has an important rhetorical function. For Gramsci, the work of education is rhetorical; there is an expectation that the development of intellectual facilities is linked closely to the work of the proletariat and the general citizenry.

Gramsci argues that the need for education for workers is important because of how the lower classes have been shut out from the ideologies of power since the middle ages. He observes how “it is worth noting that the elaboration of intellectual strata in concrete reality does not take place on the terrain of abstract democracy, but in accordance with very concrete traditional historical processes. Strata have grown up which traditionally ‘produce’ intellectuals and these strata coincide with those which have specialized in ‘saving’” (p. 11). This means to suggest that the distinctions between classes have affected the recognition of intellectual ability through schooling. If workers want to be taken seriously as an intellectual force, they must come into their own as an intellectual group. Gramsci writes, “One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing toward dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer ‘ideologically’ the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest are made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals” (p. 10). Gramsci’s interest in “conquest” is not of great interest to me, but his observation about the power of intellectual might in the struggle between “intellectuals” and “workers” is astute: if workers are to assimilate as

traditional intellectuals, they must rise from a distinct and organically-grown approach to education.

The only critique I have for Gramsci is his lack of discussion of the role of language in his writing about intellectuals, education, and rhetoric. Concerns about language could not have been too far from his mind. The language of Sardinians and the multiple language of the *mezzogiorno* of Italy were (and at times continue to be) at odds with goals by the Fascists to unify Italy under one, namely Tuscan, tongue. Yet I must also concede that the issues about language that the ILGWU faced would have been a bit more than Gramsci may have ever had to deal with. The ILGWU dealt with not only different languages, but also different *types* of languages. Yiddish, Russian, Polish, Italian and English represent five different groups of languages. Throw in Chinese later and the ILGWU looks like a miniature United Nations.

### **Pierre Bourdieu**

With all of these languages acknowledged, what Gramsci cannot offer in a discussion of language is made more available through Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's 1982 book, *Language and Symbolic Power* (I am using a 1991 translation) explores the complex role of language in political landscapes. Bourdieu's primary interests is in the way linguistics explains power, but in doing so, perhaps inadvertently asserts the important role of the study of rhetoric in the operations of linguistic power, especially for individuals who may not otherwise have access to such power.

Bourdieu affirms a belief that,

utterances receive their value (and their sense) only in relation to a moment; characterized by a law of price formation. The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speaker's competencies...it depends, in other words, on the capacity of various agents involved in the exchange to impose a criterion of appreciation most favorable to their own products. (67)

Bourdieu may believe he is thinking like a linguist, but he seems more interested in the extra-linguistic concerns of language. Just as the concern of rhetoric is not just speech, but also the means necessary for persuasion, Bourdieu is not interested in speech alone, but also the means necessary for favorable criterion from interlocutors. As Bourdieu states more explicitly immediately after the passage I just referenced, "This capacity [for evaluation] is not determined in linguistics alone." What, then, could he consider the evaluation mechanism through which interlocutors deem worthy language?

Bourdieu later states a belief that "...linguistic competence is not a simply technical capacity, but a statutory capacity with which technical capacity is generally paired, if only because it imposes the acquisition of the latter through the effect of statutory arbitration, as opposed to the commonly held belief that regards technical capacity as the basis for statutory capacity" (69). I argue that Bourdieu's assertion here aligns closely with my belief that the primary work of literacy is rhetorical; the rote ability to speak a language (what Bourdieu may identify as the "technical capacity") is subsidiary in many ways to the way the language is used (what Bourdieu may identify as the "statutory capacity"). The distinction between these terms is helpful as it invited a rhetorical understanding of literacy. As I have used as an example elsewhere, when one

person says to another “I brush my coat,” he or she may be technically competent in speech, but the situations that may arise to use that phrase, as well as the politically inoculate semantic meaning of the phrase does not allow the speaker to attain (nor spend) a great deal of linguistic capital through such speech.

Bourdieu explains that the issue at hand is one of *linguistic habitus*, which is to say, how individuals *learned* to speak. For Bourdieu, learning to speak is tied to particular social circumstances, and learning what and how to speak to social situations (81-2). He explains, “language is a body technique, and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one’s whole relation to the social world, and one’s whole socially informed relation to the social world are expressed” (86). The term “hexis” here is noteworthy, as it ties the work of this chapter on theory back to Aristotle. Aristotle wrote of hexis in his *Metaphysics*, as a way to conceptualize *having*. That is to say, it represents a sort of active condition (or possession) of some things as opposed to a passive retention. This is not a metaphor, but a clue into one’s ontological and epistemic understanding of the world. We may call language a hexis because it generally is constantly in use. The person who engages with strangers and friends uses certain language and speech markers that are actively regulated by the mind. For instance, a young woman receiving her suitor’s clearly thoughtfully handmade yet aesthetically inferior Valentine’s Day card must make active linguistic choices as to which consideration about the gift to mention upon receipt. She may insult her suitor by calling the gift ugly, even though the object is, or she may offer a tepid appreciation of the gift, choosing to focus on the thought behind it. In both situations, the choice of the speaker is representative of that individual’s grasp of not only rote linguistic



skill, but also more necessarily how that individual recognizes her social relationships. One could reasonably imagine that such a condition is exacerbated in written speech, as the opportunity to revise and edit allows an individual to focus more closely on how the language comes to represent his or her relationship to the social world.

Bourdieu's understanding of linguistic habitus as a dimension of bodily habitus is helpful in understanding his beliefs about the rites of institutions. Bourdieu's writing about institutions, particularly their communicative functions, is the essential lynchpin that draws together the ways in which language, literacy, and rhetoric are closely connected. He writes that "the act of institution is this an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it signifies to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be" (121). At first glance, this passage would seem to suggest an attitude toward institution that is generally oppressive, but the reality is that the institution itself is more neutral; Bourdieu emphasizes the *rites* of institutions. That said, the rites of institution is how institutions operate, and such power, enacted in communication, defines how individuals may approach those institutions.

To illustrate this point, consider a recently-arrived immigrant from Eastern Europe in the mid-1910s. There will be some institutions where this individual would be named in a native tongue, invited to speak to others in a similar language and prosper from the inclusion. If this individual were to step outside that community and engage other institutions, the experience may be starkly different. The inability to access a common tongue alone may be grounds for exclusion. Even if an institution were to invite

this individual to participate in its work, there may yet be difficulty in announcing the proper thing at the proper time for the maximal rhetorical effect. Language itself may be a concern some people can look beyond in an effort to be accommodating to a stranger, but the power of sound rhetorical judgment is its own topic. As Bourdieu later writes, “political action is possible because agents, who are part of the social world, have a (more or less) adequate knowledge of this world and because one can act on the social world by acting on their knowledge of this world” (127). If Bourdieu’s belief that rote linguistic competence alone does not take full advantage of the power of language has not yet been clear, he makes his point more precisely here.

Bourdieu’s interest was in the economy of language; how power and language were connected and interacted with each other. His work is noteworthy in the field of rhetoric because of how rhetorical his conclusions are, even though he may not admit as much himself. The idea that political action is related to one’s understanding of the social world may be taken for granted in most instances because of the general comfort individuals with linguistic currency have with powerful institutions. This comfort may be doubly so if the individual maintains an excellent understanding of how the institution operates (i.e., how rules are made, how leaders are chosen, what sort of discussion is appropriate for which institutions, and so forth). Yet consider the subjects of this study; immigrants in a time when media moves at a slower pace, when education is stratified and access to government necessities is limited. To be an outsider of any kind (poor, immigrant, black, orphaned, or widowed) is to have one’s name called by the institution as an outsider. In addition, individuals who may have been active politically in their homelands must now rework their political understanding of their new homes.

## **Rhetoric, Language, and Power in Conversation with Literacy**

This chapter is ultimately a testament to the power of rhetoric and the possibilities of literacy and language that are thought through rhetorically. Gramsci explains the necessity of a proletarian intellectualism that can address the so-called “traditional intellectualism” of the hegemonic institutions of the elites. The essence of the proletarian intellectualism is bound with language and social actions. Gramsci’s interest on capable speakers from the proletarian intellectual culture is ultimately a rhetorical concern. Bourdieu recognizes the ways in which linguistic competence alone cannot provide access and political engagement toward institutions that are powerful and established, that there must be a certain consideration with regard to the role of understanding the social situations of language and the ways such understandings make language more effective—a rhetorical proposition from Bourdieu if he ever offered one. Such observations from these thinkers are a reminder of the work of Aristotle, and his understanding of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever.” Indeed, rhetoric is such but the possible means of persuasion requires a particular sort of understanding of the world, one that can be provided through the work of education that keeps the rhetorical goals of its instruction clear. The attention of Cicero and Quintilian to the faculties of speech and the role of rhetoric in the exercise of power, both in discussion and action, reflects the sort of pedagogy that observes speech and language as access to power, and rhetoric is its tool.

It should come as no surprise as this project continues that the emphasis of literacy training aligns itself closely with the work of speech. Much of the discussion of

teaching English that I see in my data reflects teaching about speech as well. In this case, the presence of writing might be unexpected and novel. While individuals may define literacy through skills in reading, writing, and speaking a particular language, a rhetorical approach to literacy would suggest that the rhetorical situation of an argument better defines what is necessary for interaction. To this end, institutions that sponsor literacy also sponsor a particular approach to rhetoric, and if the study of the available means of persuasion privilege one modality over others, students, as readers, speakers, or writers, may only exercise rhetorical prudence only insofar as their literacy sponsors acknowledge where and how arguments occur.

While this chapter sets up an understanding of the relationships between rhetoric, language, power, and ultimately, literacy, the next section sets up the history of garment work and the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in the United States. The next chapter's emphasis on history, mixed with the theoretical work of this and the previous chapter, establishes the analytical approaches I take to my data later.

## **Chapter 3: A Brief History of Needlework in the United States, the ILGWU, and its Educational Department**

There are two ways to begin discussing the history of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union: through garment and through unions. This chapter offers contextual information necessary regarding the social context of the ILGWU and its Educational Department. The history of the ILGWU and garment workers is an integral part of the wider histories of the American labor movement and immigration in America. The history of garment labor unions eventually has influential implications reaching to the highest offices in United States government. The objective of this chapter is not to laud or highlight the work of labor unions in America, or contribute to literature that focuses on the historical impact of the group. Rather, this chapter establishes the economic and social exigencies of the garment industry in New York City, and how the history of that industry gave rise to the large and powerful International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, how the union organized an education program, and how that education program operated in its first twenty-five years.

The first part of this chapter describes the rise of ready-made garments and the garment manufacturing industry from the Pre-Civil War era through the early 1900s. This section includes a special emphasis on the development of the sewing machine, an essential tool for garment workers and the expansion of the garment industry. While the history of the technology like the sewing machine does not directly inform the formation of the ILGWU's Educational Department in 1914, the sewing machine is emblematic of the shifts in garment labor and the economies of the garment industry from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. In that period, labor shifted across

nationalities, genders, and class. This section profiles how changes in technology and labor economies helped establish of the garment-industry's place in the American Labor Movement.

The second part of this chapter briefly outlines some historical elements of the American Labor Movement, moving into a description of the early iterations of the ILGWU, the effect of European immigration on the union through its 1909 strike, and events up to the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire on March 25, 1911.

The third portion of this chapter will dedicate a substantial background into the causes, experiences, and effects of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. This event not only shapes American labor history, but also changes the way the union conducts its business and sees its outreach responsibilities. The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire occurred only three years before the ILGWU's Executive Board established the Educational Department, and the events surrounding the incident, especially after the fire, increased Union membership and provided a financial and student base for establishing educational programming.

The fourth section discusses the formation and beginnings of the Educational program, primarily through the work of its long-time Secretary Fannia Cohn. This section describes and sets up the economic, political, and social conditions that influenced the ILGWU Educational Department at different times in its existence. This section describes how the internal fighting within the ILGWU in the late 1920s and early 1930s interrupted educational programming, and how the organization staged its return.

The point of this chapter is to set up the exigencies of the ILGWU's Educational Department. While some of the information I present in this chapter may be interesting, it may seem at times like a stretch to go back to the invention of the sewing machine in

1854. Yet, even the invention of that technology, which is invented by a Jewish immigrant, is an important part of the narrative of immigrant presence in the garment industry. By 1914, generations of immigrants, particularly Russian Jewish, have passed through the garment industry, and this, I believe, affects how education and language became instantiated in the Educational Department of the ILGWU.

### **Dressmaking and Garment Working**

For much of human history, garments were made by individuals and by hand. Clothing made by lower classes tended to be done by the people wearing the clothes, or by the women of the house. Upper-class individuals would retain the services of a tailor whose job was to measure and manufacture the clothing to those specifications. Barthélemy Thimonnier, a French tailor, invented the first modern sewing machine in 1829.<sup>2</sup> The sewing machine was adopted a year later by the French army that purchased eighty machines for the military workshop. French tailors met the invention with scorn. The violence against the machines became so serious that in 1831 the French National Guard defended the workshop and arrested seventy-five tailors. Thimonnier fled to England where he further developed the machine, acquiring English and American patents by 1849 (Green, 1997, pp. 34-5).

In the United States, Issac Merritt Singer, a middle-aged Jewish machinist patented his first model of a sewing machine in 1854. The primary difference between Thimonnier's machine and Singer's was the type of stitch each machine created.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a longer history to the invention of the sewing machine. Englishman Thomas Saint designed a similar apparatus to the sewing machine in 1785, which was designed to embroider and sew leather. While several histories of ready-to-wear garments and the needle trades are available, the most thorough seems to be Nancy L. Green's *Ready-to-Wear and Ready to Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (1997) which informs this chapter.

Thomonnier's machine employed a chain-stitch, in which looped threads are sewn into each other to create a chain. The chain-stitch had been, to that point, the standard approach of hand-needlecraft. The flaw in the chain-stitch is that at any point that the stitch becomes loose, the whole garment can easily be unfurled. The Singer approach utilized a lockstitch and continuous threading. This meant that each stitch would lock the thread (so-to-speak) preventing the thread from becoming unfurled while feeding the thread to the needle continuously. On Singer's machine, the needle was powered by a foot pedal, which allowed the sewer to use both hands to guide the fabric. Hand powered machines, like Thomonnier's, generally allowed for about 20 stitches per minute. The foot pedal-operated machine could double that. Once electric versions Singer's machines became available, they could execute about 200 stitches per minute. Today's machines can go as fast as 8,000 stitches per minute, some can operate faster (Green, p. 35).

Singer's ingenuity with the mechanical aspects of the machines was matched only by his aggressive marketing approaches. He would establish showrooms with attractive women displaying the machines, complemented by newspaper advertisements, schools that would teach buyers how to operate the machine, and a mass production effort that made the machines relatively affordable. By the 1870s, the machines were available in France, replacing Thomonnier's in the military workshops (Green, p. 36).

The other important component to the quick popularization of the sewing machine was the rise of ready-to-wear clothing, fueled by the needs of the United States and French militaries. The Civil War in the United States required mass production of uniforms for the Union Army. Rather than measure each soldier, the Army created a set of clothing size standards so uniforms could be made quickly and sent to troops



immediately. The concept of standard sizing garments continues to be used today and created an efficient mechanism whereby fabric cutters and sewers could expedite the manufacture of garments of all sizes. The standard-sizing approach to production was picked up by the Second French Republic for military uniforms as well. The military workshops of the United States and France served as the first training schools for the widespread use of the sewing machine and led to independent tailors taking on the craft (Green, 1997, pp. 34-9). Worth noting is the fact that ongoing gender discrimination precluded women from using the sewing machine. The sewing machine was viewed as technically sophisticated and difficult to operate, and women were considered either not smart enough, not strong enough (usually both) to operate these machines (Green, pp. 37-9).

While professional needlecraft had once been the domain of male tailors, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, many of them women who learned how to sew their own clothes since youth, became a part of the expanding needle trades due to both an increased demand and the desire to support their newly-arrived families in the United States. Glenn (1990) explains that, preceding the migration of Eastern European Jews to the United States, the explosion in the Russian industrial economy created new economic opportunities for young Jewish women. While they would be paid sometimes half as much as their male counterparts, by the time Jewish families settled in the United States, families were well exposed to the idea of young women working away from home for pay that would supplement the family income.

The early Jewish sweatshops of New York City were located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, south of East Houston Street and east of Allen and Pike Streets, near

the Williamsburg Bridge. Many of the tenements that housed the early sweatshops still stand today. Their history is retold at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum where visitors can take a tour of the buildings, which have been staged to different eras in sweatshop history to offer a glimpse of what life was like for these families. The Lower East Side is of particular importance because 64 percent of all Jewish immigrants between 1899 and 1910 settled in this area. The rest spread to cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. By 1905, nearly 600,000 Russian Jewish immigrants had settled in New York City, making it the largest concentration of this population anywhere in the world outside Russia (U.S. Congress, 1911). Nearby, Italian Immigrants settled on and around Mulberry Street, just a few blocks west.

By the time Jewish and Italian immigrants arrived in the Lower East Side, demand for women's ready-made dresses was exploding. Retailers, trying to keep up with the demand, offered work to independent contractors, offering some amount of money for a certain number of garments to be completed by a certain date. This industrial model worked out to allow Jewish men to negotiate contracts and perform the work from their tenement living rooms. They would hire young Jewish women from the neighborhood to assist them with the work, working in the same space where the contractor's wife would tend to domestic duties (and performed some work herself) as well as the contractor's children. The term "sweatshop" originates from this setup; three to six individuals working in a small living room for long hours on garments. Not only the summer heat in a major urban center heated the room, but also because stoves had to remain operating so a worker would have a hot iron ready (Green, pp. 40-2).

The labor economy of this new garment industry was more fractured than the experienced needle workers who learned to sew their own clothes already knew. Runners, (often young boys) would deliver different components of the garment piecemeal from fabric cutters to the contractors. The contractor and his team would assemble the sleeves, cuffs, shirtwaists (blouses), cloaks, fringes, patches, and straps, which might arrive independently of each other in the sweatshop. The setup would usually involve the contractor sitting near the window operating the sewing machine while one of his employees fed the fabric through the machine. One or two other young women would perform the fine sewing that was not possible with the machine (such as attaching sleeves to a dress), or “finishing” a garment (adding frills, sewing sequins and other details to the dress). Sometimes there were pressers whose job was to iron and smooth out wrinkles from the garment. This was long, grueling work, and the workspace consisted only of a few tables and chairs. The work also existed in seasonal ebbs and flows, leading to periods of downtime for certain shops. As work became sparse, contractors would outbid each other to the lowest price to have some meager income (Green, pp. 40-3).

Women and children performed much of the hand needlework in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a youth at the St. Mary’s Industrial School (a reformatory and orphanage) in Baltimore, Maryland, from 1904 to 1914, future baseball icon, Herman “Babe” Ruth was enrolled in a mandatory trade program in needlework from the time he was 10 until 17. Ruth was proficient as a tailor and would spend days as a joiner sewing collars onto dress shirts for the Oppenheimer shirt company for a small amount of money paid to his student account. As biographer Robert Creamer (1974) notes, “[Ruth’s] widow said that one of the fascinating sights of her married life was

watching her husband, when he was making \$80,000 a year, carefully turning the collars of his \$30 Sulka shirts by himself, and doing a perfect job” (p. 38). Child labor was a constant presence in the garment industry, and with these otherwise powerless groups performing much of the labor, large garment companies could get clothing made quickly and cheaply.

The labor setup involving immigrants, women, and children led to massive exploitation. In the context of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, young Jewish immigrant women worked at the pleasure of their shop-owners. Everyone in the shop spoke the same language and practiced the same religion, ensuring that the Sabbath was indeed kept holy. While such a setup may be comforting to individuals half worked from their homes, the setup also made interactions with individuals from other cultures and integration into the citizenry of the United States difficult. Moreover, the reputation as an incompetent worker spread rapidly, regardless of the veracity of the claims (Green, p. 52).

However, the most difficult part of the contractor-worker relationship was the oftentimes reliance on the worker, especially unskilled and freshly arrived immigrants, on the contractor’s training and development. The division of labor in the garment industry meant that a new unskilled worker could be taught one small task and in a short period and gain enough proficiency to execute the task quickly. This would involve skills such as sleeve-setting, binding, trimming, marking, making buttonholes or cuffs, and joining (such as a skirt to a waist). This is an abbreviated list of possible jobs a worker could have in a sweatshop, yet training in only one skill made the mobility through the industry difficult. A marker would not know how to bind, and the girl making buttonholes did not

know how to set sleeves. There was no incentive for the contractor to teach these skills if the worker might take the skills to another shop for more money, requiring the contractor to seek new employees again. Moreover, in the mostly male-run shops, anxieties among the owners abounded as they sought to define masculinity through the more seemingly danger aspects of the work. Often, only men could operate the expensive sewing machines. Seen as a heavy, difficult-to-manage tool, the sewing machine would stratify the labor of the garment industry. Women, it followed, were neither strong nor bright enough to operate such a complex machine. The most useful and marketable skill in the garment trade, the ability to operate a sewing machine, was mostly inaccessible to women in the late nineteenth century (Green, p. 56).

Near the beginning of the twentieth century, garment companies, realizing that women already received substantially less financial remuneration for their labor than men doing the same job, started large factories with rooms full of sewing machines and hired young women to come work for them as operators. The setup benefited the garment manufacturer; the manufacturer no longer had to deal with independent contractors and could more closely monitor the expenses, output, and quality of the garments produced. By 1912, most men in the garment trades made more than \$14 per week. 83% of women made less than \$14 per week (Labor, April 28, 1914). Manufacturers were not concerned with the effects the division of labor had on perceptions of masculinity; if a woman could operate a sewing machine for a few dollars less per week than a man, why not hire the woman? Not needing to take into account the overhead the independent contractor would need to cover, manufacturers could also offer wages that were competitive, if not better than the sweatshops offered. Many manufacturers would provide sewing machines and

subsequently garnish a charge for rental of the machine and use of electricity (once electricity was available) from the worker's paycheck. Girls making slightly more money would also see the transferable advantage of taking the skills she developed in knowing how to use a sewing machine with her should she ever decide to seek employment elsewhere.

The factories that rose from this new business model were mainly composed of women, but this time the women were not all from the same cultural background. Irish, Italian, Jewish, and other cultures started to appear in the same shops. Girls who wanted to speak to each other would need to learn the other girls' language or English.

Cultural tensions ran high at times (which I will discuss with more depth in the next section). Factory owners were often Christian, reflected in a six-day workweek that would observe the Christian Sabbath, but required all Jewish employees to work despite their own religious observances. This issue became difficult for all sides leading some manufacturers to famously post signs explaining that failure to show up to work on Saturday may result in termination on the factory door every Friday.

This section sets up the primary exigencies in the garment trades that would come later, especially with the formation of the ILGWU, as well as the subsequent strike of 1910, Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911, and the formation of the ILGWU's Educational Department. The full history of the garment trade is of course longer, interesting, and important to the development of labor issues in the United States. For now, this history explains the important role of immigration, technology (in the form of the sewing machine), and labor economies that would come to define the workers and their union.

## **The Rise of the ILGWU**

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union began officially in 1901. It started primarily as an amalgam of the other smaller unions that existed within ladies' garment trades. Before the International, cloak workers, fabric cutters, shirtwaist sewers, assemblers, and other specialty traders operated out of their own unions and locals. These groups were otherwise small, powerless, and unless some other social connection preceded their relationships with other areas of the garment trade, likely did not know the conditions of their contemporaries. Initially, the mostly Jewish and immigrant ILGWU attempted to entice American or American-born daughters of Irish and German immigrants to join. These efforts were unsuccessful. The socialist-inclined and almost entirely Jewish International experienced challenges reaching across cultural and economic lines. These difficulties caused male union leaders to abandon drives to bring in "shiksies" (a derogatory Yiddish term for non-Jewish women) (Green, pp. 220-2).

The issues in organizing were in part cultural; however, it was probably because of the operation of Yiddish as the lingua franca of the International. By 1905, Russian Jews made up 50 percent of garment workers while Italians made up 35 percent (Dray, 2010). The International resisted efforts to establish Local boards that used languages other than English until the International established the Local 89, containing a primarily Italian-speaking membership, in 1919. Before this Local 89, the 8,000 Italian-descent garment workers operated through a branch of the Local 25, the largest Local in the International. Within fifteen years, the Local 25 boasted a membership of 40,000, and its General Secretary, Luigi Antonini, became a fixture as a First Vice-President of the

International next to International President David Dubinsky (Italian Labor Bureau, 1933).

The first real test in the solidarity of the International came with the 1909 strike against the Rosen Brothers, a manufacturer that at the time sought subcontractors that had no affiliation to the International. The International staged a five-week work stoppage and expanded its pressure on the two other manufacturers: Triangle Shirtwaist Company and Leiserson's. The events culminated in massive public demonstrations including street picketing and rallies (notably always held in Yiddish) in prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall. All strike directions arrived in Yiddish and English, disaffecting many Italian workers. Some Italian broke ranks and returned to work, causing International leaders to become more leery of the Italians as a whole.

The strike ended on February 15, 1909 with a 339 individual shops agreeing to recognize the International, with an agreement by employers to provide needles, thread, as well as an understanding that the workweek could not to exceed fifty-two hours (Zappia, 1994). The success of the strike precipitated a successful cloakworkers' strike in the summer of 1910. The International at this point had massive visibility, trained strikers, and won substantial victories in workplace conditions.

In ten years, the ILGWU organized from several disparate garment shops and turned into a large and powerful bargaining collective. Their success in organization and in expanding membership created new sorts of issues, especially as they took on more non-Jewish members. The Triangle Fire Shirtwaist Fire in 1911 would further consolidate the power of the Union, expand and diversify its membership, and ultimately help lead to the organization of the Educational Department.



## **The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire**

To begin to understand *how* the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire happened, it is incumbent to understand the construction of buildings in New York City in the early 1900s first. All buildings constructed in New York City in the early 1900s above 150 feet (15 stories) would be required to have metal window frames, concrete floors, and metal trim (Stein, 1962, p. 23). There was a simple logical reason for this requirement: according to testimony from the Edward Croker, Chief of the New York City Fire Department on December 28, 1910, the highest blaze the Fire department could combat was “not over eighty-five feet,” or seven stories. The metal trim, windows and stone floors would go a long way to prevent a fire from spreading as the materials were not flammable (like wood). When asked by a judge if the possibility of a fire in sweatshops was a serious danger, considering how many buildings were taller than seven stories in Manhattan alone, Chief Croker responded,

I think if you want to go into the so-called workshops which are along Fifth Avenue west of Broadway and east of Sixth Avenue, twelve, fourteen or fifteen story buildings they call workshops, you will find it very interesting to see the number of people in one of these buildings with absolutely not one fire protection, without any means of escape in case of fire. (Stein, 1962, p. 3).

Crocker’s words forecast the largest accidental workplace disaster in American history, which would occur merely 3 months after he uttered those words. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1911, 146 garment workers working in the Asch Building died at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, a block

away from Washington Square, died from smoke inhalation, fire and jumping to their deaths from the eighth through tenth floors finding no other way to escape the building.

The Asch building, built in 1900, was 135 feet tall at ten stories. Had the owner of the building, Joseph J. Asch, ordered that the building be one more floor taller, the building would have been required to use the metal windows and trim and concrete floors. Instead, the building was made primarily of wood: wooden windows, wooden trim, and wooden floors. The composition of the building was legal by almost all safety standards. The construction design of the building included two (wooden) central staircases when the area of the floors would normally demand three. While the building inspector raised questions about the omission of a third staircase, the architect asked for an exemption from the building rule arguing that a fire escape on the outside the building constituted a third stairwell, although it ended at the second floor (Stein, 1962, p. 24). From its inception, the Asch building was, if not in violation of existing fire code, certainly took few efforts to fireproof the wooden edifice. Sprinkler fire suppression systems existed in 1900 and city fire officials encouraged their installation (but not making the system legally required), but the costs of such a system would have added four percent to the cost of the construction. Asch balked at the idea and built ahead without more fire protection than a few hoses connected to fire water lines.

The fire itself started around 4:30 in the afternoon, around the time that the shift at the Triangle workshop ended. The fire started on the eighth floor at a sewing machine. Pattern cutters and women operating the machines ran to grab pails of water to throw onto the fire, but the volume of fabric and rags that were on the tables helped the fire

spread quickly before the workers could get enough water to extinguish it. In short time, the flames spread and the smoke began to fill the room.

Some employees ran to the available fire hoses and attempted to use them to put out the flames. As they tried to operate the hoses, they realized there was no water coming from them; there was no pressure to push the water through the hose on the eighth floor. The hoses did not work. Women on the eighth floor tried to use a telephone to contact workers on the ninth and tenth floors to no avail. By this point, the fire was spreading quickly, making its way into the stairwells. The only way to escape for the women who had not made it to the stairwells already seemed to be to try to go through the passenger elevator. The fire escapes on the building were narrow and could not hold too many of the girls trying to escape, and the smoke was making navigating to the stairways nearly impossible. Fire engines started to arrive shortly, but with no water pressure in the hoses that were already available, and the limited reach of fire equipment from eight stories down, the fire department had little recourse before going into the smoke itself.

The girls on the ninth and tenth floor surely smelled smoke, but this seemed to be well after the fire beneath was already an inferno. Girls on the ninth floor became concerned with the smell and went over to a set of doors to investigate what was occurring. They discovered that the doors were locked from the outside. The girls now had to decide to wait for the door to be unlocked or run through the smoke-filled room to the other door in the hope that it would be open. A few of the girls took the chance and made their way through the smoke and flames to safety. The fire spread so rapidly though

that soon the stairwell that was open was no longer an option to descend, so many of the girls escaped to the roof hoping to escape that way.

It is at this point that the fire is engulfing the top three floors of the building. Girls seeing no way to get to the ground floor safely through the stairwells, and with the fire exit inaccessible from the roof, thought their best chance to survive the blaze may be to jump the 135 feet.

By this point, a crowd gathered from the homes around Washington Square and students from New York University. The homes around Washington Square were posh as the neighborhood had once been a vestige of the well-connected and wealthy Manhattan aristocracy. By 1911, many of the rich residents had moved to the larger homes popping up along 5<sup>th</sup> avenue on the Upper East Side as factories and poor immigrants started to move into tenement houses nearby. It was on that Saturday that 31-year old Frances Perkins, an activist in the Women's Suffragists Movement and the Democratic Party was meeting with her friends for tea. She describes their get-together as interrupted by the sounds of screams and fire engines across Washington Square Park. Perkins and her friends went outside and through the park to investigate the commotion. Perkins reported that she saw women hanging from windows by their hands, yelling for help from high in the building. She remembers "One by one, the people would fall off...they couldn't hold any longer—the grip gives way." She goes on to describe how the girls "began...panic jumping...people who had their clothes afire would jump. It was a most horrid spectacle. Even when they got the nets up, the nets did not hold in a jump from that height. There was no place to go. The fire was between them and any means of exit" (Downey, 2009, p. 33) Perkins was forever disturbed by what she saw that March day. She would devote

her life to social welfare programs after witnessing the fire and would make close allies in the labor movement and Democratic Party. One of these allies was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt would ask her to become the Secretary of a new cabinet position heading the Department of Labor in 1933. She would serve as Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor for his entire presidency until his death in 1945. In doing so she was not only Roosevelt's longest-serving cabinet secretary, she was also the first woman to hold a cabinet position. She would go on to be influential in establishing Social Security, Unemployment Insurance and establishing a minimum wage.

The workers who survived, along with the ILGWU, staged massive protests demanding justice for those who died in the fire and that someone be held responsible for the dangerous conditions in the workshops. Workers staged strikes, marched on City Hall, and gained the sympathy of many New Yorkers who aided in relief efforts for families affected by the fire. The ILGWU already had some visibility through its strike in 1910, and the fire kept them in the newspapers and public consciousness. The district attorney (and future Governor) of New York, Charles Seymour Whitman, saw the outrage against the fire as a way to keep his own face on the front pages of the newspapers by going after the owners of the Asch building. His efforts lasted long enough to keep him in the papers, but at the time to charge the building owners with negligence or the shop overseers with manslaughter would have been difficult. The City brought two of the overseers to trial on a charge of manslaughter after finding physical evidence that at least one of the bolts on the ninth floor door was locked at the time of the fire. The trial ended on December 27, 1911 with an acquittal of the defendants, much to

the dismay of many New Yorkers (Von Drehle, p. 258). This was a huge blow to the ILGWU; it took the fire off the front pages and with that the Union's visibility.

### **The ILGWU Educational Department**

By 1913, a quarter of a million workers in New York belonged to a union, eight times its membership in 1909 (Von Drehle, p. 172). The issues presented by the Triangle fire, especially in terms of workplace safety, helped drive numbers up. The ILGWU staged a series of strikes in 1913 demanding that shop owners observe newly-legislated workplace safety measures. The Local 41, which consisted of 85-96% women, staged a strike led by a 27-year old member of its executive board named Fannia Cohn (Cohen, p. 45). Cohn was born in 1885 or 1886 in Kletzk, a town near Minsk, in Russia (Cohen, p. 4). She led young women of Jewish, Italian, Syrian, Slavic, and a small number of native-born women as their hall chairwoman whose job was to keep morale up despite the drastically different cultural and linguistic backgrounds the membership contained. This strike raised Cohn's visibility in the ILGWU. She spoke often to strikers and wrote articles in circulars and union-established magazines. She struggled with learning English in her new leadership position, and she felt that learning to write English in particular would help her gain a wider audience if she wrote newspaper articles in both Yiddish and English (Cohen, p. 51). Cohn received a scholarship from the ILGWU to learn English and organizing in Chicago, but quickly became impatient with the speed and scope of the course, dropped of the program entirely and received private lessons in English.

In 1917, Cohn received an appointment to the General Education Committee of the ILGWU. The committee arose after the success of the 1910 Cloakworker's strike and

large expansion of the ILGWU provided the union with financial stability. In 1914, the ILGWU allocated its first funding, \$1,500 to appoint an Educational Committee to develop educational programs. The objective of the ILGWU was to “both develop the general membership’s understanding of their organization and foster the development of future leaders” (p. 123). Cohn believed the educational programming could help to establish a labor intellectual culture.

Labor education was not new in 1914. Since 1900, workers attended classes at the Rand School and Workers School. However, some large companies compelled employees, either by reward or threat of termination, to attend English courses after hours. One such course operated in Highland Park Michigan through the Ford Motor Company. The Ford English School, also established in 1914, would conclude courses with a graduation ceremony in which immigrant workers would descend in clothing from their homelands from a “boat” representing how they arrived in America, and walked into a 15-foot by 7 1/2-foot pot that was “stirred” by the teachers from the school. After a few minutes, each worker would leave the pot wearing a suit and waving an American flag, representing his or her rejection of his or her old ways and an embrace of American life (Barrett, 1992). Such courses, perhaps not as flamboyantly nationalistic as the Ford program, rose around the country. Barrett reports that over eight hundred industrial plants operated their own classes or worked with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) to hold classes. The Ford program had paternalistic tendencies, arguing a need to show workers “the right way to work,” and, “the right way to live”—the American Way.

The economics of the garment industry did not lend itself to the sort of ability of plants to organize or demand workers to attend English courses. The system involving subcontractors who worked in their own homes left many wholesalers and manufacturers with little interaction with the people who actually produced the garments beyond the agents representing the subcontractor. Even as factories started to siphon workers away from the independent contractors, the employers were too sensitive to their bottom lines to expend money on education or allot time for workers that did not involve the actual production of garments. This gave the ILGWU a unique opportunity to organize its own educational curriculum.

The ILGWU, while not the first professional organization to set up its own education programs, it was the first labor union to develop its own educational programming. The program started in seeds planted in the 1909 and 1910 garment strikes when members of the Womens' Trade Union League (WTUL) would go door to door to explain issues pertaining to the strikes and the importance of Unionization. The WTUL would go so far as to publish books in Lithuanian, Yiddish, Italian, Bohemian, and English called *New World Lessons for Old World People*, an English primer that used examples from Union-related issues in its instruction. As Barrett notes, "These immigrant women learned English in a way that developed important values of class solidarity and personal relationships that they relied upon in later organizing and strikes." Organizers understood the importance of combining the mission of union organizing and language learning early inception of workers' education.

The educational programming of the ILGWU started in earnest through the Local 25 and 65, both of which contained a majority population of Jewish women, many of



whom may have been active in the WTUL. The success of these programs led to the ILGWU expanding funding in 1916 to \$5,000 per year. The organization of the educational program ran through Local educational board. Cohn's entrance into the administration of the program saw the rise of a centralized educational effort in New York City through the establishment of "Unity Centers" and at one point two "Workers' Universities" in the New York public schools.

The New York City Board of Education stipulated that any courses hosted in the public schools would have to be held in English. The New York Public Schools provided public adult education and industrial training on its own since 1904 and had an infrastructure in place to manage the use of school facilities and provide teachers for English and mathematics courses (Ravitch, 1974). As the ethnic makeup of the Local 25 and 65 was mainly Jewish Cohn sought to have courses conducted in Yiddish. Cohn appealed with the Board of Education to allow Yiddish courses, but to no avail. She rationalized that workers should learn English anyway, regardless of the reason (p. 126). Cohn's work with the Educational Department earned a \$10,000 allotment from the Executive Committee, doubling 1916's allotment. Cohn's advocacy for the Educational Department resulted in her election as the Secretary of the organization.

The Unity Centers generally held classes pertaining to social and labor issues, hygiene, English instruction (with teachers provided by the Board of Education), physical education, psychology, and economics. The Workers' University courses offered courses of a more advanced nature and taught by renowned teachers in New York City sympathetic to the cause of Workers' Education. The Workers' University catered to individuals who already attained English fluency elsewhere, perhaps through the Unity

Centers. The Worker's University consistently operated out of Washington Irving High School near Midtown Manhattan. At one point, the Educational Department opened a second Workers' University in the Brownville neighborhood of Brooklyn. This location did not stay open for long, as the Workers' University program consolidated to the Manhattan location by the early 1920s.

The Educational Department also established special classes for its leaders and business agents in economics, English, and other topics the Executive Committee felt would be important in developing new leaders. Cohn observed that shop chairpersons and active members (meaning taking on a leadership role but not necessarily in an elected position) experienced difficulty communicating issues pertaining to the union clearly. The Educational Department placed an emphasis on public speaking to address this issue catered specially to these leaders and active members.

In 1920, the Educational Department of the ILGWU came under attack for teaching workers in such a way that they became uninterested in the union. One anonymous editorial in Union newspapers postulated that the educational programming ought to lead to increased attendance in union meetings, although evidence suggested that education decreased attendance as workers were now bored with the union. Some individuals went so far to say that the educational program trained workers for other jobs outside the union, essentially losing the same leaders the program hoped to train.

These charges led to Cohn spending more time writing articles and editorials for newspapers and magazines extolling the virtues of workers' educations. At the same time, she worked with the American Federation of Labor to establish the Workers' Education Bureau (WEB), whose goal was to create a Worker's University at the Brookwood

School in Katonah, New York, some fifty miles north of Manhattan. In Katonah, she was working to establish a university for workers and help cultivate a new labor culture. Back in New York City, she was fending off charges that the Educational Department was a detriment to overall organizing efforts.

Cohn defended the department well, working to establish times at the beginning of local union meetings with programming and lectures from the Educational Department. In this way, she could incentivize attendance in union educational activities and, as the meetings were not held in the public schools as the Unity Centers and Workers' University were, hold the lectures in languages most accessible to each membership group.

Throughout the early 1920s, the Executive Committee continued to expand the allocation of funding to the Educational Department while courses remained well-attended. A recapitulation of attendance from 1922-1924 seasons reported 13,024 attending the Workers' University; 9,067 attending courses in the Unity Centers (other than English); 2,065 attending courses in Russian, roughly 9,000 attending courses or lectures in "Jewish"; and 162,400 attending classes in English at the Unity Centers (International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Educational Department, April 1924). The English courses, clearly the most popular in the program, were also taught by non-ILGWU appointed teachers. This led to some of the criticism that the Educational Department was not meeting its own charge in teaching workers.

Ott (2004) points out that the work of the Educational Department in the 1920s was influenced in large part by the work of progressive educators such as John Dewey. Progressive education put forth a curriculum in which school experience addressed the

real-life experiences of students in their daily lives and that such an education would be a model for democratic society. A Deweyan approach to education would insist that teachers have knowledge of how the student's life proceeded and teachers would need to create a curriculum that blended experiences inside and outside the school.

In 1926, the ILGWU began period of internal division, low cash flow, and general disillusionment within its ranks. While the ILGWU had a close relationship with European-born socialists from its inception, communists gradually became a larger influence in the organization through the late 1910s and early 1920s culminating in a communist-controlled Joint Board. In 1926, the Joint Board engaged a large yet unsuccessful cloakworkers strike. This strike drained the ILGWU's resources and in 1927 the Union officially ceased all of its auxiliary activities, including the Educational Department. The Great Depression started soon after in late 1929, further straining the ability of the International to generate revenue to restart its educational programing. In the midst of the growing economic uncertainty, courses in English and union history did not exceed the needs of the International's other overhead expenditures.

Cohn spent this time focusing again on her work with the WEB and the Brookwood Labor College. By the late 1920s, she had not worked on a garment line in almost ten years. She maintained her position as the Executive Secretary of an Educational Department that did not have the funding to operate. In this time, some local unions would hold their own programs in their meeting halls, but the program was not as robust as when the central Educational Department managed the activities. The ILGWU came out of its "lean years" in 1933 (Internatoinal Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Educational Department, 1938). Although the program was in shambles, the efforts of the

locals to continue educational work helped as Cohn worked to reassemble her Educational Department.

In 1935, the Educational Board installed a new Executive Director, Mark Starr. Starr was an Englishman who was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1920s but became disillusioned with the organization. Starr's labor background was in mining. His father had been a miner, and Starr entered the mines himself when he was thirteen. At 40 years old, the International saw Starr as a younger face with fresh ideas to head the Educational Department. Much of Starr's own learning came from the worker education programs he encountered through his English unions and later worked as an instructor in Brookwood. Fannia Cohn viewed Starr's inexperience with organizing across multiple cultures and the victories of the ILGWU as detrimental to the mission of the Educational Department. Starr placed a large emphasis on the Unity Centers, now called "Social Educational Center" rather than the Workers' University. The Extension division still existed, albeit in a reduced role. The course announcements from his tenure were more engaging to members of the International, drawing members to the social as well as educational components of the Department's programming. Cohn privately shared her concerns about Starr's capabilities as a leader, but the success of the program and Starr's outreach to the growing Hispanic membership would keep Starr at his post for 25 years.

Starr's role was to assist Dubinsky in reshaping the public image of the ILGWU. As Wong (1984) observes,

No longer were garment workers foreigners spouting radical political doctrines in strange tongues. The young and attractive men and women

who sang ‘Britannia Waives the Rules’ at a White House command performance of “Pins and Needles” in 1938 symbolized the new ILGWU members. They were fun-loving, intelligent, all-American workers pursuing wholesome and self-improving activities. (p. 55)

Because of this new turn in the educational programming, Cohn’s role became smaller although she kept the title of Executive Secretary of the Educational Department. Her tasks became less involved with the administration of the program, something Starr took up, and more about leading hikes and planning concert outings. The educational mission of the Union continued, although evolving conflicts in Europe refocused some of the International’s efforts to fight the rise of fascism.

### **History in Closing**

This history ends at 1939, which coincides with the last year represented in the collected archival materials used for this study. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, the politics of how the International operated, and the face of American immigration concerns, changed entirely. The International used the event to raise public awareness of the plight of the Poles, as well as mobilizing Italian members to encourage relatives to resist the urge to fight with Mussolini.

In essence, this story starts and ends with two wars: the Civil War, which marks the origins of the American ready-made garment industry, and the Second World War, which marks a change in American attitudes toward the immigrant population whose sons took up arms for the United States against their parents’ own people. In the nearly 75 years between these wars, the International organized, experienced success in strikes

and tragedy in workplace disaster, established a successful educational program, fell on hard times financially and began to build itself up again.

The importance of the Triangle Fire is paramount to this story. It helps to explain the massive influx of members, especially from the Italian community, and it was an opportunity for the International to measure its own ability to handle massive tragedy in public.

The Educational Department of the ILGWU is the progeny of this history. One of the most consistently taught courses through the Educational Department was about the history of garment workers and the ILGWU. The short history of the ILGWU, appended by the rise of ready-made garments, the sewing machine, and an industrial model that relied on immigrants, women, and children, all led to the organization of the Educational Department. I can now move on to discuss what sort of texts I choose from this history to examine in an effort to understand the program, and how I plan to execute my research methodology.

## Chapter 4: Research Methods

The September 2012 issue of *College Composition and Communication* was a special issue dedicated to methods and methodologies that pertain to research in composition, rhetoric, and writing research. The issue involved several articles that relate to methodological problems raised in this chapter, particularly with regard to challenges related to archival and historiographic methods in writing research. Composition and writing studies journals have spent considerable time recently discussing research methods. Besides *College Composition and Communication*, the journal *Written Communication* published a special issue on methods in 2008, and will revisit the topic in another special issue on methods in July 2013. Similarly, *Technical Communication Quarterly* has released a Call for Papers regarding a special issue focusing on methods to be published in 2015. Three special issues on methods in four years from important journals in the field signify a trend to me, and that is in part why I believe this chapter requires a special thoroughness in its development.

The other part that motivates a through chapter on methods is a desire to lay out a thorough explanation of my approach to my research. As Peter Smagorinsky (2008) writes, “results need to be specifically linked to method so it is clear to readers how results have been rendered from data and how the theoretical apparatus that motivates the study is realized in the way that the data are analyzed and then organized for presentation” (p. 408). Smagorinsky points out the need for explicit descriptions of five components of the methods section: the data collection, data reduction, data analysis, coding data, and the context of the investigation. While Smagorinsky is not offering a model for a particular type of research method, I find his categories to be useful in



explaining what my own research methods are and how I use them, so this chapter will generally explicate each step. Smagorinsky's article about the methods section is written for social-science-journal research, yet his observations are helpful in the context of a doctoral dissertation. The dissertation should involve a thorough discussion of methods and the theories that contribute to methodological choices. Smagorinsky's article makes these reasonable demands clearly. Comforting as this structure may be to the reader of this section, there is the complex task of identifying the methodological approach before responding to Smagorinsky's categories. This chapter describes the genealogy of thought and details the choices made that went into the research methods used in this project.

My research in the ILGWU is to understand how the type of worker's education that the ILGWU provided fits into a rhetorical tradition and the history of writing and literacy research. To contextualize my choice in research methodology, I return briefly to the research questions driving this project:

1. How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department?
2. How is literacy defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy?
3. How is literacy defined by the economic realities of students of literacy programs?

Given the timeframe this project investigates, as well as the types of documents that are available to researchers, the research methodology needs thorough explication. Many historiographic and archival approaches to writing research tell more about the sites of research rather than the way data are collected, coded, and analyzed. While some scholars

have utilized historiographic approaches to writing research, or used archives to find illuminating artifacts, there has been little in the way of scholars explaining how their research operated in a systematic way. For this reason, this chapter spends time discussing research with archives in literacy, composition, and writing studies before addressing the categories identified by Smagorinsky. The first few sections of this chapter consist of a literature review of research in literacy and writing studies that utilize archival and historiographic research approaches. The object of the first part of this chapter is to examine flaws and find inspirations from the vast existing corpus of the field, interrogate choices made by other researchers, and in turn to develop a robust methodological approach required for my own project. The next section of the chapter examines some existing methodologies that may inform a robust and systematic approach to archival research. In particular, I investigate the ways in which case study research allows and conflicts with archival research. The following section examines three recent research articles with some similarities to this study and mines their methodological decisions for ideas on how to construct a thorough methodological approach for this research. The last section of this chapter describes the research methods of this project by addressing each of Smagorinsky's categories explicitly. The objective of this chapter is to give a sense of the craft of constructing this research and to establish an explicit and consistent set of standards that other researchers may one day draw upon, critique, and improve.

For now, I examine ways other researchers in literacy scholarship have dealt with the complex work of explicating research methods for their own work. The chief challenge of researching literacy in a historical context is the need to establish a

systematic approach to collecting and interpreting data. At present, the field has been slow to codify standards to historiographic research. While the discussion has picked up recently, it is first necessary to examine how historical-based research has been done in composition and writing research before I outline my own approach. From this section, I will identify what I find to be the emerging best practices and will explain my methodological choices and fill in the categories Smagorinsky identifies.

### **Historical Research in Composition Studies**

Many scholars have written about the history of composition studies and writing research, many with particular attention to how both operate in the United States. A few of the most recognized historical research projects have had lasting effects on the field. James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* not only examines the expansion of college writing programs throughout the United States, but also extrapolates from previous histories and Berlin's own examination of primary texts a new understanding of what "rhetoric" meant in institutional contexts. Berlin writes that the ways in which "rhetoric" is instantiated has changed through time and that literacy itself is "a particular type of rhetoric" (pp. 3-4). One of Berlin's most important contributions is his taxonomy of theories of rhetoric, which he outlines in the introduction. He bases the three theories he describes, *objective*, *subjective*, and *transactional*, on epistemic categories. Berlin discusses these epistemic categories early in the book (indeed, on page 6) for numerous reasons. First, he believes explaining these categories early will allow him to offer an overview of the concepts and then permit him to discuss the approaches later in more detail. Second, it allows what he writes to be a

“chronicle” of the history of writing instruction. Finally, he believes that the work of rhetoric in English departments has suffered from a lack of creativity; while he was writing, there were few alternatives to positivistic rhetoric, which he viewed as the dominating approach to teaching rhetoric. “Rhetoric” Berlin writes, “for most English professors has meant one theory and one theory only, and the fact that past and present have provided alternative models has gone largely unnoticed” (p. 6). While the importance of Berlin’s book is not in dispute in this dissertation (in fact I quite agree with him), I am interested in briefly examining how he sets up his own study to identify the sorts of problems I have seen with how historical writing research has been conducted.

Berlin’s description of his taxonomy of rhetorical approaches early in his book is significant, as it fulfills many of the objectives he sets out. The description offers a useful overview of the approaches, so, when readers arrive to them later, they have some working knowledge of what Berlin wishes to highlight, it allows the rest of the text to read as a “chronicle,” which tells a narrative of the history of writing instruction in American colleges. Berlin immediately identifies and challenges what he identifies as the “positivistic rhetoric” of writing instruction by identifying the ways some scholars offered alternative approaches. The challenge with this approach is purely methodological: the reader cannot fully understand how he came to this particular taxonomy. Rather, readers can merely appreciate the depth of his close reading of germane materials. Indeed, even when he describes the taxonomies early in the book, he points to particular texts that offer evidence that their authors were thinking along the same lines as Berlin’s approach. However, the reader who is a bit more questioning about how Berlin created these categories will wonder what, if anything, Berlin omits. While

Berlin explains that his categories are not “monolithic,” (p. 6) some readers will wonder how much some of the texts inform, stand apart from, and bleed through one another within the context of the categories.

The challenge I raise about the methodological considerations of Berlin’s study is admittedly positivistic. I, and readers like me, appreciate the research he did, but the lack of explanation of how he did such research raises important questions for a variety of reasons. First, there is the obvious issue of omission; how can we know what was left out from his reading, and more importantly, why? For example, Berlin does not cite David Dobrin’s “What’s Technical about Technical Writing?” (1983). Had Berlin not read about this text? On the other hand, was Berlin choosing to stay away from technical writing instruction? The aversion to technical writing instruction seems unlikely, as he discusses Connors (1982) and Miller (1979) in his book. Likewise, the same issue exists with Harvey Graff’s *The Literacy Myth* (1991), first published in 1978. Did Berlin decide that he would omit works covering the nineteenth century? Was Berlin more interested in institutional approaches to teaching rhetoric? If so, how did he decide on which institutions to study? The reason for his omissions of Dobrin and Graff, although not keystone in Berlin’s work, warrants some consideration. The decisions Berlin makes to use some texts for data and analysis and not others requires a more transparent discussion that Berlin otherwise supplies.

Second is an issue of replication. If I went through the same documents Berlin identified and used the same sorts of approaches to reading as he did (looking for particular categories, words, epistemic concerns, or ideologies to emerge) would I reach the same conclusions? The distinctions Berlin makes between the categories offers some

diversity among the categories—what is included and excluded—would help both solidify the groups and give future readers a context through which other texts written after his study could be categorized. His description of the categories is helpful. However, Berlin does not give readers information about *how* he read the texts and from whence the categories he identified emerged. Berlin’s findings seem reasonable, and the epistemic categories he identifies (and appropriates to rhetoric) fit into existing understandings of epistemology. Yet the omission of an explicit, methodological approach makes the possibility of future studies based on his approach difficult. Even though Berlin’s approach appears to be inductive, it can still be methodological as several methodological approaches help demystify inductive readings of resources.

Finally, there is an issue of resource verification. Berlin bases much of his research on the use of particular textbooks in classrooms at particular schools around the United States, ongoing discussions about teaching rhetoric in scholarly publications, and notes from the associations promoting rhetorical studies. These sources can be important and useful in many contexts of literacy research as they clue readers into a discourse about writing instruction pedagogy. Readers can safely assume that the type of textbook an institution used adopted was ultimately a result of some thoughtful pedagogical approach. Suffice to say that English departments probably would not have been keen on using textbooks that affronted the way they viewed proper rhetorical training. Scholarly journals, always the seeming academic gatekeeper and the ongoing “parlor” or academic discussion would have also placed an emphasis on continuing the major discussions of the day in their pages. Organizational notes, particularly for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), offer a glimpse into the inner workings of the association as

well as the discussions that may not have made the pages of its scholarly journals. Berlin seems well suited in using these resources. The appropriateness of each resource is assumedly almost self-evident; so closely related to his discussion that explaining why this document or that is used would probably interrupt the narrative thrust of his chronicle.

Yet, there remains a challenge in understanding exactly how exhaustive and thoroughly Berlin used those resources. This is a problem for all histories: for example, neither Berlin nor the reader can verify if the organizational proceedings correctly capture what each member said or did. It is difficult to know what, if anything, changed in editorial decisions about the articles. It is difficult to know the sorts of conversations within an English department that surrounded the decision to use one textbook and not another. Perhaps the cost of the textbook trumped all other concerns. This challenge should not be attributed to Berlin's own shortcomings but the prickly nature of undertaking historiographic research. Hawk (2007) distills Berlin's problem thusly; "The dominant rhetorics in any period emerge as winners of past historical, social, and economic forces, but these struggles always produce resistant rhetorics that are covered over, lost though the production of dominant histories..." (p. 75). When most of the subjects and primary witnesses are deceased, the researcher must make assumptions and take liberties with the material in order to get something—anything—out of them. This may dissuade some researchers from taking on this sort of research because it seems to lead to a lot of educated yet subjective reasoning on the researcher's part. Hawk expresses concern that Berlin believes "through active, subjective agency, Berlin is touting objectivity—both objective, historical facts, and an objective teleological goal"

(p. 75). Perhaps Berlin was aware of the perils of this sort of research, yet he did not discuss them because at the time he wrote there was a need for the fields of composition and writing research to understand their own history. As writing studies becomes a more identifiable field and the epistemic demands of scholarship become more stringent, it is important that researchers who desire to conduct the sort of research Berlin and others did in examining histories of writing and literacy apply new, more explicit explanations regarding their methodological approaches. While Hawk writes about Berlin in the context of methodologies of classroom practices, I am concerned with research practices. However, our mutual issues with Berlin are situated in a time and space unlike Berlin's context twenty-five years ago.

Most of this chapter so far has been a methodological critique of Berlin, but this critique does not mean to undercut Berlin's importance, nor the importance of his work to the fields of composition, literacy, and writing research. However, in developing my own research methods, I need this project to interrogate how archives and histories become research data for analysis. Yet, part of the reason to continue this critique is to identify that a canonical text that uses histories that shape the discourse of the field could be strengthened by closer attention to methodological considerations such as questions of omission, replicability, and data verification. Scholars in writing and literacy research must take up the mantle of explicit and thorough methodological discussions. Writing a historical narrative alone no longer suffices in answering the sorts of specific questions that the field has developed a vocabulary to ask.

Berlin is not alone in being less-than-revealing about his research methods. Some of the finest, most instructive texts in the field use historiographic approaches that weave



fine narratives but leave out questions with regard to their methodological precision. In a way, the absence of explicit methodological discussions within writing and composition studies is rooted in the way historiographic research operates. Even texts that are dense in using and citing resources, such as David R. Russell's *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History* (1991), neglects mentioning the methodological considerations that went into the research presented. Another more recent volume, *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition* (2007), consists of archival research that is turned into narratives about composition programs in various universities, yet none of the essays indicate the methodological considerations of those going through the archives. I will not question *why* this seems to be the case, but I think Berlin's characterization of his work as a "chronicle" may offer a clue to the understanding the issue. Berlin's aversion to positivistic rhetoric, the idea of an objective epistemic truth to guide an approach to teaching rhetoric, is well understood within the first few pages of his book. The characterization of his work as a "chronicle" is a nod to the narrative nature of his work. A chronicle, like a newspaper, tells a (one) story. The story Berlin tells is helpful to readers only in the context of his research interest (the different approaches to rhetoric instruction for the first seventy-five years of the previous century), but he was not writing with the expectation that those who come after him might want to tell the story differently.

After Berlin, John Brereton edited *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925: A Documentary History* (1995), a volume of primary documents taken from a fifty-year span as composition scholarship in the United States began to emerge as its own discipline. The volume is extensive, including diverse

resources from teacher's testimonies to magazine articles to excerpts from textbooks. Brereton offers some contextual information for each chapter, and at times to introduce individual resources. Brereton discusses his methods in choosing which documents are allowed into the volume and which are not in the preface, stating, for example: "I have deliberately taken [resources] from printed rather than manuscript sources; I wanted to publish public record, what compositionists said to each other, to their students, and to concerned citizens" (p. xv). This sort of brief methodological discussion goes a long way to explaining the nature of how this data collection was conducted. This gives the reader a sense of where the documents came from and how they were chosen. Presumably, one could scour the archives as Brereton did, and using the same standards as Brereton, looking for seemingly important texts that shed light on the history written composition instruction in America, but the result of this work would not look so much as research that makes an argument and examines evidence as it would be primarily be an edited collection of artifacts.

Harvey Graff's *The Literacy Myth* comes closer to a systematic, historiographic, methodological approach to literacy research. In the preface to the 1991 edition of his book, Graff explicitly addresses how he approached the book methodologically over twelve years earlier by discussing how literacy research has changed since the book's initial publication. He views the works in the field since his book as a field coming into its adolescence. Graff identifies the disciplinary discussion of literacy from the first edition of his book as located in censuses, regional resources and he examined "literacy's social patterns over time and the fairly systematic and patented variations in its distributions over time and space" (p. xv). For this reason, it seems case studies (that

were often not explicitly called case studies) and ethnographies emerged as the preferred methodologies of literacy research for scholars who located themselves within the social sciences. In these contexts, literacy, as Graff states “was conceptualized as either or both dependent and independent variable. At once a source of analytic and conceptual flexibility, this could also be a problem and a source of interpretive confusion and weakness” (pp. xv-xvi). Phrases like “dependent and independent variable” may seem strange in literacy research, as they are more common in research that is more experimental and quantitative than what Graff performed. For Graff, the challenge was that once “literacy” became a methodological variable, a critical approach to it becomes particularly difficult because the questions raised in such research are more about variables, conditions and effects around literacy, but not necessarily definitions of literacy themselves.

While many wrote interesting studies, often using explicit, replicable methods in case study or ethnographic scenarios, literacy itself could not help but become a variable with a static definition. This is to say, once literacy became an experimental variable, the rigor of exploring it as a subject became more difficult because the embedded claims depend upon static assumptions and definitions.

Graff lauds the work of Scribner and Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy* (1999), as well as the growing cognitive turn in writing and literacy research because such work opens the opportunity for social-scientific research in literacy to be studied as a subject, but not so much as a variable. Literacy in this sort of work becomes located in an educational context, as a variable in conversation with some other variables rather than an assumed theoretical constant. Likewise, Graff appreciates the work of

ethnographers because their work places literacy in a context of human communication, which allows literacy to be seen as one of many variables in the way particular groups interact with each other (p. xvii). These avenues of research allow those who contextualize how literacy becomes defined and instantiated from case to case a bit more theoretical flexibility while still establishing methodological rigor. The question is no longer, “How is or is not this group literate?” The new question becomes “What are the values connected to literacy for this group? How are these values operationalized?”

Graff’s observations about the methodological rigor introduced to literacy and writing studies provides a good place here for me to pause and consider the type of research I perform. I have already established in previous chapters my interest in the education programs offered by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and why I find their situation unique and compelling through a narrative of their history and the history of worker’s education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interest alone, however, does not lead to meaningful research that adds to the body of knowledge the field has about literacy, and, in an effort to thoroughly examine the ILGWU and to make a contribute to how scholars may better come to understand literacy, more is required of me than merely composing a narrative history of the ILGWU’s Education department. Considering the strengths that Graff points out in some then-recent research and the challenges posed by the histories like the one Berlin writes, I am inclined to situate my own research as a mixed methods study. I will discuss this decision with some more depth in the next section of this chapter.

This review of historiographic methods in composition, literacy and writing research is necessary because it helps explain some of the heritage of the research I

pursue. The past few pages work to address issues in historiographic research by applying some of the methodological standards Smagorinsky writes about to some recent works in the field of writing and literacy research. For now, it is necessary to move on and explore some research methods that offer methodological transparency to historiographic research.

### **Mixed-Methods Historiographic Research**

Perhaps one of the challenges of Berlin's work is that his interest in literacy is within a broadly conceived educational context: American Colleges from 1900 to 1985. The type of work Graff does and finds interesting focuses on major cities in Ontario, Canada from 1861-1871. Of course, Berlin was more interested in the types of epistemic approaches that became acculturated in rhetoric instruction in the United States, not the ways in which literacy interacted with social structure in Canada. Nevertheless, Berlin's sweeping study can only offer a limited understanding of literacy. There is still much to understand about the way literacy is defined and instantiated that is different in contexts outside traditional, university-written composition pedagogies. By his own design, Berlin cannot help but reinforce the dominant narratives of the timeframe he researches. While he strives to illuminate otherwise marginalized epistemic approaches to rhetoric, he is bound to what was published and discussed by the well-known scholars and institutions in the field. At the same time, by Berlin's designs those dominant narratives become mentionable and open for critique and interrogation. Here is the rub of method, it seems; a sweeping study of a large institution that lays to bare its *modus operandi* or a deeply focused, confined study of a particular group at a particular time that helps to establish

some understanding about the topic at hand, but does not allow readers to make broad generalizations to other contexts.

The recent history of writing research seems to appreciate the latter approach. In the past few years, many award-winning articles and books have taken the focused qualitative approaches to explore literacy. As Schultz (2006) argues, qualitative research “[led] researchers to use the term ‘literacy’ to refer to more than the acts of reading, writing, and speaking and to consider ways in which these acts are intimately tied to social, cultural, economic, historical, and political contexts” (361). The work of these recent scholars inspires my own research. In the next section I will explore some recent and contemporary research in writing and literacy research and explain in some depth what about their approaches are useful to my research and where I expand upon the fine work they have started. For now, I pause to discuss the broad topic of case study and mixed methods research so I may define it before we go much further and touch upon its applicability to my own inquiry.

I investigated three approaches to case studies as I considered the research methods for this study, including Stake (1995), Gerring (2007), and Yin (2009). Stake’s background in composing case studies for educational programs, particularly with regard to assessment issues, is a promising assistance to my project, which explores an educational program. Likewise, Gerring’s broadly defined interpretation of what a case study can be is inviting to the sort of research I want to engage. However, I focus my attentions on Yin, whose text I find most accessible to my own research, and most necessarily complicating my research methods.

Yin (2009) writes that generally three conditions make case study methods applicable to a research project. First, the type of research question that is posed must be explanatory in nature and be interested in “operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies and occurrences” (p. 9). The second condition is that the case study does not require the control of the behavior events. The case study researcher keeps him-or-herself from manipulating how subjects act; this keeps the research from being experimental in nature; the case-study researcher is an observer of an otherwise naturally unfolding series of event (p. 11). The third condition is that case study research focuses on contemporary rather than historical events. The case study researcher ideally has access to a full body of evidence, including direct observation and interviewing subjects about the events observed (p. 11). Clearly, this final condition is a large issue, as it would seem that my research, located in texts in some cases nearly 90 years old, is outside the confines of “contemporary” events. Even the richest archive will not be able to encapsulate the full depth of resources the case study may. While I cannot call this research a case study, at least not if I am faithful to Yin’s definition, I can draw upon his robust discussion of methodological considerations to construct my own methodological approach.

Before I go on, I return to my research questions in order to foreground the upcoming methodological discussion:

1. How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department?
2. How is literacy defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy?

3. How is literacy defined by the economic realities of students of literacy programs?

With regard to Yin's first requirement, since this project is more interested in observing how definitions of literacy become established over a particular time my research would qualify for consideration as a case study. While I will describe the effects as a part of the greater contextual narrative of the project, my interest is mainly exploring literacy in the context of one particular literacy program in mind.

Regarding Yin's second condition, my research subject cannot involve controlling the behavior of the participants. Even if this project wanted to control how a person in charge of a large education program, everyone who was involved with the program is long since dead, rendering the effort logistically infeasible. The sort of data available for this project pushes the project out of the realm of case study, as the data are not "contemporary" to present time. It would be impossible to directly observe participants in the educational program, or interview leaders, or gain access to *all* relevant documents. This project must rely on the archives collected by libraries, which may not include *everything* produced for both public and private audiences at the time of the ILGWU educational department's existence. My research has the appearance of archival research, even though there are yet more challenges that rise from that decision.

This research does not meet all of Yin's requirements of a case study. Yet the approaches he describes are helpful to plug into archival research. At present, there has not been a satisfying, definitive, theoretical discussion of robust methodological approaches to archival research in rhetoric, composition, writing, or literacy studies. The closest concentrated text I have been able to find about the topic so far is the relatively



recent collection edited by Ramsey, et al. (2010) titled, *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*. The volume is an earnest effort to guide researchers using archives to make the most of the resources they have in front of them, intermixing practical advice (such what items to bring to a collection the researcher is visiting) with interviews from noted archival researchers. Likewise, Kirsch, et al.'s edited collection, *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process* (2008) focuses on the possibility of historical research beyond traditional library archives and in communities, organizations, and personal experiences. What is absent from this collection is a thorough discussion of how researchers ought to code, analyze, and reduce the data. What is necessary for robust archival research is a more prescriptive sort of research methodological approach; the kind usually found in case-study methods.

The research methodology of this project cannot be a “case study” in the strict sense of the term as Yin uses it. This project is outside the scope of a contemporary context, and the project cannot assume to have full access to the full range of documents that would have been available to the case, nor can I engage in a direct observation of the program participants. At the same time, sound writing research demands a level of rigor that is more robust than the theoretical considerations of methodology that have already been discussed with regard to archival research in the fields of literacy and writing studies.

So how is this issue resolved? One approach is to examine recent research in writing and literacy studies and to identify some of the authors' methodological considerations. I choose studies that are well-written, recent and, in my opinion, robust about their methodological considerations. The studies I examine are not supposed to

represent a sample of what has been accomplished in writing and literacy studies over the last five years; they are simply texts that speak to the sorts of values about research methods that shape this project.

### **Recent research in literacy and writing studies**

While many fine articles and books published in the past five years have added substantial contributions writing and literacy research, I will focus my emphasis primarily on three studies whose work stands out to me as exemplary and containing research germane to the sort of study I want to conduct. The three are studies of literacy, writing rhetorical practices in focused spatial and temporal contexts. These texts are:

1. Enoch's (2008) *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a students, 1865-1911*,
2. Vieira's (2011) "Undocumented in a Documentary Society: Textual Borders and Transnational Religious Literacies,"
3. Berkenkotter & Haganau-Bresch's (2011) "Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lunatic Asylum."

The work by Vieira is unlike the other two because she deals with a contemporary ethnography of literacy practices by undocumented workers. While she does not address issues pertaining to historical research, her work nonetheless addresses the important exegeses of immigrant literacy practices. The works by Berkenkotter & Haganau-Bresch and Enoch provide a strong foundation in work done in archives, yet only Enoch deals with second-language learners, and even then, the contexts of her research spread through time and space including cases that are otherwise unconnected to each other. The

variations in these studies point to the diversity of possibilities in research, and demonstrate the variations in research approaches that can contribute to my own research.

### *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*

Jessica Enoch's primary interest in *Refiguring Rhetorical Education* is in arguing for the place of women, even ones as "marginalized members of their communities due to their professional status as female teachers," inside the rhetorical tradition (p. 11). Enoch studies the works and pedagogies of three female teachers between 1865 and 1911. She chooses teachers who had to work with nontraditional students in freedman's school after the Civil War in the American south, schools for Native American students, and in Spanish-language newspapers near the Texas-Mexican border. What results from her research is a collection of compelling histories about these teachers, their contexts and the reach of the influence. More importantly, Enoch's approach, informed by the feminist rhetorical and pedagogical theoretical lenses of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Cheryl Glenn (among others), argues for an expansion of understanding the essence of the rhetorical tradition. For Enoch, the work of female teachers, even those doing so-called service work, engaged the same sort of rhetorical theories that made power somewhat more accessible for marginalized communities.

It is difficult to speak of skills in literacy, elocution, writing and discourse as being the primary interest of the organization because there is no evidence that says this explicitly. Enoch, by arguing how teachers in marginalized communities brought a rhetorical education to that community's members does much of that work for me. Moreover, Enoch explicitly states that feminist theory informs how she reads her

resources and goes to great lengths to explain how the theoretical approach shapes how she collects, analyzes, and interprets her data.

Enoch also is important for another reason: her research subjects are limited. She examines three particular instances, almost like cases, delving deep into contextual concerns and offering a narrative that illuminates the work of the women she studies. That tight focus is lacking in the work of Berlin and others who insist on writing grand histories that span nearly a century. Enoch's focus on particular teachers is key to keeping her case narrow. Moreover, the way she constructs her narratives gives readers an opportunity to observe how these teachers adapted to changing contexts, and proposes some motivations for those changes. Of course, all of these subjects had been long deceased when Enoch conducted her research, which impedes her ability to write with authority about the *why* questions readers may ask. Where primary resources cannot answer questions, Enoch offers readers are well-educated interpretations of events that pose tentative answers. Clearly, the historical nature of Enoch's work does not fit into Yin's definition of a case study, although her tight focus on particular individuals and their primary sources and a thorough grounding in contextual data makes her work an example of the type of blueprint to follow for my own research.

However, I find one small difference between what Enoch has done and what I believe is required of my own project. For all the groundwork Enoch has done to make my own work easier, she is still in essence writing a history that emphasizes a narrative rather than data. Her reading audience does not know how Enoch collected her data, and what may have been omitted from her sources. Enoch's most thorough explicit exploration of "method" occurs early in her text when she encounters the problems

inherent in the way archive-based research has been handled in the history of rhetorical education. She writes, “Because this method looks for well-known rhetoricians and their students, it often tracks how enfranchised men accessed exclusive schools to teach and learn a set of rhetorical skills that would in turn enable them to make full use of their enfranchisement” (p. 9). I agree with Enoch’s assessment here. Indeed, this is in some ways in the same vein through which I outline the problematic issues with Berlin earlier in this chapter. Enoch uses the next page to identify scholars who have felt similarly and have gone through the work of doing research that honors the rhetorical education of the marginalized. For all this tradition, though, it is not entirely clear how the subjects Enoch chooses became worth choosing. Was it a wealth of resources? Was it through some local fame she came to know of? Enoch does a fine job explaining the historical contexts of each teacher, and weaves the narrative in such a way as their importance in their communities was evident in that context. Yet this does not tell us why these teachers made good research subjects before the study. Enoch does not explain exactly how these three teachers were the best subjects for her research. An explanation sharing that the most compelling reason to focus on these teachers is due to the ease in accessing their materials is a great help to other scholars who want to pursue similar work to hers.

In this case, I must recognize the importance of the narrative Enoch composes. In a composition and rhetorical tradition that perpetuates narratives of male and mostly white presence, Enoch’s work fits female teachers into narratives they previously did not occupy. My criticism is not meant to negate the importance at the core of Enoch’s work, that is to say recognizing the importance of women teachers in marginalized communities to the rhetorical canon. Rather, I assess how she conducts her research to explore how my

own methodological and theoretical grounding needs to be more explicit for readers and future scholars.

*Occult Genres and the Certification of Madness in a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Lunatic Asylum*

Berkenkotter and Haganau-Bresch's 2011 study of genres and speech acts asks questions about how medical admissions records operate rhetorically in the medical certifications of "madness" and how primary and secondary sources in archival sources can "triangulate" to "confirm or disconfirm one another" (p. 222). Their work focuses on asylum documents of two patients incarcerated at Ticehurst Asylum in southern England from 1861, 1866 and 1876.

Berkenkotter and Haganau-Bresch explain their decision to use Ticehurst Asylum because of its famous role in the history of psychiatry. The asylum itself catered to wealthy individuals, and the nature of that patronage allowed for the resources available to researchers to be more abundant than might be found in other asylums. They write, "Medical superintendents at Ticehurst has more resources than could be found at public asylums...this close supervision and extensive documentation resulted in often lengthy case histories and notes on the progress (or lack thereof) of each patient" (p. 226). The decision to use the Ticehurst Asylum is argued well, its place in history of psychiatry is well noted and the availability of documents to study appear to be at least enough to sustain the inquiry. The two cases Berkenkotter and Haganau-Bresch ultimately decide to study in depth are interesting, but how they are remarkable apart from other cases is presented without explanation.

One of the greatest strengths of Berkenkotter and Haganau-Bresch's work is the analytical tools they use: namely, genre and speech act theory. These theoretical lenses demand that much of the work done in the study be concentrated on texts themselves, and so the readers are invited to examine the evidence for themselves. The presence of the texts in their article serves a particular purpose: to demonstrate how they are analyzing the materials they found. Their analytical approach demands a certain amount of demonstration through the texts. Moreover, as they work to "triangulate" their research, the presence of primary and secondary sources becomes more important to their tight methodological work.

I take two things from Berkenkotter and Haganau-Bresch. First, it is important to include primary sources in the study. While their study is primarily at document-level, their work to offer context to the cases, particularly in the case of Henrietta Unwin (p. 235) helps illuminate their boarder concerns, locating them in a particular social and economic situation. I take this as a cue that I can make use of documents for close analysis. Yet exactly how to perform this research is unclear. My research in the ILGWU is to understand how the type of worker's education that the ILGWU promoted fits into a rhetorical tradition and the history of writing and literacy research. Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch offer an excellent assistance of a clear analytical approach that helps me understand the ILGWU program in the context of my research questions. I have some ideas for data collection as well as a robust analytical framework.

Another source of inspiration from Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch I use for constructing my own analytical framework is their focus on one kind of document. Their examination of case history documents helps focus the sample they are researching.

While it does not suggest that one could substitute one analytical approach for another in looking at documents, the emphasis on a particular kind of documents does narrow the type of work a researcher can perform.

One final topic that Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch raise that strengthens my own work is their observation of finding sources that “triangulate” their research. For Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch, the emphasis on one sort of document as a point of departure helps establish a theoretical baseline through which all their other research may follow. As other documents from similar circumstances become available to offer confirmation of contextual information, challenges assertions made by the group studied, or verify the fidelity of the primary sources, the “triangulation” of their research not only offers credence to their research but also expands the theoretical scope of their work. Incidentally, Stake (1995) writes at length regarding the importance of triangulation in case study research. I believe the opportunity to discuss the role of triangulation is larger than primary and secondary sources for the same case. Rather, contrasting how similar issues are discussed in similar contexts can help illuminate the research subject through contrast. While my intent is not to write a compare-and-contrast discussion regarding the ways different worker’s literacy programs operated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, triangulation offers a way to understand if the issues encountered by one group are similar to those of another.

#### *Undocumented in a Documentary Society*

Kate Vieira’s “Undocumented in a Documentary Society: Textual Borders and Translational Religious Literacies” offers a thorough methodological and analytical



approach to literacy research done with individuals who may be the most marginalized members of society: undocumented immigrants. Vieira's interest is in the operations of transnational literacies in a community of undocumented Brazilian immigrants in a Massachusetts mill town. This article, published in 2011 addresses issues pertaining to the role of writing in undocumented immigrant literacy practices. Vieira published earlier (2010) about similar topics using the same population as the 2011 group. Her research methods are ethnographic and her approach utilizes grounded theory to understand her data. The study design and methods are explicit and clear; she uses literacy-history interviews, extant texts, and ethnographic observation to collect her data (pp. 440-1). Already, in the context of my own research, much of the work that Vieira does will be impossible for me to perform. However, her interest in literacy activities in immigrant communities is what becomes particularly helpful. As the ILGWU's constituency was primarily immigrants, many of whom were young, female, and unable to speak English, the Education Department itself was for many a vehicle of literacy practices that worked to acculturate many members of those communities to American social and civic life.

Vieira's finding regarding the importance of religious literate practices in the undocumented population she works with are particularly interesting once she explores the roles of "Missionary Cards," which are cards that are in some ways certificates of completion of missionary courses. The "papers" that come through these church courses for one of Vieira's subjects, Juliana, "confers liberty and legality, albeit in a limited realm" (p. 452). It makes me ponder how the ILGWU education programs may have offered something similar, although instead of through missionary cards, perhaps through activities pertaining to active union membership, particularly through writing. It may be

difficult to verify this sort of hypothesis. The distance of time between Vieira's more recent subjects and my immigrant subject of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century involves a history of the criminalization of undocumented immigration that is relatively recent. Rather, what is more intriguing is the possibility to understand what Vieira identifies as "how one group's cross-border movement has shaped their literacy practices" (p. 457). In the same way, once I understood the work of the ILGWU, its popularity and importance to its constituents, I understood the importance of how literacy becomes instantiated in that context.

### *Three studies in conversation*

These three papers, while substantively different, help craft the larger essence of my project. First, all three describe tightly defined cases. The chief benefit of this approach rests in its ability to bring a degree of rigor to data collection that prescribes what may or may not be included for analysis. However, Berkenkotter & Hanganu-Bresch, and Enoch are using cases that would not fall under the definition of a case study according to Yin, as these studies focus on historical rather than contemporary events. Yet, I still believe the work of Berkenkotter & Hanganu-Bresch, and Enoch are case-based. Perhaps the difference between a case study and case-based research is not entirely clear. However, I would argue that perhaps Yin is being too narrow in dismissing historical research from his definition of a case study. After all, within Yin's discussion of researchers choosing the boundaries of a case and the units of analysis for data collection for their research, he does not suggest that case study researchers are required to work that is located in a particular temporal context (interviewing participants, for

example) (p. 31). While Yin is otherwise helpful in defining one kind of case study research, the emphasis on the contemporary as slightly confusing as much of his other discussion of case study research does describe research design apparatuses that could be used in historical research.

The reason to hold on to Yin so closely while challenging the definition of his topic is because his work is otherwise helpful in setting up my research design. Yin's thinking about case study research design is the type of theoretical work that scholars in composition and literacy studies need to begin working on as the field expands.

Vieira's work, while an ethnography, offers some further ideas in the area of data collection that I find useful. While much of her work focuses on interviews with undocumented immigrants, she also collects texts that show how her "participant's literacy experience were manifested in their writing" (p. 439). This is useful because it helps to establish the importance of the literacy experience of the participants rather than merely examining the programmatic decision made by administrators. In my case, this would bridge the gap between the students and the Education Department of ILGWU. My data collection should at least have some emphasis on the literacy experiences of students, along with the pedagogical novelty of the program. Vieira's work also utilizes a methodological approach to collecting and coding data, similar to Berkenkotter & Hanganu-Bresch.

Vieira also references her use of Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory, described by Glaser & Strauss (1967), is an approach to social research in which the researcher discovers theory from the data collected. Rather than testing data against an existing hypothesis, Grounded Theory relies upon the recursive analysis of a researcher in finding

theories that emerge in categorizing and coding data. Vieira's use of Grounded Theory provides a potential analytical and coding framework for my own research.

The work that has been done up to now was done to recognize and hopefully untangle the large ball of yarn of historiographic research approaches in composition and literacy research. While past approaches should not necessarily need to commit ceremonial seppuku, the field has changed in such a way that methods once considered preferable are now under standards that are more rigorous. At the least, standards of the past need some revision, and much of this section has gone to great lengths to examine how to bring in new approaches that address the needs of this growing discipline.

The heart of methodological considerations in research design is determining exactly what the researcher is looking for. As I am looking for the ways in which literacy, power, education and economics are constructed in the work of the ILGWU Education Department, my options are somewhat limited. Writing a history of the organization is too sprawling, and as I observed in my discussion regarding Berlin, the field of writing and literacy studies demands a certain amount of rigor in research. With Berlin, and in some part with Enoch, the narrative itself becomes the location of research and the audience is not wholly clued into the operations of what was omitted and what was included. Vieira and Berkenkotter & Hanganu-Bresch introduce the importance of taking careful looks at the artifacts left by subjects; their writings, and when possible, their words. The work of their studies leads me to consider looking at textual artifacts for my research. They are relatively easy to identify and access and may be reduced using a transparent logic. Yet archival research should not merely refer to a method of data collection, it is an understanding that texts from the archived construct a story

themselves, and that the archives themselves, as they are collected, categorized, and accessed compose narratives of their own, which researchers must examine as closely as the texts contained within those archives.

### **Research Design**

The article by Smagorinsky's (2008) mentioned earlier is particularly useful in helping researchers operationalize writing research. I believe the categories he identifies should be addressed in sound social science research design. The structure of these next few pages about research design means to address what Smagorinsky outlines. This section of this chapter explicates the clear design and methodological thinking for this project.

### *Data Collection*

The challenge with doing research that is based in large part upon archival materials is the availability of usable and germane resources. Three archives deal particularly with the ILGWU Education Department. The first is the Tamiment Library and the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives located in the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library at New York University. The second is the Kheel Center in the Catherwood Library at Cornell University. The third is in the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library. These three collections complement each other, but have different materials in their archives.

The Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives contain a large collection of ephemera from the ILGWU Education department. This includes

publications from its printing press, programs, promotional materials, newsletters, songbooks, plays and other documents primarily composed by the Education Department and its students. The materials in this library are generally public; nothing I have seen so far suggests that it is meant for internal review between leaders of the ILGWU. This is an excellent resource for understanding the public operation of the program; the sorts of classes offered, what students read, heard and produced, and how the programs of the Education Department were advertised to its members.

The materials in the Catherwood Library at Cornell University are substantially richer in volume. The Catherwood library contains most of the papers of the important historical figures of the ILGWU. The papers of Union President Benjamin Schlesinger (the president in 1916 when the ILGWU education department was established) are collected, as are those of Luigi Antonini, president of the ILGWU Local 89, a predominantly Italian-speaking membership whose strength allowed Antonini to rise to Vice President of the ILGWU. In my opinion, the most important papers in the Catherwood Library that are helpful to my research about the ILGWU Education Department are those of Fannia Cohn, the long-serving secretary of the Education Department. Her papers include correspondence, speeches, notes, materials from the publication division of the Union, as well as several photographs.

The Manuscript and Archived Division of the New York Public Library also contains papers and photographs of Fannia Cohn. Strangely, the collection of Cohn's papers, especially documents that deal with the ILGWU Educational Department, does not overlap significantly with the papers from the Catherwood Library. The notes on the collections and the archivist were unable to explain why these two collections are split

between two institutions. The documents complement the research and still provide important artifacts for understanding the ILGWU Educational Department.

### *Data Reduction*

Smagorinsky explains that a “researcher’s task is to take this amorphous mass of data and reduce it to something comprehensible and useful” (p. 397). This will, in essence, put the borders around my work that will give it some distinguishable shape. The nature of critical discourse analysis makes an extremely close and thoughtful examination of texts that confines researchers to a small corpus to study. Just as Berkenkotter and Hanganu-Bresch choose to focus their research on just a few patient case documents, I will use a few documents meant for mass consumption that were produced by the ILGWU Education Department for worker-members. These documents were called “An Announcement of Courses Given in Workers’ University,” course catalogues of sorts, (although it was not as explicitly named such in later iterations). One of the challenges of doing archival research is the sometimes-fickle nature of finding materials that are both germane and available. Although the ILGWU’s most influential period happened relatively recently in American history (80-70 years ago), not all of the materials from the organization have been carefully archived and catalogued. With regard to the course catalogues, I have collected these documents from the 1923-4, 1929-30, and 1934-5 “seasons” of the program. The earliest document is from the program’s seventh season during the fifth year when the influential Fannia Cohn served as the education secretary. The 1929-30 season offers a snapshot of the program just before the great stock market crash of October 1929. The 1934-5 season marks the beginning of the resurgence of the

Union during the Great Depression, which saw an influx of students and funding.<sup>3</sup> While many other time periods may be chosen for this research, it is important to keep a relatively tight case as too many pages of data may make explaining the novelty or importance of my findings convoluted.

This research does not look for findings that are generalizable or necessarily representative of what happened in other years. While I approach the research with more questions than conclusions, my research does not assume to tell the tale of how education programs outside the ILGWU, even at the same time and in the same sort of situation (although there were none) might have operated. Yet it is still important for a researcher to tell the audience what sort of population and data was available.

I choose these “course catalogues” because they are a part of the interactions between member-workers and the administration of the union. In theory, they will exhibit the political and economic objectives of the ILGWU through its vocabulary and approach to constructing a popular text. The subject matter of the “course catalogues” is education, and all of the texts explain the importance of education to democracy, the labor movement, as well as for workers themselves.

Another large component of these archives is a robust collection of course outlines composed by instructors to be handed out to students. In the many folders of these course outlines, only one document addresses the topic of teaching English in one handwritten-page (unsigned and undated). This document outlines approaches to teaching English, particularly writing, and lists three texts that will complement the course. This discovery deserves special inclusion, as it is possible to get a sense of when the text was

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<sup>3</sup>In 1934, the Executive Council increased the funding for the Education department to \$100,000. In 1916, when the program had started in earnest, just \$5,000 was appropriated (Goslin, 1938).



written, and it gives clues into the place of literacy in the administration of the educational department.

With artifacts identified and reduced to manageable units of artifacts for analysis, this research begins to take shape. “Placing brackets” (so-to-speak) around the artifacts gives the project the semblance of a case study as described earlier. What follows also draws upon some of the same theoretical constructs of case study research methods, but is distinctive in its utilization of archives as the locus of research. To this end, the research method components described here may be expended upon to develop a novel approach to rigorous archival and historiographic research in literacy.

### *Coding Data*

Data coding, for Smagorinsky, “makes evident the theoretical approach used to analyze the data...coding manifests what theory would say about data and makes the researcher’s theoretical perspective on the corpus explicit” (p. 401). In this project, the theoretical approach draws upon Brandt’s work on “sponsors of literacy.” The framework of coding the data relies on *who* the sponsors of literacy are, *what* relationship they have to the worker-students in this context, and *how* the values of the sponsors of literacy influence literacy acquisition. This relies on a close analysis of text in connection with the settings of the text.

This coding approach is meant to “explicate the stance and interpretative approach that the researcher brings to the data” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 401). Indeed, coding also explains how my ultimate data analysis is connected to the theoretical concerns discussed earlier in this project. This project utilizes Brandt’s theories of

sponsors of literacy as a way to examine literacy practices and the coding categories reflect the importance of that work in the way the data is understood and later analyzed.

Others may approach the same set of data with a different theoretical approach (and necessarily a different coding schema) and come up with different conclusions from the ones I draw. Yet, as Smagorinsky points out, “The development of these categories is not, from my theoretical perspective, a vehicle for producing a static representation of reality. Rather, it is to align my analysis with my motivating theory in ways that make my own subjectivity in relation to the data clear and unambiguous.” (p. 402) An earlier part of this chapter charged that archival and historiographic research tends not to concern itself with replication and charges of subjectivity. Smagorinsky’s call for coding explication helps to assuage such concerns by making the subjectivity of the research both explicit and rooted in particular theoretical approaches that future scholars can examine and critique.

My coding approach for this topic draws from Grounded Theory, but it is not an application of Grounded Theory in the strict sense. My coding schematic is not inductive to the text, but inspired by how Grounded Theory organizes categories. My decision to look to Grounded Theory to structure this sort of textual analysis comes from observing the success Vieira found in using it for her own materials. The coding approach for this research follows from Strauss’ (1987) thorough discussion of coding and Grounded Theory. The coding for this research relies on four categories and eleven codes that emerged from data collection. The categories are my own revision of Strauss’ suggested “coding paradigm.” I adjust the titles of the coding categories to address my research interest better:

Table 1: Strauss' "coding paradigm" revised	
Strauss' (1987) "coding paradigm" pp. 27-8	This study
Conditions	Stated rhetorical concerns
Interactions among actors	Social dynamics
Strategies and tactics	Language Issues and Representations
Consequences	Defining literacy

The categories and codes are overlapping—some passages apply to different codes or categories. Given the concision demanded of the genre of course announcements, some sentences and phrases must perform a variety of textual functions. The emphasis of the categories is to identify the function of the text while the code should describe how that function is performed by the text. For example, one category identifies the context of a passage while its code narrows in on how the text operates within this category. Table 2 provides an example of this:

Table 2: Categories, Codes, and Examples		
Category	Code	Example
Social dynamics	Responsibilities of the teacher	"Classroom instruction in the theory of the art [of speech-making] will be restricted to brief explanations and criticisms" (1921)
	Responsibilities of the student	"The student will be expected to work up the theory for himself by faithfully following text-book assignments." (1921)

The codes in Table 2 emerge from sketching out the interactions between different individuals in the classroom. I focus on the classroom here because this is where students

most often interface with the educational program. The category, in this case, identifies the interactions between students and teachers while distinguishing the presence of power dynamics between each.

After spending some time with the materials available from the archives, I worked out the following categories, codes, and definitions for how my coding system would operate. The formation of the categories and codes are informed by my research questions, however, the first research question, “How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department ?” both the largest and most complex, relies upon the many categories and codes that answer the two other research questions. For this reason, most of the categories specifically address the other two questions.

Unlike Table 2, Table 3 does not offer specific examples, but lays out the theory behind each code. I provide examples in the next chapter after I identify the findings in the archives. I created the codes listed here in response to how I saw the texts fitting into the categories I identified in Table 1.

Table 3: Categories, Codes, and Definitions		
Category	Code	Definition
Stated rhetorical concerns	Institutional concerns	References to reasons pertaining to the institution’s (and Sponsors of Literacy) interests in literacy instruction.
	Individual/student concerns	References to individual student interests, reasons, and in motivations in attending the course.
Social dynamics	Objectives of Educational Department	References to the objectives of the educational program in student learning.
	Objectives of broader ILGWU	References to the objectives of the ILGWU in student learning.

	Responsibilities of the teacher	References to specific role of teacher instruction in the classroom.
	Responsibilities of the student	References to specific role of student behavior and expectations in the classroom.
Language issues	Representation of non-English languages	Portions of the text that are in or mention languages other than English.
	Meta-representations of English	Portions of text dealing specifically with teaching and learning of English.
Defining literacy	Representations of speaking	References and definitions of speech and speech-making.
	Representations of reading	References and definitions of reading.
	Representations of writing	References and definitions of writing.

These categories and codes at times overlap, yet at other times there may be no data to share in the category at all—an interesting predicament wherein absence becomes an important and perhaps illuminating component of the answer to the research questions.

Because Grounded Theory presents theory and coding emerging from collected data, the next chapter includes the coding and passages from each text that represent these codes. Because of the nature of this research, the coding focuses narrowly on addressing the research questions at hand, and I use some latitude in fitting passages into some codes. For instance, none of the materials I reviewed explicitly defines literacy the way a dictionary might. However, the texts perpetuate a particular view about literacy that ends up instantiating the term in a particular context. Why not just call this category “instantiating literacy?” My decision to use the word “defining” operates to deal with the lasting consequence of how the texts represent literacy. “Instantiating” something is

temporary; the word references the use of something as an example. While in the context of this study I am using examples, I believe the consequences of these examples of literacy is a representation of what literacy was, is, and could be to those who encountered the texts. I make this distinction in my coding approach so my data analysis may represent how I understand the texts as I interpret them, rather than using my analysis to argue for decisions I made in coding.

### *Data Analysis*

The analysis of the documents identified operates in two ways; first, the analysis describes the texts for their characteristics in-text. This is without the benefit of historical context and emphasizes the ways language, writing, and literacy appears individually. The next step in analysis is to examine the texts in context with each other. This includes looking for contrasts and continuity in attitudes toward the coded data. The next level of analysis takes the context of the writing into account, including triangulating sources from other documents and research. Each step along the way reveals a more complete understanding of the primary artifacts and how they help inform literacy theory. To this end, the coding schema described in the previous section offers a heuristic through which the sample of texts may be understood, both illuminating and organizing the contents of the texts.

The final unit of analysis applies the findings about the artifacts and reflects upon how those findings inform and develop theory regarding sponsors of literacy and larger issues in literacy research. This is more of a conclusion than an analysis, although the conclusion is informed by the aforementioned theoretical foundation of this research. It

may be easy to allow conclusions to take their own form, away from the theory that has worked through the rest of the project. Indeed, there will be space to address tangents and ephemera that naturally come up in large research projects, but the final move of analysis is in applying the findings to inform and develop literacy theory.

The presentation of the analysis in this paper represents these analytical moves simultaneously to assist with the ease of reading repetitive information, as well as aligning the texts with the timeline of events in the Educational Department's history.

### *The context of the investigation*

There are, in essence, two contexts. First is my investigation; where issues of education, literacy, immigration, and labor to give me tools to develop research approaches to these issues. Of course, the context of the ILGWU's Educational Department itself is more important for the coding and analyzing data. Important is how the actors in it operated the education department at a time when Federal efforts to limit immigration from Asia and southern Europe and new labor laws in the wake of the Triangle Fire directly impacted the union's operations. I explained the context of my interest in this research in Chapter 1, and discussed some of the theoretical issues pertaining to literacy, rhetoric and writing in chapters two and three. Chapter 4 discussed the history of the pre-1940s ILGWU as it pertains to literacy instruction. As Smagorinsky observes, "The problem is that there is a whole lot of culture, and a whole lot of history, for each person involved in social science research, and so paring it down to something manageable and relevant, without shortchanging what matters, is a tremendously vexing job" (p. 404). With that in mind, I offered a thorough yet manageable overview of the

ILGWU during one of its most prosperous and politically active times. My goal was to offer enough that helps explain the political efforts of the Union to illuminate my results and analysis.

### **Limitations of this Research Method**

This research approach is not without some limitations. First, my research will focus on the way the institution that created the course announcements interpreted and reflected its own understanding of exegeses important to students (and itself). To this end, I may expect to observe little in the way of a direct discussion regarding the economic realities of students. In one sense, I would expect the writers of the course announcements to use their knowledge of student economic realities as a component of a rhetorical approach to encouraging participation in the educational programing. Whether or not the writers adapt such a rhetorical approach, while creating difficulties for answering research question number 3 would nonetheless illuminate something about the writers' own approach to this sort of text, which is still significant in the scope of this study.

The scope of this study, with five texts spanning eighteen years to help explore a twenty-five year history of language instruction, can only offer glimpses into the operation of the educational programing. The selection of materials represents a judgment call on my part after examining and assessing all of the documents I had at my disposal for this research. As a collective corpus, the course announcements are the closest thing to a unified type of text that is available for analysis. Letters, reports, memos, and course outlines were too difficult to rely upon because I could not explain a logic regarding the



gaps among like documents. In the case of the ILGWU, the years of internal division from the late 1920s into the 1930s, and the cessation of most of the International's social programming explains the gap in resources. The fickle nature of archival research is such that limitations in resources need to be worked through, not around. I hope that my brief history of the ILGWU's educational program assuages the concerns of readers worried that the gap in materials represents something other than an institutional issue within the International, and not a weak corpus.

As this study focuses on a small collection of texts from eighty years ago, I would be remiss to suggest that these texts speak to the individual understanding of what literacy is amongst individuals in the International. While the course announcements are corporate documents, I cannot suggest that it is illustrative of how individuals working with the educational programming felt about literacy. This is why my emphasis is on what the *documents* represent, and how they reflect *institutional* concerns. While I could find no rough drafts or letters containing discussions about how the educational department composed the Course Announcements, the length, professional printing, and wide distribution of these documents suggest to me that at least a few eyes edited or responded to the texts before publication. The limitation of working with a few published pieces of text is that I cannot postulate much about their editing or production, and so I cannot endeavor to look for negotiations of meaning, especially with regard to the meaning of literacy, between those who wrote these texts. I can only take the texts at their face value.

The final limitation is that my use of Grounded Theory in archival research is, to my knowledge at least, untested in Writing Studies research. To this end, this study is more than an exploration of how literacy becomes defined in the context of the case I

choose; this study is also a foray into an uncharted methodological ground. This means that any flaws overlooked in constructing this research design reflects upon the quality of my research. While I like the idea that this sort of project can help me think through the strengths and weaknesses of a relatively new approach to archival research, I also know that using this text as a laboratory may compromise some of my analysis. This, I fear is the most difficult limitation to face, as I cannot assess the success of my research design until well after I finish the research.

Limitations are a part of research design, and researchers cognizant of the limitations of their study can only seek to become emboldened by the prospect that the study is important, illuminating, interesting, and advances the body of knowledge about their subjects in spite of these limitations.

### **Looking Ahead**

This chapter explored the methodological concerns I encountered in designing a research approach to the work of the ILGWU's Educational Department. The first portion of this chapter reflected upon how other scholars, particularly James Berlin, dealt with archival materials. Unsatisfied with those approaches, I outline what I feel is missing from research that utilizes archives and went on to examine texts that I believe exemplify good research that is germane to my study. Drawing upon inspiration from those studies, I report my research approach, spending time to address each of the categories Smagorinsky (2008) identifies.

Considering what I have written for these past few pages in mind, my intention in this chapter was not to run a long list of research conducted or to restate philosophies of

research done by others. Rather, I intended to bring as much transparency to my thinking, particularly in theories and in my methodological practices that inform my research approaches. I hope to have a readership whose questions about my research go more fulfilled than unfulfilled in my writing. For the next chapter, I set the research component aside and move on to the important task of describing the materials I collected in archives throughout the state of New York that deal with the Educational Department of the ILGWU until 1939.

## Chapter 5: Description of Materials Collected

This section describes the general qualities of the four “Announcement of Courses” pamphlets I analyze for this project, and then partitions the texts according to the categories and coding schema described in Chapter 4. In this way, it is possible to get a sense of the course announcements as text and understand their general qualities that inform how different sections are broken down into the coding schematics. Not everything in the description of the texts are meant to reflect something that will be coded—some descriptions are meant to give a sense of what sort of information is generally in the course announcements. Other passages give a sense of what is *around* the coded materials, describing to the complexity of the texts themselves. This chapter closes with some general observations about the texts that might go unnoticed in the coding phase. This demonstrates how I prepare the text for analysis in the next chapter.

As I stated earlier, there are seven announcements available through the archives I examined ranging from 1921, and 1923 through 1925, and then from 1937-1939. The two archives are oddly consistent in the lack of materials from between 1926 and 1936. This eleven-year drought may be explained in a few ways. First, the materials may come from the same collection. This seems unlikely, as one collection (from the Wagner Archives at New York University) contains ephemera and documents collected from the long history of the ILGWU (some of its materials go as far as the 1970s, and the other collection (from the Cohn papers at Cornell) is from a personal collection. There is little to say about the gap save for its consistency in both collections. This points to a limitation of archival research more than anything else, but the consistency of absence is noteworthy. I will not hypothesize what happened to these eleven years’ worth of documents; such

conjecture is outside the scope of this research. Instead, I am interested in the texts scholars are left with, as well ancillary resources that shed light on the texts available. All of the documents were taken as photographs on an iPad 2 or an iPhone 4 in May 2012. I present images from the 1921 Course Announcement to offer an example of how some the text appeared on the pages.

The structure of this chapter will be as follow: each Course Announcement will be described on its own, observing instances where the documents state objectives of the workers' education program, shows attention to its own rhetorical situation with respect to audience, as well as formal features. The five documents come from 1921, 1923, 1925, 1937, and 1939. Naturally, the longest description will be of the 1921 document. The 1937 and 1939 documents are both noticeably brief, and so their descriptions will not require the same amount of depth, although their brevity itself is telling.

### **1921 Course Announcements**

The 1921 course announcement brochure is a sixteen-page booklet. The cover is simple, undecorated and utilitarian in its presentation as shown in Figure 1:

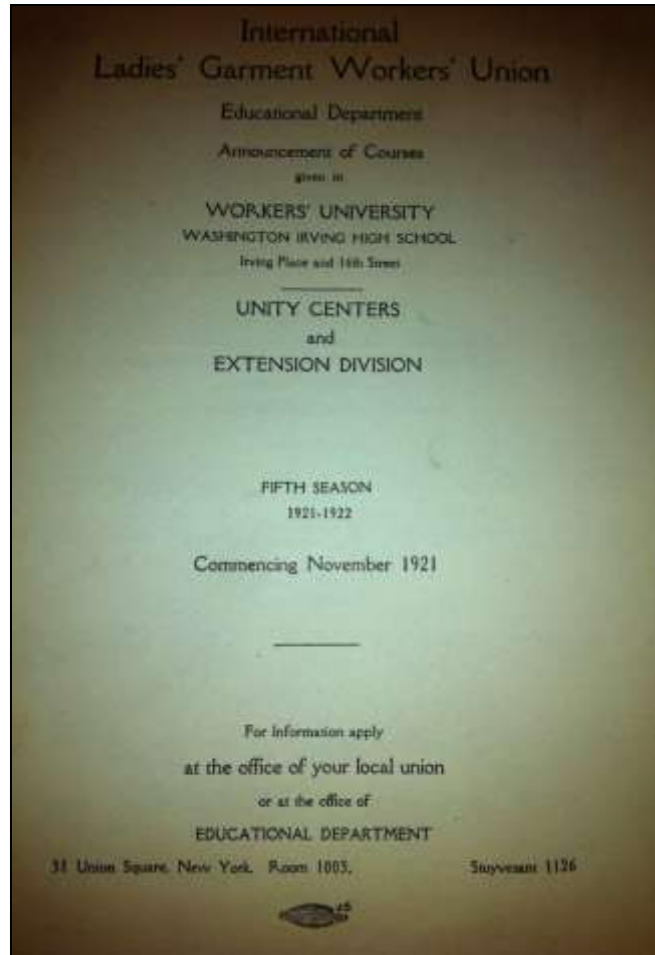


Figure 1: Cover of the 1921 Course Announcement

The first interior page (on the other side of the cover) contains a short three-line epitaph at the top of the page:

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Ignorance is essential to industrial slavery

Education, cooperation and organization is essential to institutional democracy [sic]

Below this epitaph is an acknowledgement of the officers of the union, its education committee, and the members of the Executive Committee of Faculty.

The third page opens with a statement of Aims for the education department. It reads:

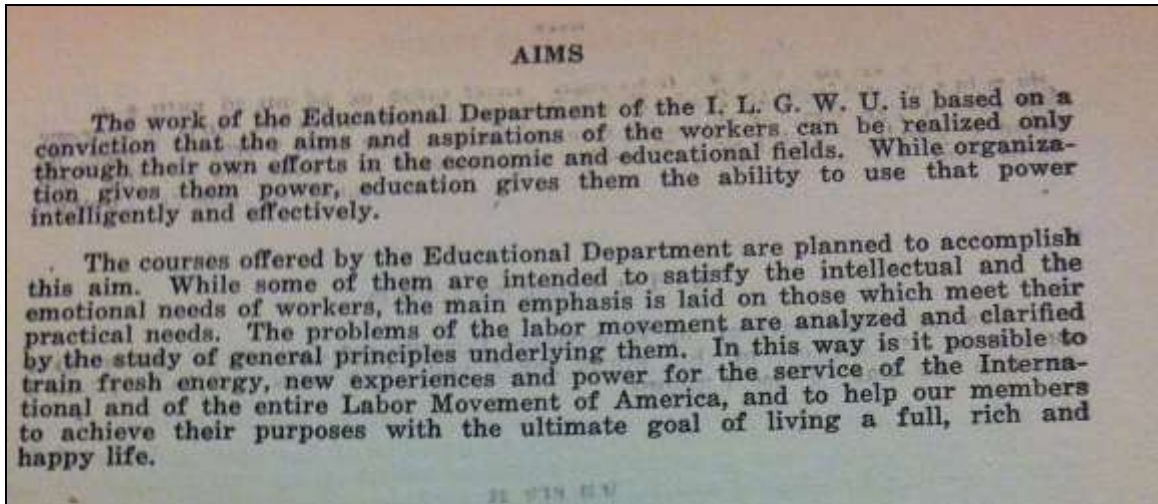


Figure 2: Aims Section from 1921 Course Announcements

The next section offers a brief, 4-line history of the Educational Department, mentioning that it was organized in 1916 and that an annual expenditure of \$15,000 was authorized at the 1920 convention. This is followed by an explanation of the administrative structure of the Educational Committee. The final section explains the Activities of the Educational Committee. There are three groups of educational activities the Education Department conducts, each identified through *where* the activities occur.

First, there is the Unity Center, essentially eight public school buildings throughout the City of New York utilized by the ILGWU after regular school hours. The brochure explains that the Unity Centers provide three sorts of instructions:

1. English, arithmetic, history, civics and physical training. The teachers of these subjects are assigned by the Board of Education.<sup>4</sup>
2. Classes in the History of the Labor Movement, History, Organization and Problems in Trade Unionism in America and Europe, with special reference to the I. L. G. W. U., Applied Economics, Applied

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<sup>4</sup> As referenced in chapter 4, assumedly the New York City Board of Education, not the ILGWU committee.

Psychology, Appreciation of Music, etc... This work is arranged and controlled by the Educational Department of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

3. Instruction in hygiene is given by lecturers assigned by the Bureau of Industrial Hygiene of the Board of Health.

The following page continues by identifying the second location where educational activities occur, the "Workers' University:"

The Workers' University consists of classes which meet chiefly on Saturday Afternoons and Sunday Mornings. Instruction of advanced nature will be given in such subjects as Trade Union Policies, Labor Problems, Current Economic Literature, Problems of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Applied Psychology and Logic, Training of Speakers and Teachers for the Labor Movement, Literature, Public Speaking, Social and Industrial History, Co-operative Movement and others.

The third and final location, "The Extension Division," is described as "courses given to groups of members of the International, and of lectures and talks given at business meeting of local unions." Important to note is that "These [courses] are planned to reach as many as possible of the rank and file of the organization. They are given in the language which is best understood by the groups. English, Yiddish and Italian are employed."

The next section describes "Outlines," reading, "Complete outlines of each lesson are used as a work of reference and at the end of the term constitutes a syllabus of the course." It is difficult to ascertain the breadth of this statement. Does this apply as well to



the courses offered at the Unity Centers where the teachers are provided by the Board of Education? In examining the archives myself, I have found course outlines similar to what is described here and from roughly the same time, but these were clearly for the sorts of courses provided by the ILGWU Education Department. For that purpose, I will assume that all references to outlines are of ILGWU-run courses.

The next section is a two-line statement explaining that admission is free for members of the ILGWU, and that workers from other unions may be admitted at the request of their union. There is then a statement about books for reference and study being provided by the Educational Department at a reduced fee. The end of this page states that the opening exercises of the Workers' University will be held on Saturday evening, November 19, 1921.

Worth noting at this point is that the Workers' University is located at Washington Irving High School in Manhattan. The address appears on the cover page of the brochure. Washington Irving is located at 16<sup>th</sup> and Irving just a few blocks away from Union Square. The office of the Educational Department itself is at 3 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, just a few blocks on the opposite side of Union Square from Washington Irving High School. This would be 12 blocks north of Washington Square where ten years earlier the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire occurred, and about a mile and a half from the Lower East Side where twenty years earlier a high concentration of Italian and Jewish Immigrants had formed neighborhoods. Just fifty years earlier, Theodore Roosevelt and his family lived just four blocks north of Washington Irving High School. The geography of where the Workers' University is tells a tale of movement by working-class immigrants northward into midtown Manhattan, and would have proved a difficult place to reach for the

increasing numbers of immigrants moving to the Williamsburg and Greenpoint neighborhoods in Brooklyn, just across the East River. The Unity Centers were spread throughout Manhattan (3 locations), the Bronx (3 locations), and Brooklyn (2 locations) and are listed on the back page of the brochure.

The next page of the brochure describes the courses available at the Workers' University. I will not go into detail with these entries unless there are issues germane to the teaching of English literacy. However, I will briefly list these courses for reference, omitting full descriptions:

- I. Labor and Unionism
  1. The Policies of the American Trade Unions
- II. Applied Economics
  1. Current Economic Literature
- III. Social and Industrial History
  1. Social and Industrial Labor History of Europe and America
  2. Social and Industrial History of the U.S.
- IV. The Co-operative Movement
  1. The Co-operative Movement
- V. Applied Psychology
  1. Applied Psychology and Logic
- VI. Literature
  1. Tendencies in Modern Literature
- VII. English
  1. Public Speaking
- VIII. The Psychology of Trade Union Organization
- IX. Current Economic Opinion
- X. Economic Geography
- XI. Sociology

From this list, there are a few noteworthy descriptions. The "Current Economic Literature" course explains it will be "A study of recent important books on current economic and labor problems. These books will be summarized and discussed by the class." Likewise, the "Tendencies in Modern Literature" reads that it will involve "Study and appreciation of such recent German novelists and dramatists as: Hauptmann,

Sundermann, Wedekind, Wassermann, and Schnitzler. This to be followed by a consideration of great American writers, both younger and older, such as Poe, Walt Whitman and Mark Twain as well as Sinclair Lewis, Floyd Dell and Eugene O’Neill.” These two courses (and the Public speaking course, which I will get to shortly) are the only two courses that suggest students will be required to read literature. Other courses describe “study and analysis/appreciation,” and another goes so far as to list books that will “assist” the instructor’s work, but none makes clear the expectation of reading as clearly as these two courses.

There is little to find about the listed instructor of the literature course, B. J. R. Stolper. In 1939 he published a book called *Integration at Work, Six Greek Cities: An Experience with Social Studies, Literature and Art in the Modern High School*. This was published by Columbia University through the Bureau of Publication in the Teacher’s College. In 1969, Stolper published a book about Stephen Crane through Columbia University Press. Beyond this there is little to glean from his background.

The public speaking course appears as shown in Figure 3.

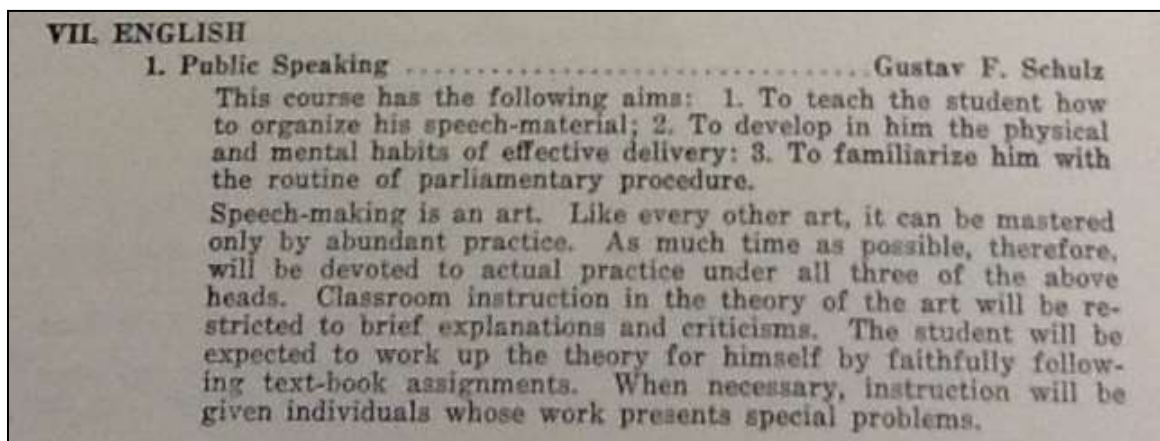


Figure 3: Public Speaking Course Description in the 1921 Course Announcement

The course announcement states that the instructor for the public speaking course is Gustav F. Schulz. Professor Schulz was affiliated with the City College in New York City, with an obituary in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* stating that at the time of his death in 1951 he had been associated with the college for “over fifty years.” While the obituary acknowledges his participation in a Veteran’s Affairs program to help train returning World War II veterans in public speaking, it is mute on the topic of his work with the Workers’ University (p. 122). Professor Schulz did not publish widely, although does appear in some acknowledgments of books and journals.

There are several courses listed to be given in Unity Centers. Again, I will not summarize all of the courses, but I will briefly list them for reference:

- I. Labor and Unionism
  1. History of the Labor Movement in the U.S.
  2. Current Economic and Labor Problems
  3. Trade Unionism in the U.S.
- II. Applied Economics
  1. Economic Problems and the Worker
  2. How Man Makes a Living
- III. Applied Psychology
  1. Social Application of Psychology
- IV. English
  1. Classes in Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced English
  2. High School English and Public Speaking
- V. Courses in U. S. History and Arithmetic
- VI. Health
- VII. Physical training
- VIII. Music
  1. Understanding Music

The course descriptions in this section are briefer than those in the Workers’ University section. The section on English explains no more about the courses than I already described beside mentioning that the Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced English classes are held three evenings a week at all Unity Centers, and that the High School

English and Public Speaking courses are held four evenings per week at all Unity Centers. The last note about the English courses is that the teachers are arranged by the Board of Education. Up to the English courses, all of the other course descriptions included the name of the instructor after the course title. This is probably because the course was particularly popular with its mostly foreign-born students. Fannia Cohn writes in 1921 that up to 40 teachers handled these classes.

The last section of the English portion of the Course Announcement shares the courses in the Extension Division.

- I. Courses
  1. History of the American Labor Movement
  2. The English and French Labor Movement
  3. Current Problems and Tendencies of the Labor Movement with Special Reference to the I. L. G. W. U.
  4. The Methods of Trade Unionism in America
  5. The Evolution of the Industry
- II. Talks to Be Given at Business Meetings of Local Unions on current economic and labor problems and on hygiene by a prominent speaker.
- III. Training of Speakers for the Labor Movement.

Before I delve deeper into the last course, it is worthy to note that under each of the course descriptions under section I was not only an identified instructor, but also a note stating which languages in which these courses were conducted. Courses 1-3 are described as “In Yiddish and English.” Course 4 is listed as “In Yiddish.” Course 5 has no designation. This will be an important distinction shortly, but for now, I will return to section III of the Extension Courses.

The “Training of Speakers for the Labor Movement” course is taught by Alexander Fichandler, the Educational Director of the Educational Committee of the ILGWU. The description of the course is presented through Figure 4:

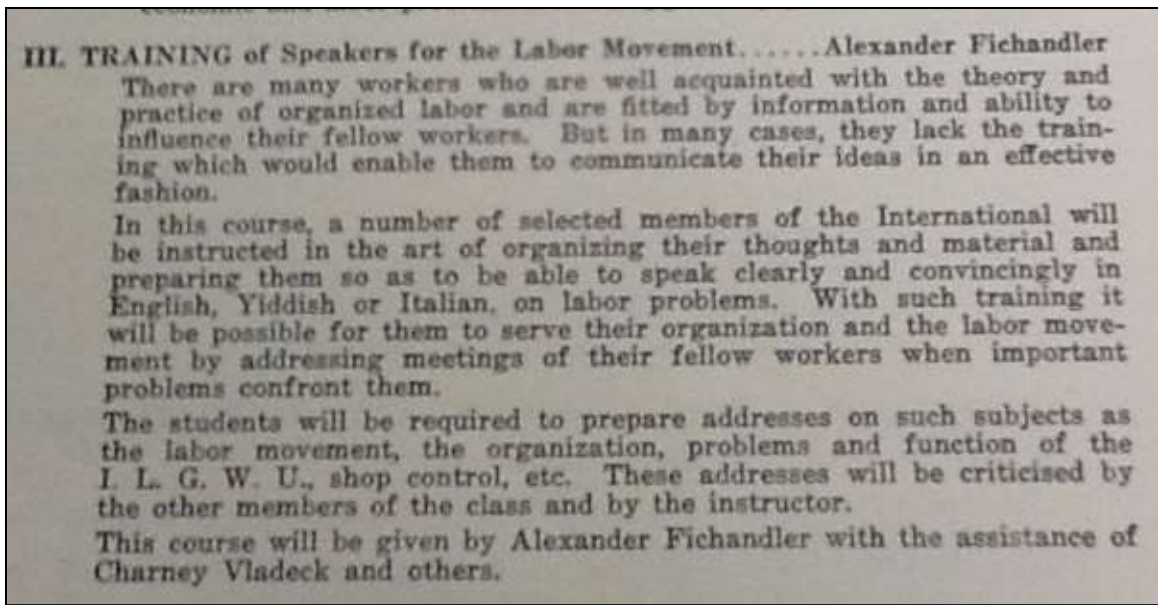


Figure 4: Description of Training of Speakers for the Labor Movement course in the 1921 Course Announcement

The page also makes clear that the extension courses would be important for members who wish to hold leadership positions within the Union, such as shop leaders, committee members and so forth.

The following page is written entirely in Italian. It seems to carry over from the “Extension Division” section, although it does not make any explicit statement connecting the two sections. The page begins with a literal Italian translation of the course description of “The Story of the Labor Movement in America” [Storia del Movimento del Lavoro Americano]. It is nearly identical to the summary written two pages earlier. The next entry is a similarly translated description of “The Evolution of the Industry” [Evoluzione dell’ Industria], a nearly identical description to what comes a page earlier. Beneath this is a description of the work of the main Extension Course listed two pages earlier, translated into Italian. Figure 5 is a photograph of the Italian page:

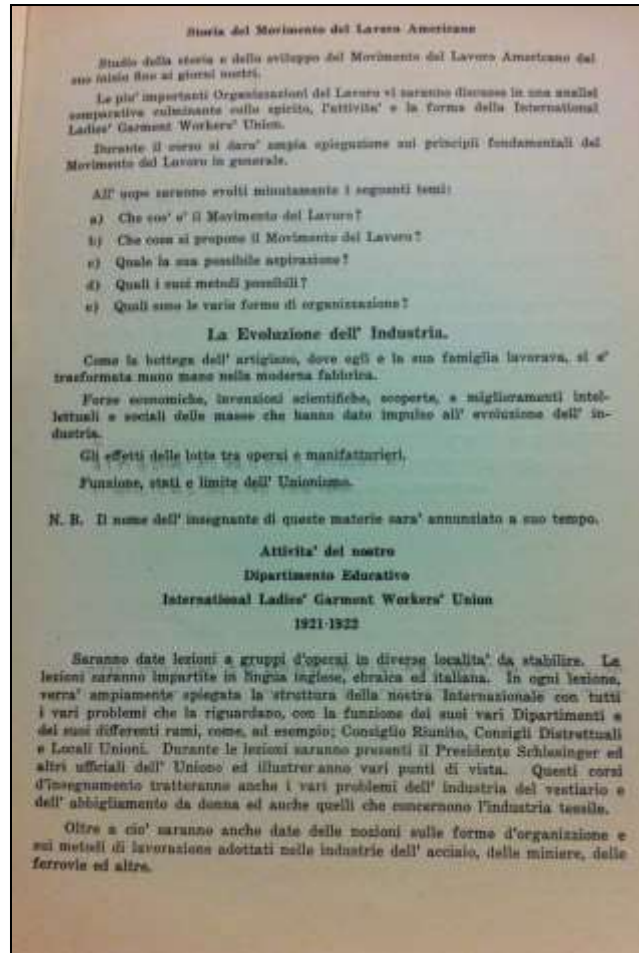


Figure 5: Italian Page from the 1921 Course Announcement

This is the only page in Italian. It is followed by four pages of text in Yiddish. The placement of the Yiddish at the end of the volume is appropriate considering the correct way of reading Yiddish. One opens a book from left to right and the text is read from right-to-left (the opposite of most European languages). As I cannot read Yiddish, I will not attempt to corroborate the language choices as they correspond to the English.

The final page, and back of the booklet, is a list of the Unity Centers throughout New York City. The locations are in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. Figure 6 shows how this page appears:

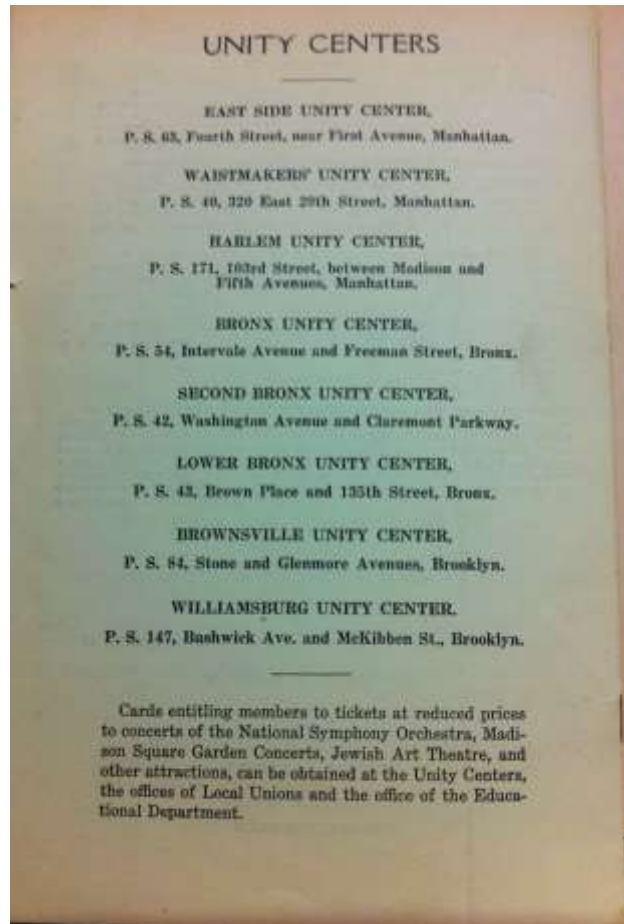


Figure 6: Back page of Course Announcement showing locations of Unity Centers

## 1923

At 32 pages, the 1923 Course Description booklet for the ILGWU is twice as long as its 16-page 1921 edition. The cover is much the same but now includes an emblem on the cover of an open book and a lit lamp (one that looks much like a genie's lamp from Arabic folklore) and the words "Knowledge is Power" around it.

The next page has a brief description of the work of the ILGWU Educational Department. The first paragraph describes the convictions and aims of the department. The second paragraph broadly speaks of the courses the department offers. The third paragraph is a literal Italian translation of the first paragraph. This is followed by an



acknowledgement of the President and Secretary Treasurer of the International and then the members of the Educational Committee.

The next page contains a Forward about the educational department. Unlike starting with the Aims as in the 1921 booklet, this Forward speaks generally about the philosophy of the ILGWU educational activities. It is also much about the general philosophy of the union itself. The second paragraph of the Forward reads:

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was practically the first labor organization in America to recognize the truth that in addition to providing for economic needs of its members, a Labor Union has other functions; among the most important of these, is that of providing for their spiritual needs.

With a mostly Jewish and large Catholic contingent, the "spiritual needs" are probably not meant as *religious*. The next two paragraphs clarify the "spiritual" angle:

Education is the mighty lever with which humanity has been raised from primitive savagery to its present state. An Education will be one of the most potent means by which humanity will be raised to a still higher level, where joy and happiness will fill the life of all men, women and children.

The function of Labor Education is to assist in the all-important task of making our world a better place for all to live in. The truth is clear to all intelligent workers, that it is the mission of the workers themselves to abolish the inequities and injustices under which they suffer, and that it is only through organization that they can accomplish this aim. But it is equally clear that economic strength is much more effective if directed by intelligent, well informed, clear thinking men and women.

The rest of the forward contains similar language and expresses similar sentiment. It touts the creation of “new and true social and spiritual values” and training leaders in the union through the education program.

The Forward also noticeably draws attention to the novelty of its own existence. It repeats the assertion that the education program put on by the ILGWU is one-of-a-kind, and even frames the program as an “experiment for the entire American Labor Movement.” The Forward suggests that the curriculum has changed since the program’s inception, and that the final success of this sort of program cannot be judged too soon, but the fact that other labor schools are emerging elsewhere there is some currency to the notion that the ILGWU program is something special.

Following the Forward is a brief history narrative of the ILGWU Education Department. The History mentions that the 1922 Convention authorized an annual contribution of \$17,500 for the next two years of the program, a \$2,500 increase from the 1920 convention as reported in the 1921 Course Announcement.

The next topic of the booklet is the Administration, which is similar to the 1921 Course Announcement. This is followed by the description of activities such as the Unity Center, Workers’ University, and Extension Division (all mentioned in the 1921 Course Announcement) as well as “Out of Town Activities,” “Music and Drama,” “Books,” and “Outlines.” “Books” and “Outlines” were mentioned in the 1921 Course Description, but “Out of Town Activities” and “Music and Drama” are new to this section. The “Out of Town Activities” are described as “Educational Activities conducted by Local Unions in Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia and other cities are under the general direction of the

Educational Department.” “Music and Drama” refers to special ticket prices to performances of plays and symphonies.

The next section of the Course Announcement is in Italian. It is a verbatim copy of the last two paragraphs on the page in Italian in the 1921 course guide. This is notable because in the 1921 course guide, the section in Italian was a literal translation of a description that had come two pages earlier. In the 1923 context, on page 8 of the booklet, the description is isolated from other courses. The same information is made available on page 24 in English (Course No. 34).

Starting on page 9 the Course Announcement booklet starts to announce courses. This is noticeably different in structure from the 1921 edition because the courses are organized along the lines of a particular course number, much like a college course number, rather than through Roman and Arabic numeral-based outlines. Pages 9 through 25 list 38 courses across the three earlier identified “Activities” of the Educational Department (Workers’ University, Unity Centers, and Extension Division). I will not produce an itemized list of what occurs here, as much of it is similar to the 1921 edition, and many of the descriptions are not germane to the inquiry of this project. However, I will make some observations that are important to my analysis later.

The courses listed in the Workers’ University section are more verbosely described in the 1923 edition than the 1921 edition. The section describes 14 courses, almost of which have listed instructors and clear objectives. There is once again a literature course, this time titled “Social Forces in Contemporary Literature in English,” which again places its focus on radical authors and reporters, as the 1921 course.

Course No. 13. English, once again, does not show the same sort of in-depth description as the other courses. The course is the Public Speaking class that was described in the 1921 booklet. Even more noticeable is that the text used to describe this course is verbatim the same as what showed up two years earlier. The only difference between the two editions is the lack of an identified instructor. 1921 reported Gustav F. Schulz as the instructor, 1923 reports no official instructor. While the other entries have been revised, expanded, and in any cases courses were added to the program, the English course remains the same verbatim.

The second section of the 1923 course announcement, which focuses on Unity Centers, also has expanded course offerings (Courses 15-24) and while many of the courses and descriptions have changed in some way, Course No. 21, English, changed only in its offering. The High School English course that was offered four times per week in the 1921 Course Description is absent now. While I am not interested in providing an analysis of this decision, I would acknowledge that since these courses were led by teachers provided by the Board of Education, there is a possibility that the ILGWU had no choice to keep the course due to some sort of cutback by the Board (which is not to propose there is evidence to suggest such a cutback). Yet, the Educational Committee also acknowledged that 1923's budget saw an increase in its allotment from the International by \$2,500 from 1921 levels. With added revenue, it would be difficult to comprehend that the High School English program was redacted due to budgetary reasons. What happened here is one of the earliest questions I asked as I entered this research, and I have found nothing yet to offer a satisfactory answer. When I consider the reported popularity of English-language courses, the omission of this course is even more

perplexing. Perhaps the course was subsumed into one of the other English courses described in the same line. The answer remains elusive.

The Unity Center Courses on Civics, Health, and Physical Training remain in the catalog under the same verbatim descriptions as the 1921 Course Announcement.

The next section describes the Extension Division courses. As with the sections before, the course offerings have been expanded. Like the 1921 Course announcements, the most of the courses list both instructors as well as available languages of instruction. There is an addition of instruction in Russian in a new course, “Industrial Hygiene.” Another noticeable difference is the renaming of the 1921 course “Training of Speakers for the Labor Movement” to “Training for Active Service in the Trade Union Movement.” Apart from the change in the title of the course, the course description closely, although not verbatim, follows the premises of the 1921 description: the goal is to train speakers who can go forth and speak on labor problems. The change of “Speakers” to “Active Service” does not translate to any substantive change in description, although the choice to change the wording of the title of the course is still interesting.

The last page in English, page 26, is a description of a “Health Education” program run through the Union Health Center of the ILGWU. It is clear that this is a program that is not organized by the Educational Committee, but still a program the committee promotes. The description of the program speaks of lectures and special classes regarding diet, first aid, exercise, as well as lectures on child, mental, sex, and shop hygiene. All of the courses are held in the Union Health Center in Manhattan.

The final six pages are written in Yiddish. My cursory look at the section does not give me any clues to what is included in those pages, although the expansion of text is noteworthy from its 4 pages in the 1921 Course Announcement.

## **1925**

The 1925 Educational Department “Announcement” booklet cover is simpler than the one preceding it. The “Knowledge is Power” emblem remains, but the text is sparser. The 1923 edition listed the address of the Workers’ University and made clear that the programs offered in the “Course Announcements” included those of the Unity Centers and Extension Division. Such identifications are not made in the 1925 edition. There is more white space and the document looks less cluttered.

Likewise, the first page inside the cover simply lists the members of the Educational Committee and the President and Secretary-treasurer of the ILGWU. There is no brief description of the work of the Union as there was in the 1923 edition. The text is again 32 pages long.

Another important change is on page 3, where the booklet lists instructors for the 1925-1926 season. The names are listed in alphabetical order in two columns along with the credentials of the individual. Fannia Cohn is listed as “Vice President, I. L. G. W. U.,” and interestingly A. Fichandler (who had been recognized as the Educational Director of the Education Department since the 1921 edition) is listed from “Education Department, I. L. G. W. U.” and underneath that, “Principle, Grade School, Brooklyn.” There are instructors connected to Adelphi College, Brookwood College, Columbia University and the High Schools of New York City.

The following page, page 4, includes another departure from the previous booklets: an advertisement. The advertisement is for a book about the history of the ILGWU written by Louis Levine. The ad states that the price of the book is \$5, but that members of the International can obtain the copy for half price. The advertisement encourages the reader to “Get every member of your Local to read it!” This is the only text on this page.

It is not until page 5 that anything about the objectives of the Education Department appear. Gone from this section is the emphasis on helping to meet the *spiritual* needs of members; the charge is named more pragmatically. The section first paragraph touches upon a common theme to what has been written before, but adds a new twist:

The truth is clear that it is the mission of the workers themselves to abolish the inequalities and injustices which they suffer, and that they can accomplish this only through organization. But it is equally clear that economic strength is much more effective if directed by intelligent, well informed, clear thinking men and women.

The purpose of the educational activities of the I. L. G. W. U. is to provide the Labor Movement with such men and women.

The following sections include much of the same information as has been listed before regarding the sorts of programs that are offered by the Educational Department. The Out of Town Activities, Music and Drama, Books, Outlines and Opening Exercises are written about nearly verbatim from the 1923 edition.

Interestingly, there is no mention in the opening pages of this Announcement booklet regarding the amount of money allocated to the Education Program. While that amount may have meant little to the common reader in the first place, the omission of this information is noteworthy. While the 1924 Course Announcement booklet is not in the purview of this research, it is noteworthy that the allocation amount is mentioned there.

Like the 1923 Course Announcement booklet, the 1925 text starts by listing courses at the Workers' University. Again, I will not compose an inventory of the courses that are not germane to the task. There are more courses in the 1925 Workers' University list than the 1923 list (16 and 14 courses, respectively). English is listed as course 15 and again uses the same text verbatim from the 1921 and 1923 texts save for the noticeable redaction of the "Speech-making is an art" paragraph. Again, the English course is the only course in the Workers' University without a listed instructor.

The next section is the Unity Center offerings, which has been reduced substantially to five courses from 10 in 1923. The English course description is the same verbatim as it was in the 1921 and 1923 Course Announcements.

The Extension Division section makes a marked departure from what it had previously been organized to do. The scope is much more professional in scope, with the first course offering in the Extension Division called, "Courses for Executive Members, Officers and Active Members of the I. L. G. W. U." The description bears reprinting here, considering some of the new components of their instruction setup:

The Trade Union is growing to be an increasingly complex social institution. Not only is it the Workers' Commonwealth, through which they act as citizens of the



community, but it also participates in every movement which works for progress and human happiness...

Naturally, the management of a union is a complex problem. It is a great responsibility to hold office in a union, whether paid or unpaid. The office reflects the intelligence of the Trade Union that he represents. Therefore, he must be trained in the position...

With this in view, we have planned the following educational program:

- I. a. Members of the executive boards of our numerous locals are urged to devote one evening a week to their education. For this purpose classrooms will be equipped in some of their offices and in the I. L. G. W. U. Building where they will meet from half past six to nine o'clock in the evening.
- b. The two and a half hours will be divided into two halves
  1. The first half for the study of the English Language
  2. The second half for the discussion of the American Labor Movement, with special reference to the problems of our own I. L. G. W. U.

This new sort of curriculum for the Extension Division is unique in its characterization as a professional development for officers of the union. Also noteworthy is the large block of time assigned for study of the English language. The text further clarifies some of the subjects that will be taught within this Extension Course. The first listed is a study of "English, Oral and Written." This is the first time writing shows up as a subject of its own, as opposed to being presented as a component of another subject (namely, Public Speaking). There is ultimately a list of nine subjects that are a part of this of the

Executive Member/Officer's course. Like other places in the Course Announcements through the year, all of the subjects list an instructor except for the English course. Furthermore, the English course is not described as being taught or affiliated with the New York City Board of Education.

Interestingly, another course in English shows up again in the Extension Division. This course, Course No. 23, is labeled as "Practical English." It is described as: "In instruction and practice in writing documents, reports, pamphlets, etc. This course is intended for active members of the union." This is again a marked departure in what the organization has offered before in the area of writing. This course might look to the modern reader similar to a course in technical writing. There is again no mention of an instructor for this course.

There are five courses offered through the Extension Division in 1925. While the course for officers and Executive Committee members lists instructors for particular subjects, there is only one other course that names an instructor: Course No. 25: Civilization in America. The other three courses, the aforementioned Practical English class, a course titled "Educational Activities for Wives of Members of the I. L. G. W. U.," and "Lectures on Labor and Social Problems given at business meetings of local unions." It is not for this section of my project to try to interpret the meanings behind the qualities of these courses, their descriptions, and omission yet. However, as with many of the other sections of this Announcement booklet, there is a marked departure from how these documents have tended to look.

After the Extension Division section, there is one last page in the English portion of the booklet and it appears to be another advertisement, but this time for "Unity

Village,” a summer vacation resort made available to members of the ILGWU. I classify this as an advertisement because there is no reference to the Unity Village earlier in the text as one of the Activities of the Educational Department, and because the description of the village includes a mention that it is “made available to our members at a minimum rate,” as well as because the page comes on the last page of the English portion of the booklet. The page mentions that there is a library, bowling, and hiking available on this 750-acre estate in Pennsylvania. The page also mentions that the Educational department arranges lectures from “Prominent persons” addressed to four to five hundred guests.

This concludes the English portion of the 1925 course guide. The next eleven pages are in Yiddish, another noteworthy expansion from the six pages in 1923, and four in 1921. The last page, as with the previous editions of the Announcements, is a list of Unity Center Locations.

## **1937**

Twelve years is a long time to jump for this sort of project. The jump is necessary due to the availability of the resources in the archives. Yet there are also substantial and noteworthy changes to the Announcements booklets that signify radical changes in the Educational Program in those twelve years. Most notably, the length of the booklet has been substantially reduced to a single page, folded over once to create a four-page pamphlet. The cover is folded over most of the other page, except an inch gutter on the right side exposing part of the third page of the pamphlet. This gutter contains the phrase “ACTION BASED ON KNOWLEDGE IS POWER” written vertically.

The cover no longer has the “Knowledge is Power” icon. The only illustration is a two-color man and woman shown torso-up sitting and speaking to each other. In front of the woman is a sewing machine between them. The woman is leaning toward the man with her left hand extended as the man sits cross-armed, seemingly listening to the woman. Below the image a narrative unfolds in the first-person, supposedly from the point of view of an ILGWU member who wonders how to “keep [his] mind alert and get new ideas” as well as “know what’s happening in the world.” The narrator then introduces a friend who has apparently been listening to these ruminations and “snaps back ‘You should join one of our Social and Educational Centers.’” It would seem that the term “Unity Center” which was used in the previous announcements has been replaced with “Social and Educational Center.” The rest of the narrative involves the friend describing the programs available at the Social and Educational Centers, as well as the fact that the programs are free of charge to members of the ILGWU.

The next page contains a list of Social and Educational Centers throughout New York City. This page is interesting for numerous reasons. While the 1921-1921 list of Unity Centers listed eight locations, this one lists five. The geography of these centers is equally interesting; there are no longer any Centers located in lower or midtown Manhattan. The only Centers in Manhattan are listed as in Harlem. One of these Centers is a block from Central Park near the Upper East Side, a far departure from the ghettos of the Lower East Side. There is one Center in the Bronx, where there were once two locations. There are two locations in Brooklyn, but their geography is equally interesting. The locations are not in Williamsburg and Greenpoint, but in the villages of Bensonhurst and East New York. Bensonhurst is in the far south area of Brooklyn, far closer to Staten

Island than Manhattan. East New York is much further east than the previous locations, almost near where John F. Kennedy International Airport would be located seventy years later in Queens.

The importance of this geography will be examined in the analysis, but it follows general trends of the migrations of the immigrant populations that worked in the garment trades out of Manhattan. Moreover, to move into locations relatively close to these centers would require financial capital and access to transportation that may not have been available to workers just fifteen years earlier. This study into the geographic changes in the Centers will be discussed at further length in the next chapter.

The third page of the Announcement lists the courses available through the Centers. The list is of ten total courses, along with brief descriptions of each. The list takes up the whole of the third page and is continued onto the next (and final) page. The list is short enough to reprint here:

1. The Meaning of Trade Unionism
2. History, Structure, and Functioning of the ILGWU
3. Public Speaking and Advanced English
4. Visits to Points of Interests?
  - a. Recreational Activities
5. Theater and Concert Parties
6. Labor Songs
7. Hikes
8. Social—Entertainments
9. Health Discussions

## 10. Social Interpretation of Literature

None of the aforementioned courses includes the names of instructors. There is no mention of opening exercises or anything resembling the ways the earlier Announcements mimicked traditional schooling traditions.

The course of interest, of course, is “Public Speaking and Advanced English”.

The description is as follows:

This is a study of how to express oneself clearly and convincingly. However, the art of speech without information and ideas to convey is like an experienced operator working on a perfect machine without thread.

This class will therefore be a discussion of the economics of our industry and problems of our International—along with the art of public speaking and the English language.

This description is telling for several reasons, the most important of which is the complete absence of preparatory English courses that appear in the earlier Announcements. The course in this Announcement is a hybrid English/Public Speaking/Contemporary Issues in Economics course.

The entire 1937 announcement is a stark departure from its 1920s predecessors. There is no longer a stratification of organization in the courses offered—there is no Workers’ University mentioned, the Unity Centers are now called “Social and Educational Centers,” and the Extension Division is like the Workers’ University nonexistent. The Announcement is also noticeably monolingual—there is no more Yiddish written for pages, or asides in Italian.

Interestingly, the writing of the course descriptions is almost tentative in its construction. Take, for instance, the description of the “Social Interpretation of Literature” course. A few sentences read, “Because our time is limited, however, we must select our reading carefully. A good instructor in literature can help us. In this interesting series the instructor will discuss the modern novel and drama of America and Europe.” The passage is confusing in the second sentence, the statement of “a good instructor *can* help up” does not suggest that such an individual is immediately available, but merely a possibility. Speaking more to the quality of the other descriptions, several of the courses offered seems to be activities rather than classes. The descriptions of Hikes, Theatre and Concert Parties, Visits to Points of Interests? [sic] give a sense that students may be less interested in who the instructor is as much as the experience the course promises.

The spare nature of the Announcement and the seeming reduction in the programs of the Educational department may be explained by factors beyond the purview of this project. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that as a course, Public Speaking and Advanced English survived the reductions. It is difficult to tell what sort of changes may have happened to the curricular operations of the course, but its continuity in the program, and as one of four more “course-looking” offerings of the Educational Department demonstrates some fidelity to the continuity of literacy and speaking development. The course is imbued with a curriculum geared toward the problems (and perhaps the promotion) of the Labor union and the problems faced by workers.

While there are no Educational Department commencement exercises, there is a mention at the end of the pamphlet of a Student Fellowship Festival Dance and Pageant. It is clear that through the activities listed in the pamphlet that the aims of the Educational

Committee are more social than educational at this point. While I don't mean to dichotomize the social and educational, the changes in the programs of the Committee, and the renaming of "Unity Centers" to "Social Education Centers," as well as the narrative at the beginning points to a rise in the social element of the program. So now it is on to the 1939 Announcement to see if these traits continue.

### **1939**

The 1939 "Program," maintains the basic structure and sort of information it seems to be the same genre and scope as the 1920s Course Announcements and 1937 "Announcement." It is, however, twice as long, and is now presented on yellow paper. The document no longer has the tricky folding where the "Action Based on Knowledge is Power" running gutter of the 1937 "Announcement." (The gutter is printed on the back of the pamphlet next to the list of Social Educational Centers locations). Moreover, the 1939 Program contains a slightly more detailed pair of friends speaking in the illustration at the top. The man and woman remain, as does the sewing machine, however the woman now has clearly dark hair and facial features including a clearly open mouth. The man has eyes and a mouth, showing his position as her interlocutor.

There is again a text in the form of a narrative below the image. While the 1937 Announcement was written in the first-person from the perspective of someone being pitched the ideas of participating in the Social Educational Centers, this narrative is written from the point of view of the individual doing the pitching.

The text is clearly immersed in the political turmoil of the time. The friend of the narrator expresses frustration about the state of the world's problems, stating, "Before I



see my way through one problem, something else begins to worry me. The headaches come from everywhere. Washington, Europe, even from faraway China and Japan as well as here in my own shops.—the news reaches us so quickly that my mind cannot follow it.” The narrator shares the programs and activities at the Social Education Centers run by the ILGWU, ending by mentioning that the activities are provided for free to members.

The first page inside the Program marks a return to the Educational Department outlining its aims for its programs. The aim of the Educational Department, the text states “tries to stimulate in [members] an intellectual curiosity and healthy response to life.” The next paragraph explains a philosophical approach brought to the program of “Learning By Doing,” which encourages members to apply what they learn in the Educational Department by participating in the “daily life of their organization.” The section goes on to explain the connection between “Play and Think” programs, arguing that recreation enables healthy minds in workers.

The next area of the section is about “The Written Word.” There is a short paragraph explaining the position of the Educational Department’s programs and writing. It states:

As much as our institution is eager to reach all our members through its educational programs, we realize that lectures, discussions, dramatics and similar activities are limited as to time as space. The written word, on the other hand, reaches the workers everywhere. For this purpose, we have prepared several attractive and suggestive pamphlets.

Such a statement may have been ambitious years earlier, with a newly-arrived migrant membership base speaking several languages, the publications of the Union already

stretched three, perhaps four languages. There is nothing in “The Written Word” paragraph to suggest that the documents are available in English only, although the absence of other languages in the Program would suggest that English is at this point at least the *lingua franca* of Union publications.

The following page contains a new section about “Student Democracy,” which is about the Students’ Council and the Student Fellowship. Both are organizations that help with some of the planning and administration activities of the Educational Department, and are framed as voluntary organizations made up of Member-students. After the Student Council section is the “From Learning to Action” section that showed up in the 1937 Announcement.

The bottom of the third page contains a black-and-white photograph of seven women sitting on a rock. The image is noteworthy as it is the first time a photograph has shown up in any of the Course Announcements (or “Programs”). The caption of the image reads: “Some members pause for a rest on one of the numerous hikes and outings conducted by the ILGWU Educational Department.” The women are all smiling and represent a variety of ages.

The next page is a two-page splash containing ten black and white pictures of members enjoying different activities offered by the Educational Department. Text in the middle of the page reads:

Develop Body and Mind

Play and Think

In your

Social and Educational Centers

The images, from clockwise on the top left hand corner, are as follows:

1. A group of men playing handball being watched by another group of men and women.
2. Two women standing on a diving board, with one in a position showing she is ready to dive.
3. A formal dance with men and women dancing with each other.
4. A group of women in dark dresses involved in a discussion.
5. A group of women doing calisthenics in a gymnasium.
6. A group of women posing with each other for a picture. This image is further noteworthy because there are at least two African-American women in the picture.
7. A group of women and men (mostly women) listening to a lecture from a man at the front of the room.
8. Five women rehearsing a dance that looks like the Can-Can.

There are two images under the text in the center of the page as well. The image on the left is two people, at least one of whom is a woman, at the tops of their respective climbing ropes. The image to the right is a large group of men and women who are in the lower plaza in Rockefeller Center standing in front of Paul Manship's *Prometheus* sculpture.

The images are clear, professionally-taken, and centered on the experiences of the members. The high prevalence of women in these images suggests their important place in not only the membership of the ILGWU but also the programming of the Educational Department. Only two of the images, the ones I identified previously as images numbers

4 and 7, are images that are related to educational rather than social activities, and image 4 would be up for further discussion.

The following two pages contain descriptions of the activities available at the Social Educational Centers. These descriptions are now accompanied with small illustrations that correspond to each activity. Interestingly, the illustration corresponding to the Public Speaking and Advanced English course shows a woman in a black dress addressing an audience of men.

Three course descriptions are presented without any illustrations. They are also new additions since the 1937 Announcement. One is a class titled, “The Social and Political History of the United States,” the second, “Citizenship,” and the third, “Appreciation of Music.” The course on Citizenship is interesting as its description is germane to literacy issues. The description is as follows: “Do we need to point out the importance of being a citizen of the United States? We shall therefore conduct a special class in citizenship which will include a study of civics, the English language, and history of the United States.” Aside from the “study of civics,” the topics for this course are already covered in other courses offered in the Program. It is still interesting that this course appears now.

In the history of the Educational Department of the ILGWU, from its beginning in 1915, it would seem that it has taken 24 years to see a course in citizenship show up in the Course Announcements. In addition, the courses on English and the History of the ILGWU are the only constant mainstays of the program. There may have been overlap in teaching citizenship in the courses on English in the courses of the 1920s, although since the educators who were appointed to that class were done at the behest of the Board of

Education it would be difficult to suggest, much less test, such a theory. One possible explanation could be that an influx of Jewish refugees from Germany and Eastern Europe may have precipitated a move in the Educational Department to offer courses that directly address citizenship. These are all items to be tested in the analysis section, and necessary for a connection to literacy and rhetorical study.

Under the courses is a notice of the ILGWU Fellowship Lunch to be held at the Diplomat Hotel in December. This event is billed as a “Reunion of Students, Teachers and Friends,” This is remarkable as the 1937 Announcement includes a notice for a “Social Dance and Dinner” at the same hotel. The lunch is said to include a movie, dancing, and entertainment. The event would seem to have become an all-day experience rather than an evening.

The back page contains a list of the Social Educational Centers throughout New York City. They are unchanged from the 1937 Announcement save for the addition of a center in East Manhattan. The location, Julia Richman High School, is remarkable as it was a girls-only public high school until 1967. It is also remarkable as it is located in the Upper East Side. The location, at 68<sup>th</sup> Street and just a few blocks from the East River is much closer to the initial venues of the ILGWU Educational department (including the Workers’ University located at 16<sup>th</sup> Street) than any of the other sites.

### **Coding**

Using the coding schematics described in chapter 4 (on page 132), as well as the description of materials early from this chapter, this section of this chapter shows how the data collected are categorized and coded. The categories come from my adjusted “coding paradigm” borrowed from Strauss (1987). Chapter 4 describes the codes somewhat

through Tables 2 and 3, but it is here where the codes appear with examples from each Course Announcement. While this research is not pure Grounded Theory, the coding is inspired by elements of grounded theory and provide a coding of the texts that illuminates how sponsors of literacy and rhetorical issues operate in these texts. To that end, there is an inductive element to how the texts generate the code in the categories, but the categories supplied the structure through which I developed the codes while also being attentive to the presence of Brandt's sponsors of literacy. These tables are both the worksheets and the final product demonstrating how I organized my collected data.

Table 4: 1921 Course Announcement		
Category	Code	Example
Rhetorical concerns	Institutional Concerns	"Aims" section of text.
	Individual/Student Concerns	
Social Dynamics	References to Educational Department Administrative objectives	"Aims" section of text.
	References to ILGWU administrative presence in Educational Department	List of Educational Committee Board of Directors on inside cover.
		"Administration" section of text
		"History" section of text
	Responsibly of the Teacher	From: Course description: "Public Speaking;" "Classroom instruction in the theory of the art will be restricted to brief explanations and criticism."
		From: Course description: "Public Speaking;" "When necessary, instruction will be given individuals whose work presents special problems."
		Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "In this course, a number of selected members of the International will be instructed in the art of organizing their thoughts so as to be able to speak clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian on labor problems."
Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "The addresses will be criticized by the other members of the class and the instructor."		
Responsibilities of the Student	From: Course description: "Public Speaking;" "The student will be expected to work up the theory for himself by faithfully following text-book assignments.	

		Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "The students will be required to prepare addresses on such subjects as the labor movement, the organization, problems and function of the I.L.G.W.U., shop control, etc."	
Language Issues	Representations of non-English languages	Extension courses, general description: "These courses will be given in English, Yiddish or Italian."	
		Description of Extension course "History of the American Labor Movement:" "In Yiddish and English."	
		Description of Extension course "The English and French Labor Movement:" "In Yiddish and English."	
		Description of Extension course "CURRENT Problems and Tendencies of the Labor Movement with Special Reference to the I.L.G.W.U.:" "In Yiddish and English."	
		Description of Extension course "THE Methods of Trade Unionism in America:" "In Yiddish."	
		Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "In this course, a number of selected members of the International will be instructed in the art of organizing their thoughts so as to be able to speak clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian on labor problems."	
		Italian section of the booklet (1 page)	
		Yiddish section of the booklet (4 pages)	
		Meta-representations of English language	Extension courses, general description: "These courses will be given in English, Yiddish or Italian."
			Description of Unity Center "Course IV. English."
Description of Extension course "History of the American Labor Movement:" "In Yiddish and English."			



		Description of Extension course "The English and French Labor Movement:" "In Yiddish and English."
		Description of Extension course "CURRENT Problems and Tendencies of the Labor Movement with Special Reference to the I.L.G.W.U.:" "In Yiddish and English."
		Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "In this course, a number of selected members of the International will be instructed in the art of organizing their thoughts so as to be able to speak clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian on labor problems."
Defining Literacy	Representations of Speaking	Workers' University Course description: "Public Speaking."
	Representations of Reading	Workers' University Course description: "Tendencies in Modern Literature."
	Representations of Writing	Workers' University Course description: "Public Speaking" (Organize speech material?)

Table 5: 1923 Course Announcement		
Category	Code	Example
Rhetorical concerns	Institutional Concerns	Paragraphs on inside cover. "...it is hoped to train fresh energy, new experience and power to be put at the service of the International and of the entire Labor Movement of America, and thus can our members be trained to achieve their purposes, with the ultimately goal of living a full, rich and happy life."
		"Forward" section. Particularly, "The purpose of the educational activities of the I.L.G.W.U. is to provide the Labor Movement with such [intelligent, well-informed, clear thinking] men and women."
		Paragraphs on inside cover. "While organization gives them power, education gives them the ability to use their power intelligently and effectively." and, "...and thus can our members be trained to achieve their purposes, with the ultimately goal of living a full, rich and happy life."
Social Dynamics	References to Educational Department Administrative objectives	"Aims" section of text.
	References to ILGWU administrative presence in Educational Department	List of Educational Committee Board of Directors on inside cover.
		"Administration" section of text.
	"History" section of text.	
Responsibly of the Teacher		From: Course description: "Public Speaking;" "Classroom instruction in the theory of the art will be restricted to brief explanations and criticism."

		<p>From: Course description: "Public Speaking;" "When necessary, instruction will be given individuals whose work presents special problems."</p>
		<p>Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "In this course, a number of selected members of the International will be instructed in the art of organizing their thoughts so as to be able to speak clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian on labor problems."</p>
		<p>Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "The addresses will be criticized by the other members of the class and the instructor."</p>
	Responsibilities of the Student	<p>From: Course description: "Public Speaking;" "The student will be expected to work up the theory for himself by faithfully following text-book assignments."</p>
		<p>Description of Extension course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "The students will be required to prepare addresses on such subjects as the labor movement, the organization, problems and function of the I.L.G.W.U., shop control, etc."</p>
		<p>Educational Department hopes for students to become more involved in the International through education.</p>
Language Issues	Representations of non-English languages	<p>Italian paragraph in paragraphs on inside cover.</p>
		<p>Section on page 8 in Italian.</p>
		<p>Extension courses, general description: "These courses will be given in English, Yiddish, Russian or Italian."</p>

	Description of Extension Course No. 27 on pages 21-22. 21 courses "given at local unions." Of which, 6 are noted as "Yiddish," two study "Yiddish Literature," one is designated as "Russian," and one designated as "Yiddish and Russian."
	Description of Extension course No. 32. "The English and French Labor Movement:" "In Yiddish and English."
	Description of Extension course No. 33. "How to Conduct a Union Meeting:" "In Yiddish."
	Description of Extension course No. 34. "Courses to be given to groups--members of the executive committee, shop chairman, etc. These will be given in English, Yiddish or Italian."
	Description of Extension course No. 35. "CURRENT Problems and Tendencies of the Labor Movement with Special Reference to the I.L.G.W.U.:" "In Yiddish and English."
	Description of Extension course No. 38. "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "In this course, a number of selected members of the International will be instructed in the art of organizing their thoughts so as to be able to speak clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian on labor problems."
	Yiddish section of the booklet (5 pages).
Meta-representations of English language	Extension courses, general description: "These courses will be given in English, Yiddish, Russian or Italian."
	Description of Unity Center "Course No 21. English."
	Description of Extension course No. 32. "The English and French Labor Movement:" "In Yiddish and English."
	Description of Extension course No. 33. "How to Conduct a Union Meeting:" "In Yiddish."

		Description of Extension course No. 34. "Courses to be given to groups--members of the executive committee, shop chairman, etc. These will be given in English, Yiddish or Italian."
		Description of Extension course No. 35. "CURRENT Problems and Tendencies of the Labor Movement with Special Reference to the I.L.G.W.U.:" "In Yiddish and English."
		Description of Extension course No. 38. "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement:" "In this course, a number of selected members of the International will be instructed in the art of organizing their thoughts so as to be able to speak clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian on labor problems."
Defining Literacy	Representations of Speaking	Workers' University Course description: "Course No. 13. English. Public Speaking."
	Representations of Reading	Workers' University Course description: "Course No. 10. Social Forces in Contemporary Literature in English..."
	Representatons of Writing	Workers' University Course description: "Course No. 13. English. Public Speaking" (Organize speech material?)

Table 6: 1925 Course Announcement		
Category	Code	Example
Rhetorical concerns	Institutional Concerns	Ad for a book on the history of the ILGWU on page 4.
		"Aims of Workers Education" and "What we Try to Accomplish" section of text (pp. 5-6).
		"What we try to Accomplish" Section, especially on pp. 6.
Social Dynamics	References to Educational Department Administrative objectives	"Aims" section of text.
		Extension Division Course No. 22. "Courses for Executive Members, Offices and Active Members of the I.L.G.W.U."
	References to ILGWU administrative presence in Educational Department	List of Educational Committee Board of Directors on inside cover.
		"Management" section of text.
	Responsibly of the Teacher	
	Responsibilities of the Student	Workers' University Course No. 10. "The Making of Industrial America." references use fo course textbook, Louis Levine's History of the ILGWU "The Women's Garment Worker." Moreover, "Membership in this course will be restricted to those who can show a satisfactory acquaintance with Dr. Levine's Book."
Educational Department hope for students to become more involved in the International through education.		
Language Issues	Representations of non-English languages	Extension courses, general description: "These courses will be given in English, Yiddish, Russian or Italian."

		Description of Extension Course No. 24 "Educational Activities for Wives of Members of I.L.G.W.U" on page 19. Courses "will be given at convenient centers and in languages best understood by them." Yiddish section of the booklet (12 pages).
	Meta-representations of English language	Extension courses, general description: "These courses will be given in English, Yiddish, Russian or Italian." Description of Unity Center "Course No 20. English." Extension Division Course No. 22. "Courses for Executive Members, Offices and Active Members of the I.L.G.W.U." Including "The first half [of the course] is for the study of the English language." Emphasis on "English, oral and written." Extension Division Course No. 23. "Practical English" pp. 18.
Defining Literacy	Representations of Speaking	Workers' University Course description: "Course No. 15. English. Public Speaking"
		Extension Division Course No. 22. "Courses for Executive Members, Offices and Active Members of the I.L.G.W.U." Emphasis on "English, oral and written."
	Representations of Reading	Ad for a book on the history of the ILGWU on page 4. Explicit command to "Read it!" "Books" and "Outlines" section on pp. 8.
		Workers' University Course description: "Course No. 10. Social Forces in Contemporary Literature in English..."
		Workers' University Course No. 10. "The Making of Industrial America." references use fo course textbook, Louis Levine's History of the ILGWU "The Women's Garment Worker." Moreover, "Membership in this course will be restricted to those who can show a satisfactory acquaintance with Dr. Levine's Book." Workers' University Course No. 14. "A Social Study of Literature."

Representations of Writing	Workers' University Course description: "Course No. 13. English. Public Speaking" (Organize speech material?)
	Extension Division Course No. 22. "Courses for Executive Members, Offices and Active Members of the I.L.G.W.U." Emphasis on "English, oral and written."
	Extension Division Course No. 23. "Practical English" pp. 18.



Table 7: 1937 Course Announcement		
Category	Code	Example
Rhetorical concerns	Institutional Concerns	Course 2, "History, Structure, and Functioning of the ILGWU."
	Individual/Student Concerns	Narrative on cover page.
Social Dynamics	References to Educational Department Administrative objectives	
	References to ILGWU administrative presence in Educational Department	Course 2, "History, Structure, and Functioning of the ILGWU."
	Responsibility of the Teacher	Course 3, "Public Speaking and Advanced English."
	Responsibilities of the Student	
Language Issues		
	Meta-representations of English language	Course 3, "Public Speaking and Advanced English."
Defining Literacy	Representations of Speaking	Course 3, "Public Speaking and Advanced English" especially "But the art of speech without information and ideas to convey, is like an experienced operator working on a perfect machine without thread."
	Representations of Reading	Course 10, "Social Interpretation of Literature."
	Representations of Writing	

Table 8: 1939 Course Announcement		
Category	Code	Example
Rhetorical concerns	Institutional Concerns	Section at top of pp 2.
		"Public Speaking and Advanced English Course" including "Discussion of the economics of our industry, problems of our international, and current events..."
	"From Learning to Action," through education, members become more active in the International.	
	Individual/Student Concerns	Narrative on cover page.
Social Dynamics	References to Educational Department Administrative objectives	
	References to ILGWU administrative presence in Educational Department	
	Responsibility of the Teacher	
	Responsibilities of the Student	"From Learning to Action," through education, members become more active in the International.
Language Issues	Representations of non-English languages	
	Meta-representations of English language	"Public Speaking and Advanced English Course."
Defining Literacy	Representations of Speaking	"Public Speaking and Advanced English Course."
	Representations of Reading	"The Written Word" Section on p. 2.
	Representations of Writing	"The Written Word" Section on p. 2.

## **The Announcements in Reflection**

The purpose of this chapter was not to conduct a compare-and-contrast of the course announcements of the ILGWU Educational Program. Rather, it was to set forth a body of evidence from which the analysis could be conducted. There are several documents related to the ILGWU's Educational Program, which may assist in triangulating what is presented in these documents, but this is more important for the analysis than this description of materials.

There are common threads to these documents that will warrant investigation in the analysis. First, through the documented history of this program, English learning, Public Speaking, and the history of the ILGWU has remained a steadfast programmatic element. The continued offering of these courses are likely a testament to their popularity amongst the member-student population, and their expansive class offerings conceivably made it difficult for the course announcements to offer specifics on who would teach the English and Public Speaking courses. This also points to a continued understanding on the part of the Educational Department on the necessity of rhetorical education, as well as a statement of their own values with regard to education, as well as the possibilities of the rhetorically-trained union member.

That said, the Course Announcements become more stratified as time goes on. For example, while the 1921 description of the Workers' University suggests that the instruction conducted there will be of an "Advanced Nature," the much shorter description in the 1925 Course Announcements is sure to mention that "Those who attend the classes [at the Workers' University] have had preliminary training in the Unity Centers or elsewhere." Another instance of this stratification of students occurs as the

extension division becomes more focused as years pass on some courses being primarily for members who are currently or have designs on becoming Executive Committee members and Officers of the ILGWU. The idea of such training is surely reasonable, but such training is not made available in the late 1930s at all. Students have no recourse through the Educational Department to become higher-ranking members.

None of this is to minimize the progressive offerings of the Educational Department. Rather, these incongruities are described in the coding mechanism of this research and further worked out in my upcoming analysis. To that end, the place of rhetoric and literacy in conversation with each other through an educational institution emerges more clearly from the artifacts.

## Chapter 6: Analysis of Materials Collected

Before I go on, it is helpful to the upcoming discussion to revisit my research questions:

1. How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department?
2. How is literacy defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy?
3. How is literacy defined by the economic realities of students of literacy programs?

The following section provides an analysis of the materials mentioned in the previous chapter. First, the chapter explores the presence of Brandt's notion of sponsors of literacy through the ILGWU Educational Department. This section explains that there are more sponsors of literacy than the Educational Department alone in managing the curriculum of the educational programming of the ILGWU. Next, the chapter explores the rhetorical concerns of sponsors of literacy. One item that emerges in exploring the rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy is how Burke's theory of identification may be an useful tool in explaining the some of the structure of the educational department programming. The chapter closes by addressing the ways the educational programming addressed possible rhetorical concerns of the workers and students who attended these classes.

Ultimately, this chapter analyzes the ways worker education, literacy, and rhetoric are concurrently represented in the ILGWU with an eye toward developing a robust analysis that could be extended to other sorts of organizations. While the concern about

literacy sponsorship owes its theoretical debt to Brandt, issues of worker education, literacy, and rhetoric take into account the works of Gramsci, Bourdieu, Quintilian, and Cicero. The four theorists of chapter two offer a contrast to Brandt because their work operates under different assumptions and, more importantly, methodological rigor. Through the ILGWU, this chapter comments on the theories of the theorists through Brandt's work, moving toward the immersion of a theoretical understanding of the relationships between worker education, literacy, and rhetoric.

### **Literacy Sponsorship and the ILGWU**

In one sense, the role of the ILGWU as a literacy sponsor may be reduced to its financial involvement as the financial underwriters of its Educational Department. From the \$4,000 allocated in the 1915 ILGWU annual convention to the mention of \$15,000 in 1921 and on to the mention of \$17,500 allocated in 1922, records seem to indicate that the union was the sole financial patron of the program.

While the union took on the educational department as its own financial obligation, it still needed to address logistical challenges that came along with organizing classes and giving students space to learn. The only other organization that has some influence on the operations of the Educational department would be the New York City Board of Education. Their demand early in the formation of the Educational Department that all activities held in New York City Public School be conducted in English clearly impacted the way the Educational Department designed its curriculum. The course announcements of the 1920s make clear that courses offered in languages other than

English were held as part of the Extension Division, the courses that were conducted in the offices of the local unions.

It would be difficult to argue that the Educational Department sought to avert the English language requirement of the New York Public Schools. The Extension Division courses were organized particularly for rank-and-file members of the International. Attending an English course starting in November that met several times per week at a few select public schools across Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx may have been a tall order for worker in the 1920s. The winter months typically saw an increase in work and overtime as winter wear (especially cloaks) and holiday-season garments were in large demand. Workers taking on extra hours and perhaps with a family at home may not have been inclined to schlepp themselves from work to home for dinner and back out again for class. These concerns are exactly what the Union recognized as the drawbacks of the Educational Department. In fact, the “1916 Report of the General Executive Board,” as part of the thirteenth annual convention proceedings described the committee’s assessment of the Educational Department as: “We do not believe our expectations were met with the results obtained.” Their chief concern was the scheduling of courses.

Two literacy sponsors emerge from this assessment: the Executive Committee of the ILGWU, and the New York Public School Board of Education. One is overtly explicit regarding its sponsorship; the Executive Committee of the ILGWU is referenced several times in the Course Announcements of the 1920s, demonstrating its largess as the financial underwriters of the program as well as elucidating its administrative function as the overseer of the Educational Committee. Furthermore, the Educational Committee,

named in the inside covers of the Course Announcements of the 1920s, is composed of members of the Executive Committee. This is not to mention the several allusions to members of the Executive Committee facilitating some of the courses in the Extension Division. Nor does this take into account how several courses are designed to train Active Members and Officers in the Union.

The New York Public School Board of Education's role as a sponsor of literacy is more difficult to pinpoint. The volumes of letters and documents from the Educational Department and Fannia Cohn's own files contain several documents Ms. Cohn sent to the New York Public School Board of Education to request the use of facilities. In the documents I have located, none mentions the importance of maintaining an English-language emphasis that Cohen (1976) identifies. At the same time, teachers appointed by the New York Public School Board of Education taught the English courses offered. One could reasonably presume that the teachers appointed by the Board of Education would maintain adherence to some variation of the existing English curriculum already installed by the Board. The lack of documents in the Educational Department and Cohn's own files describing the English course may point to a hands-off, if not disinterested approach to the English courses in the Unity Centers. This is not so much an analysis through omission, but a hypothesis that helps to explain the absence of such documents. While the Educational Department may have been active in the shaping of the English curriculum used in the Unity Centers, there are no documents in my research that would suggest this is the case. As with anything else in archival research, the lack of evidence may be due to poor documentary management, or accurately reflect the relationship between the ILGWU Educational Department and the New York Public School Board of Education.



With the evidence that I have seen and presented so far, I am inclined to sway toward the latter.

In these ways, the sponsorship of literacy is divided between the New York Public School Board of Education and the ILGWU Executive Committee; the New York Public School Board of Education became responsible for elementary through intermediate English skillsets of workers. The Educational Department becomes involved in literacy practices once the worker/student is in a position to use their English training in the service of the Union. In fact, the early Educational Department is not entirely concerned with language competence in English. The 1921 and 1923 Course Announcements mention a course in the Extension Division, titled “Training of Speakers for the Labor Movement,” seeks to teach students the arts of speaking “clearly and convincingly in English, Yiddish or Italian...[sic].” English does not become a primary concern within the multi-lingual extension division until the 1925 “Course for Executive Members, Offices and Active Members of the I.L.G.W.U.” wherein the curriculum of the course describes that half of each meeting will be devoted to the study of “English, written and oral.” The importance of this shift is notable not only because the New York Public School Board of Education is no longer the only sponsor of literacy explicitly involved with the teaching of English, but also because the Extension Course also explicitly mentions the importance of written English for the first time in the Course Announcements.

The identification of two different sponsors of literacy for members of the ILGWU as the Executive Committee and the New York Public School Board of Education, and the exploration of how both organizations practiced their power provides

a working answer to my first research question: How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department t?

The Executive Committee practices its power as a sponsor of literacy through two mechanisms: through the allocation of financial resources and through the presence of Executive Committee members on the Educational Committee. While the importance of financial resources may seem obvious, it becomes even more apparent when considering the so-called “dark times” of the late 1920s and early 1930s mentioned in Chapter 3, when the funding for the Educational Department ended completely.

The presence of members of the Executive Committee on the Educational Committee is likewise important. Fannia Cohn herself became involved with the Educational Department through her own presence on the ILGWU’s Executive Committee. As the Executive Secretary of the Educational Department, she was responsible for the daily operations and logistical concerns of the organization, taking on jobs from organizing the Course Announcements and procuring rooms in public schools to soliciting teachers from large universities and managing the department’s budget. Her background in the administration of the ILGWU, as well as that of the members of the executive committee who also served on the Educational Committee, is apparent in the ways the curriculum reflects an interest in training worker/students to work toward the interests of the ILGWU. I will develop this line of argument at greater length in the next section of this chapter.

The New York Public Schools Board of Education’s role as a sponsor of literacy is slightly less obvious but important nonetheless. By providing a space for worker/students of the ILGWU to come together and engage in educational activities,

they provided an opportunity for immigrant workers to practice the use of English, but also provided a space for students of different nationalities and backgrounds to meet and speak with each other. The courses were clearly presented in the Course Announcements as being in English, both as a function of the description itself as well as the omission of non-English languages, which are explicitly mentioned in the Extension Division. The act of providing these public schools to be used as a Workers' University and Unity Centers allows members to meet other members outside the confines of their union offices. It was in the shops that Jewish, Italian, and other immigrants often first met each other, outside the comfort of their homogenous ghettos. The extension of another space where no non-English-speaking group had clear dominance, English became a common communicative resource. Courses conducted in English by skilled teachers, some devoted to the study of English itself, as well as class discussions that may have been in English offered an opportunity to practice the language.

There is no question regarding the popularity of the English courses in the first place, either. The "Report of the Educational Activities 1922-24" submitted by the Educational Committee to the General Executive Board in April 1924 reports that between the 1922-1924 seasons (two seasons, 1922-1923, and 1923-1924), there were 162,400 "Classes in English in Unity Centers." This would work out to 81,200 students per year spread across three levels of courses. The function of the New York Public Schools Board of Education providing the space and trained teachers to instruct these courses cannot be understated. Moreover, an Educational Department document from the "dark times" (1934) discusses courses locals might want to organize, but omits the instruction of English from its list. Perhaps the importance of specially qualified teachers

who have experience in the teaching of English was not available to the Educational Department outside its relationship with the New York City Public Schools Board of Education. While such a position may be difficult to investigate or defend, there is clear evidence that the Educational Department, while willing to conduct courses on economics, psychology, history, and labor politics, was not able to offer comprehensive courses in English on its own. The Board of Education, through its resources of space and access to qualified teachers maintained an immensely powerful position in the ILGWU Educational Department.

Considering Brandt's description of a sponsor of literacy, the role of institutions in literacy programs and individuals becomes easier to contrast. Institutions without a primary obligation for the training of literacy require the involvement of other institutions to carry out that mission. In the next chapter, I will explore this with a bit more depth, but the exertion of power by the different institutions in this case is uneven. The Board of Education received compensation from the ILGWU Educational Committee and was able to execute its own English-learning curriculum. The Executive Committee of the ILGWU was able to offer classes that placed an emphasis on the economic and social implications of the labor movement in America. Brandt observes that learners become beholden to the interests of the sponsor of literacy. Two different yet focused interests by the two sponsors of literacy mostly influence the vocabulary practiced by the worker/student in the ILGWU's Educational Department: the Executive Committee's focus on the interaction of student with issues pertaining to organized labor and economics; and the New York Public Schools Board of Education's curriculum in elementary through advanced English. As much elementary and intermediate English is focused on functional

ability to use language, the power of what sort of language is practiced lends itself to Bourdieu's criticism of language as symbolic power. Sponsors of literacy are able to privilege a particular interaction with language. This power exerts itself in how the learner deals with other individuals and institutions. To this end, worker/students dealt with a language that privileged the rhetorical concerns of the ILGWU.

### **Rhetorical Concerns and Sponsors of Literacy**

The theoretical concerns addressed in the first two chapters of this work explore the ways in which literacy practices are defined by the rhetorical situation posed in literacy education. The ability of an individual to call upon literacy as, what Brandt calls, a "resource," is related to the individual's training. To this end, I argue that stratifying different types of literacy (such as critical, rhetorical, functional literacies, as Selber and others have) does not bring literacy research to something more precise, but makes the definition of literacy more elusive and perhaps more confusing. Rather, I believe literacy is bound to rhetorical subject—that the function of literacy is rhetorical as literacy is a resource that provides access to ongoing arguments and discussions. This emerges from the data of the text I analyzed rather than through Brandt's theory explicitly.

As the previous section points out, sponsors of literacy practice their power within their own institutional operations. The ILGWU is not primarily an educational organization, and so it defers issues of logistics, and teaching specialized subjects to institutions like the New York City Public Schools Board of Education, which can extend its own influence through its institutional curricular operations. Yet, the ILGWU's courses that work outside the purview of the Board of Education impart a language with a

student that has use in selective social settings. In the ILGWU's program, the emphasis on labor economies, politics, psychology, and organization (to name a few) allows worker/students to engage that vocabulary. At this point, there is an interaction between two groups: the sponsor of literacy and the student.

The final two research questions of this project address each of these groups. The primary concern of this section is with the way literacy becomes defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsor of literacy. The definition of literacy in this context refers to the sorts of resources that become available to students through their instruction. I encountered no explicit mention of "literacy" in any of the materials I examined in my research pertaining to the ILGWU's Educational Department specifically. However, by utilizing Deborah Brandt's definition of literacy, as it is described at the beginning of chapter 1, the characterization of literacy as a "resource...which, like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially gains the seekers," the word need not be mentioned explicitly. The characterization of "Literacy" becomes identifiable learning outcomes and ideologies.

The next section will explore how the literacy program of the ILGWU offers "opportunities and protections that it potentially gains the seeker," but for now, the emphasis is on the institutions action as a sponsor of literacy. While the previous section identified two sponsors of literacy, the role of the New York Public Schools Board of Education is difficult to expand upon. There is little available about what, if any, demands the Board of Education made upon the Educational Department outside establishing an emphasis on English usage in the schools. The resources pertaining to the

ILGWU, however, are more robust. The Course Announcements themselves provide a baseline of the expectations of what the Educational Department envisioned as its educational objectives, particularly with respect to how students would use their learning to serve the Union. Some ancillary materials, such as publications by Fannia Cohn, help to triangulate these findings.

The “Aims” section of the 1921 Course Announcement explains that the Educational Department lays its main emphasis on courses “which meet [workers’] practical needs.” The “practical needs” of the workers are understood in this context through the framework of the labor movement. The “Aims” section goes on, “In this way it is possible to train fresh energy, new experience and power for the service of the International and of the entire Labor Movement of America, and to help our members to achieve their purposes with the ultimate goal of living a full, rich and happy life.” To this end, the rhetorical situation of the “Aims” section establishes an understanding that the workers’ (in this case, also the audience’s) welfare is aligned with the success of the International and the wider Labor Movement. This sort of language is consistent with corresponding “Aims” sections through the 1923 and 1925 course descriptions.

The course offerings reflect the emphasis on the importance of the International and Labor Movement. The courses in the Workers’ University read like masters seminars, addressing highly specialized topics such as “Trade Union Policies and Tactics,” “Unemployment Insurance,” “Economic Problems of the Working Woman,” “The Labor Movement in the Steel Industry,” to name a few.

Courses pertaining to the study of the English language, such as literature and public speaking courses, shift in their descriptions through time. The 1921 literature

course, “Tendencies in Modern Literature” reads as though it is a general literature appreciation course. By 1925, the course, renamed “A Social Study of Literature,” taught by the same instructor, emphasizes how “Literature is the indelible record of progress, the product of the same forces which account for the enlarging aspirations of the people.” The emphasis on the social element of literature may be reflected in the listing of authors in the 1921 Course announcement, which mentions authors such as Eugene O’Neill, Sinclair Lewis, and Floyd Dell, all of whom sympathized with the Labor Movement.<sup>5</sup> To this end, the only course that does not have an explicit connection to the advance of the Labor movement is the course on Public Speaking. The course description offers a functional approach to teaching public speaking, emphasizing qualities like helping the student develop the “physical and mental habits of effective delivery.” The wider rhetorical situation of the Workers’ University, particularly with its emphasis on the Labor Movement, may have seeped into the instruction of the course. There may certainly have been ample material for students to practice for their speeches supplied by other courses at the Workers’ University.

Courses in the Unity Centers appear less intensive in their subject matter and descriptions than the Workers’ University courses. Nonetheless, Unity Center courses share an emphasis on social and labor issues as the Workers’ University. The offerings in the Unity Center courses are fewer in 1925 (five courses) than in 1921 (eleven courses). In 1925, three Unity Center courses offered deal specifically with economics and the labor movement, the other two courses are English and Physical Education. Since the 1921 course announcement guide, the Educational Department dropped courses in

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<sup>55</sup> O’Neill was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, Dell was an editor for the socialist-leaning magazine *The Masses*, and Sinclair Lewis’ work often attacked American capitalism.



arithmetic, music, health and psychology in the Unity Centers. Clearly, in the early years of the Educational Department, the reduction of courses points to some of the values the Executive Committee might reasonably exercise as the program progressed.

Interestingly, the funding of the program from 1921 to 1923 program increased from \$15,000 to \$17,500. The 1924 Course Announcement, while not a subject of analysis for this project, confirms that the annual appropriation to the educational work of the International was set at an annual \$17,500 for the next two years, which includes the 1925 season. This becomes an interesting issue: although appropriations increase from 1921 to 1925, the Educational Department still reduces course offerings at the Unity Centers. The remaining courses in 1925 are either extremely popular in attendance (English), directly related to the mission of the Union (the courses on social and economic concerns of the Union), and Physical Training.

There are two points of note from the 1924 Course Announcement: first, the announcement identifies that Physical Training and English courses as taught by teachers assigned from the Board of Education. Second, the 1924 Course Announcement mentions eleven courses at Unity Centers. So why the reduction to five courses the next year when the appropriations remain the same? Perhaps the economics of working with the Board of Education made good financial sense in continuing the employ of teachers for English and Physical Training, but the group decided to move its resources elsewhere in educating workers in the Extension Division or Workers' University. It is difficult to make conjectures about this in the absence of internal documents, meeting minutes, or letters among the principles of the organization. All that is available is a perplexing

situation where course offerings at the Unity Centers are reduced without any seeming economic impetus to contract the program.

Rather than try to figure out *why* the course offerings in the Unity Center are inexplicably reduced, I believe that examining *how* these changes affect the curriculum may be telling of the Educational Department's assessment of its own situation. I have established earlier that I believe the sponsors of literacy provide such sponsorship through a particular rhetorical framework. The interest in training individuals through its own program related to how the program will prepare those individuals to engage a language and rhetorical situation that is in line with the rhetorical situations the sponsor sees as most pressing. A large labor union would understandably place its emphasis on the social and economic ills facing its membership, if it is interested in serving that membership. To that end, the move by the Educational Department to eliminate courses unrelated to the social and economic concerns of its membership is reasonable. The fact that Physical Training and English maintain themselves in the Unity Centers may have more to say with the general popularity of those courses that supersede any other reason to eliminate the course.

The English course is interesting in this context. The way the Educational Department stratifies courses between the Unity Center and the Workers' University is almost akin to a prerequisite program. An adult worker in the Union may have to take courses from the Unity Center in English before he or she could move up to the public speaking course offered in the Workers' University, or the Executive Committee and Officer training as a part of the Extension Division. Likewise, some of the other courses offered in the Unity Centers have courses that seem related (and more precisely focused)

in the Workers' University. The 1925 Course Announcement explicitly mentions, "Those who attend these classes [in the Workers' University] have had preliminary training in the Unity Centers or elsewhere." The role of the Unity Center is at least in part to prepare worker/students to go on to the Workers' University. Perhaps this is a parallel to the relationship between modern High Schools and Universities. However, an important distinction rests in how the training of learners at the Unity Center focuses on understanding theories of economics and skill with language; this is not a comprehensive education. The education works toward training the next generation of leaders, speakers, advocates, and active members of the Union. To this end, the focus on economic and social issues pertaining to the Labor Movement is an act ensuring the efficiency of the program; it provides a clear streamline to the courses in the Workers' University that are related to the core mission of the Union. The rhetorical concerns of the sponsor or literacy in this case rests in how the worker/student comes to understand their place in the mixture of the expectations the Union has of its students, the students' understanding of economic and social theories, and their mastery of language. The student who does not understand all of these factors in essence cannot help the Educational Department execute its own goals. To this end, the architecture of the Unity Center-to-Workers' University educational model is constructed to reinforce a particular understanding of the student's rhetorical place in their own education.

Not all this analysis of the operation of the rhetorical concerns of the ILGWU as a sponsor of literacy takes into account the Extension Division component of the program. Throughout the history of the Extension Division, the Course Announcements always mention that lectures and courses of the Extension Division are given in the vernacular of

the group (usually a Local branch of the International) addressed. Moreover, the Extension Division offers social gatherings, hikes, visit to museums, and group attendance of concerts. These courses are in addition to the earlier-mentioned Training courses for Executive Committee members, leaders and “active members.” However, when the Course Description mentions the Extension Division Training course, it makes clear that these courses involve a barrier to entry that precludes most members of the group. The courses of the Extension Division either complement the rhetorical training of leaders of the International, or place an emphasis on supporting the social dynamics of the groups within the Union.

The Union’s interest in maintaining a social cohesion in its membership has important rhetorical implications. Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification, and as a fact of identification, consubstantiality, helps explain part of the rhetorical interest in maintaining strong social ties within the Locals. Burke writes that an individual may not be identical to another individual, but that person may still identify herself with another individual for a variety of reasons. Once an individual identifies herself with another person, Burke argues, she becomes “substantially one” with that person, even though she is still unique to that person. To this end, individuals become consubstantial to each other. Burke explains that in rhetoric, “identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (pp. 19-23). Burke’s theory of identification and consubstantiality helps explain how the Educational Department constructs its social programming to double as a rhetorical function.

While all of the members of the Union have the common bond of brother-and-sisterhood through their common vocations, the similarities could be limited to these points. The ILGWU was founded to join several different trades in the garment industry. Cloakworkers, shirtwaist-sewers, sleeve-pressers, cutters, and other specialties within the garment industry did not have much of a reason to interact with each other outside of possible social interactions in their neighborhoods—outside of their shops. As the ILGWU became more diverse with respect to ethnic representations, the chances of social interactions, especially between young women of different ethnic backgrounds, became more challenging. The Educational Department's social programming may have operated in the interest of bringing together individuals through their common industrial background, bound by their Union. In essence, the workers who participated in the social program may have come to identify themselves not only as consubstantial with each other, but also with the larger social apparatus of the International as a whole.

The social function of the Educational Department is more apparent in the drastically revamped educational programming of the late 1930s. The 1937 Course announcement guide describes eleven total offerings, but five of those offerings are distinctly social. These offerings include visits to points of interests, union songs, recreational activities, hikes, concerts and theater parties, and "Get-togethers." My use of the word "offerings" here is meant to be sensitive to the fact that the 1937 course announcement does not mention "courses." Perhaps more interestingly, the name of the spaces facilitating these events is no longer a "Unity Center," but "Social Educational Centers." Keeping in mind the description of these course announcements from the previous chapter, their more engaging design, lack of meta-discussion about the

administration of the Educational Department all contribute to a more socially-accessible turn in the promotion of the Educational programs. The narrative on the cover page invites the reader to picture himself or herself as actively using the full breadth of social and educational offerings from the educational department. The two-page photographic collage of members enjoying the amenities of the Social Educational Centers in the 1939 Announcement adds to this social aesthetic.

The later course announcements by no means meant that the Educational Department had abandoned its interest in training future leaders of the International. Although the description of the curriculum is not nearly as stratified or described with the same depth as the Announcements of the 1920s, the Announcements of the 1930s articulate a mantra of “Action Based On Knowledge is Power.” The “Knowledge is Power” philosophy of the 1920s is mixed with activity, social interaction, and an emphasis on recreation and training the body as much as it is about the mind and thinking. This is surely part of the ascent of Englishman Mark Starr as the Director of the Educational Department and Fannia Cohn’s gradual marginalization while still operating as the Executive Secretary of the Department.

The shift in a focus on social and educational programing on an equal footing with each other demonstrates a matured rhetorical view of the educational programing itself. The education of members that was stratified between those who may become leaders through the Workers’ University and select Extension Course of the 1920s gives way to a socially-enhanced comprehensive education in the late 1930s. This may have been due to the linguistic accessibility between members using English that may not have been available in the 1920s (by the late 1930s the only English course offered is “Public

Speaking and Advanced English”). The reason why the change occurred is not as important as how it represented the rhetorical concerns of the International as a sponsor of literacy. The overall shift in education is reminiscent of Gramsci’s “new intellectual,” where the hands that make and the mind that thinks creates a new workers’ intellectual tradition. To this end, the rhetorical concerns of the ILGWU seem in line with Gramsci’s own thinking; to train the worker as an intellectual and advocate for other workers. In the context of the ILGWU, the advocacy for other workers is best operationalized through the institution of the International. In this respect, the programing of the early Educational Department mimics the sort of hierarchy of the wider ILGWU institution itself: courses are stratified based on performance and ability, individuals who perform well at a lower level are elevated to greater exposure and responsibility.

This may not have been what Gramsci had in mind with worker’s education. The architecture of institutional hierarchy occludes individuals who have not met the prerequisites to get to the upper-echelons of the institution. This shows in the curriculum of the Educational Department of the early 1920s.

How is literacy defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy? In the 1920s, it is defined by the ability to master issues of not only language, but also understanding economic and social challenges faced by workers so the learner could ascend the hierarchy of the International and put their learning to use towards its end. The Educational Department of the late 1930s by contrast emphasizes the social along with the educational, and the program becomes more comprehensive for participants. Literacy in this context is a resource of not only learning, but also social interaction as well; the practice of being around others and identifying with them.

Although the rhetorical function of this relationship is not necessarily explicit, it still creates a unit of cohesion and sets up a workable rhetorical situation for the International as it continues its own work.

This extended discussion tended to focus on finding out what the institution of the International stood to gain rhetorically by its constructing of an educational/literacy program. The next section examines the position of the workers in this ecology of literacy and how their needs become instantiated in the program of the Educational Department.

### **Rhetorical Concerns and the Seekers of Literacy**

The third research question of this project is: “How is literacy defined by the economic realities of students of literacy programs?” This section is interested in representations of student interests in participating in the ILGWU’s programs, as well as how those concerns align with the potential contemporary needs of worker\students at the time of the program. The short answer to the question is that literacy is hard to define in this context. This is for two reasons: first, the focus of this research on the documentary history of the ILGWU tends to privilege the curricular objectives of the educational department. For this reason, there are not many resources that share student perceptions of the program, or elucidate how students affected change in the Educational Department. The second reason answering the question is difficult is because the size of the International’s membership became so large and ethnically diverse that narrowing on the interests of a few select groups, let alone individuals, would be nearly impossible. By the mid 1930s, Jews and Italians were leaving the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The groups had already formed large ethnic enclaves in the Bronx (the Italians) and west and south



Brooklyn (the Jews). Records of changing demographics of membership are spotty as best, however Puerto Ricans and Chinese workers were entering the garment industry by the mid-1930s (remember Maria and her friends from *West Side Story* who worked in a women's bridal dress shop.) This section cannot answer the research question fully, but addresses two places where worker\students' interaction with the Educational Department provided space for asserting their own literacy needs within the program.

One consistent element of the planning of Educational Department Programing is the inclusion of a Students' Council. The "Administration" sections of the 1921 and 1923 Course Announcements reference the Students' Council as one of the three groups the Educational Department consults as it "plan[s] its work" (the other two groups being the faculty and Join Conference of Local Educational Committee). In these Course announcements, there is no explanation of how students may join this organization, or how much of the programmatic planning is influenced by the Students' Council. The 1925 Course Announcement explains: "Each class elects two members to serve on a Students' Council. This Council aids the Educational Department to keep in touch with classes, and selects three of its number to sit with the Executive Committee of the Faculty." The definition of "class" here is ambiguous. In some other areas of the Educational Department, a class is considered an entire course regardless of how many sections of that class may be available. In the 1924 Report of the Educational Committee to the Executive Council, the "classes" of English would translate to the number of students enrolled. In this context, 8,000 classes would mean 8,000 students. With this in mind, and scarce documents from the time that describes the quality of the Students' Council, it is difficult to say how many people participated in the organization.

The 1925 Announcement suggests that the Students' Council served an observational role; they are charged with "keep[ing] in touch with classes" and sending members to the Executive Committee of the Faculty. The Students' Councils are removed from the programmatic decision-making body of the Educational Department.

While the 1937 Announcement makes no mention of the Students' Council, the 1939 Announcement explains the group with some depth. In 1939, each Social Educational Center selects three students to become members of the Students' Council. These students work with the Educational Department and the larger ILGWU Student Fellowship to help plan programs, even offering suggestions. Members of the Students' Council are likewise charged with planning and carrying out social activities, as well as promoting the offerings of the Educational Department in their shops. This expanded description may be a part of the more socially-engaged nature of the 1939 Announcement. However, a student reading this Announcement might find the responsibilities, visibility, and social nature of the organization more attractive than the limited administrative functions of the earlier Students' Council.

The opportunity for students to engage in the Council does not suggest that Students had an active role in constructing the educational policies of the Educational Department. The focus and gradual reduction of courses in the Unity Centers, the most accessible of the organized educational curriculum offered by the Educational Department, would suggest that the size of the Students' Council shrunk though the early 1920s. Moreover, any power the students could exert on their own learning did not apparently include the addition of courses to the Educational Department's offerings. The

role of students in their own learning would appear to be neutered by the Educational Committee until the late 1930s.

The emphasis on learning issues consistent with the mission of the International, as well as the training of public speaking, parallels the observations of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian regarding the training of the orator. In the cases of both Classical rhetorical education and the operations of the ILGWU's Educational Department, the objective was to train students in a particular type of educational experience. In the classical tradition, this would have been to engage with government: courts, forums, civic discussions, and issues pertaining to voting. In the ILGWU's Educational Department, the function was to administrate and promulgate the work of the International. Both contexts are emblematic of institutional interactions: one with a government and the other with the hierarchy of a labor union. The challenge for the student here is the scale of what they can access through education.

A garment worker may be pleased to have access to power in her labor union, and may find the education of the union to be helpful for other parts of her daily concerns. Yet the programs as described through the materials I have collected are intent on offering this education through the guise of interacting with the hierarchy of the union itself. There is little to suggest that the educational program can address the daily needs of workers dealing with the politics of their shops, negotiating prices with retailers and wholesalers, interacting with local or national governmental organizations, or technical issues of the garment trade. The emphasis on labor issues in the broader concern of the Labor Movement does not seem to translate to the daily labor experiences of the workers.

There are two references to communication or literacy outside the context of the mission of the International. The first appears in the 1925 Course Announcement in the Extension Division course “Practical English.” This course involves “Instruction and practice in writing documents, reports, pamphlets, etc. This course is intended for active members of the Union.” The first half of this description is similar to what may describe a contemporary technical writing course. The emphasis on different types of documents marks an implicit understanding of the multitude of genres available to English learners outside public oratory. As the first mention of a class devoted to writing, the scale of where students may apply the skills they learn in this course increases beyond the speakers’ dais.

I will not argue that students need writing to experience a good educational experience. However, the training of writing, the permanence of the written word creates a literary culture that better represents the type of engagement workers in a literary society might interact with each other. Before 1925, customs officials at Ellis Island would take note of whether or not immigrants could both read and write. This is the mark of a culture that comes to understand its essence as a documentary society. For that reason, it is remarkable that the Educational Department seemed generally more interested in the spoken word than the written one, even though writing culture permeated the garment industry.

One could argue that Jewish culture is highly literate and writing and reading were well-represented there. However, in the context of working across a large network of multi-ethnic members of both genders and a range of ages, it might suffice to figure

that there would be a premium placed on constructing the written word well to a variety of audiences.

Much of this section of this chapter has tried to glean the rhetorical concerns of workers. The first part of this section ponders how workers may have been marginalized in an educational program designed to serve them, particularly in the lack of emphasis on the written word. There is still a larger concern regarding what students may have needed as a part of their rhetorical education: access to American citizenship.

The first course on citizenship offered by the Educational department appears in the 1939 Announcement. While several courses before this time contained components of what might make up a class on citizenship, the courses always framed themselves in the wider concerns of labor and economic concerns. The presence of one course organized toward United States citizenship is novel in this respect. As chapter 3 outlines a brief history of the challenges faced by immigrants—particularly Jewish and Italian ones—in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the International did not make a concerted effort to promote citizenship until well into the Educational Department's operation.

The description of the course states: “Do we need to point out the importance of being a citizen of the United States? We shall therefore conduct a special class in citizenship which will include a study of civics, the English language, and history of United States.” The importance of being a citizen of the United States is offered as self-evident, although it was not so apparent through the life of the Educational Department to this point. Citizenship could give members the privilege to vote for candidates sympathetic to the International, it would give legal standing when a worker wanted to sue her shop, or a shop manager wanted to settle a dispute with a wholesaler. Besides

establishing a large voting bloc, there is little in the citizenship course that could benefit the internal operations of the International.

If in the 18 years of materials I collected I was asked to identify the course that was most useful to worker/students, this would likely be the course. I am not interested so much in making immigrants citizens as I am in how the training in language becomes associated with the ability to speak to power by accessing the history and civic traditions of the United States. The worker who could speak eloquently in English on labor and economic issues to his or her brethren is certainly better off than having no educational opportunities at all. However, the worker who knows her constitutional rights can go to a court and have legal standing, can vote, and launch protests as a full citizen without the specter of abuse or deportation seems to me to have the stronger position.

## Chapter 7: Implications of Literacy Sponsorship, Writing, and the Rhetorics of Literacy

This chapter functions to sum up the work done in this study. The first three sections address each research question and acknowledge what the study has done to answer each research question directly through the analysis I conducted in the previous chapter. This chapter closes by identifying three areas I encountered while working on this project that I would like to pursue further. Before I address my research questions, I believe it is important to discuss the ethical implications of the literacy program I described in this study, as there appears to be nowhere else in this study where such a discussion would be appropriate.

While evidence and analysis shows that the Educational Department of the ILGWU operated primarily to perpetuate its own interests through its student base, I believe this is not a breach in the relationship between educators and learners. While interviews with students from this era are nonexistent, I can only imagine that a stranger to the United States, whose language provides her with no access to legal services, or bureaucracies, would benefit from access to any free English literacy program. While institutional racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism may have blunted gains in prosperity, access to English literacy surely made life in their new homes more manageable and perhaps more prosperous. Learners could perhaps read and negotiate apartment leases or homestead property. They could read notices in the newspaper or file police reports. They could walk up to a stranger on the street and, using a common tongue, ask for directions. Such access, especially in a city as large as New York counted for something even if literacy did not translate to monetary gains.

The program the ILGWU provided may have been some peoples' only chance to learn English from trained and professional educators that the New York Public Schools provided. I would not want to suggest that the Union's interest in using the educational department to emphasize training leaders within its own ranks was somehow unethical. Evidence from the time suggests that some students took this learning into other industries. This charge against Fannia Cohn and the Educational Department was consistently on their minds. Students did what they wanted with the education. Some stayed, some left, some became leaders and still others were satisfied with their shop roles. The educational programing facilitated personal intellectual growth, and students were not beholden to the International's largess. At the same time, the International exposed itself to the risk of losing students who might become bored or intellectually stimulated by opportunities outside the union.

The setup of the ILGWU's educational program was open for both students and the union. Unlike the Ford English School<sup>6</sup>, where students were expected to remain faithful employees to the Ford Motor Company and become acculturated to the "rich way of living," the International's program focused on the functions of language and knowledge as they are related to a broader international laborer's movement. The fact that the International emphasized social and labor issues is hardly surprising as that was a core component of its mission. No evidence suggests the ILGWU was coercive or exploitive of learners. To this end, the ethical issues of teaching about issues directly related to the Union's existence and operation are more remnants of what the group knew and cared about more than their interest in creating a propaganda wing.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the Ford English School, see Meyer's "Adapting the Immigrant to the Line: Americanization in the Ford Factory, 1914-1921" (1980).



The rest of this chapter discusses closes this research by considering the context, findings, and analysis together. This chapter proceeds by addressing the three primary research questions and then moves on to posit some areas for further exploration with this sort of project.

### **Research Question 1**

Question: How are literacy sponsors practicing their power in the ILGWU Educational Department?

This project began by incorrectly assuming there was only one sponsor of literacy: the ILGWU through its Educational Department. The emphasis on the one institution in an effort to expand upon the understanding of sponsor of literacy put forth by Brandt (and described in chapter two) placed blinders on this project. It was not until the research question, framed by “how” demanded an inquiry into the functional aspects of the educational programming that the New York City Public Schools Board of Education rose as an important player in the narrative of literacy.

Sponsors of literacy practiced power in the ILGWU’s educational programing through its institutional organization. Both the institutions of the International and the Board of Education have existing hierarchies in place that allow each to handle important elements of operating the program. The International provided the financial allotment that kept school doors open, school materials in print, and an Educational Committee that could organize the curriculum.

What the International lacked in infrastructure, the Board of education could provide: classrooms in accessible and safe buildings in the city, gymnasia, and trained English teachers. The price for this educational infrastructure was monetary as well as curricular: any courses held in New York Public Schools needed to be in English. The history of the International included resistance to the use of languages other than Yiddish in its operations. Fannia Cohn tried to get this requirement waived to no avail causing the Educational Department to cede to its needs for an educational infrastructure and adopt the policy. In this instance, sponsors of literacy are not only in contact, but also in contrast with each other regarding student learning goals.

The dynamics of power exhibited here are useful as scholars expand research upon sponsor of literacy. First, scholars must explore the possibility that in literacy learning, although students may recognize one organization that provides the educational programming, other, seemingly invisible programs, may impel the front organization to revise its own curricular objectives. Such an understanding puts the power dynamics of sponsors of literacy into murky waters. The definitions of sponsors of literacy becomes difficult when literacy is understood as an ecology of powerful groups each working to assert its own educational ideals on learners. The complex systems of literacy programs needs to be more thoroughly developed in future research.

Does thinking about literacy programs and sponsors of literacy necessarily mean that scholars need to determine if one group is more powerful than another is? Perhaps, but in the case of this study the position of each organization operated along define roles. There is no evidence to suggest that beyond the English requirement the Board of Education exerted other influence on the Educational Committee. Likewise, within the

parameters of renting rooms from the Board of Education, no evidence suggests that any undue influence visited the Educational Committee from the Public Schools. Surely, in other literacy programs the relationship between the providers of space and the providers of curriculum was more contentious.

In this study, the story of power is simple: A labor union designs an educational program but needs spaces that can accommodate large numbers of workers and trained teachers in English as a part of its mission. The Board of Education for New York City granted the Union a space to operate its programs but demanded that all programming be conducted in English. The Union ceded to this demand, and both organizations worked harmoniously until the internal division in the Union temporarily suspended the Union's relationship with the Board of Education.

There is one more important point that addresses the question of how the sponsors of literacy practiced their power in the ILGWU's educational program. The ILGWU was successful insofar as through its programming it maintained a focus on the needs of its own institution. Brandt initially describes sponsors of literacy as individuals such as older relatives, parents, teachers, clergy, bosses, and military superiors to name a few. Each of these individuals operates from a larger institutional apparatus that is as much an element of the way they understand and provide access to literacy as their personal proclivities. A military member and a clergywoman may have a different understanding of the social obligations of their roles as sponsors of literacy. Such understandings are a part of their own literacy training, especially through which literacies they access on their own. The institutions they represent, whether educational, military, religious, cultural, or social, defines the ways they understand literacy, which in turn changes what learners, can

access themselves. The sponsor of literacy is sometimes part of an institution that has rhetorical obligations to its membership as well as its own existence. In this context, literacy must be understood not as some rote ability to speak, hear, read, or write, but as the sort of resources Brandt describes. These resources provide currency and access, but only in areas where such currency is recognized. The arguments that make up literacy become currency, and they are redeemable only where such arguments are tolerated. To this end, the rhetorical concerns of sponsors of literacy become the currency of students and the students perpetuate the rhetorical interests of the institution.

## **Question 2**

Question: How is literacy defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy?

There are two ways to answer this question. First is a question of theory: literacy becomes defined by the wider rhetorical concerns of the sponsor of literacy through that sponsor's most immediate threats. The cares of the International are a part of the worldview that leaders understand as they meet to discuss the urgent needs of the day. Bourdieu might call this *habitus*. The idea that the morals and ways of understanding how the world operated means something different to a leader in the ILGWU than individuals living on Madison Avenue in the Upper East Side. The concerns of the International and Educational Department could not help but become manifest in its educational programming.

The second answer to the question is more functional in scope. The rhetorical concerns of the sponsors of literacy were defined in course offerings and materials. The

literature that the Educational Department exposed students to consisted of outlines, lectures, books, and plays that dealt with labor and social issues. Evidence demonstrates that, as the Educational Department expanded financially in the 1920s, the course offerings became refined to deal almost exclusively with labor and social issues.

All courses in the course guides can be understood either in how each contributed to the sustainability of the labor movement, or as a mechanism for breeding working solidarity through social connections. No courses in the guides are “private” between one member and a teacher. The social nature and social emphases on the courses are part of constructing a larger rhetorical exegesis.

The organization of the Public Speaking and leadership courses generally maintain an emphasis on the application of knowledge to social action. Just as the pedagogies of Cicero and Quintilian argue for speakers to continue to prime their crafts in public oratory, so to the courses listed with “English” pose English learning and speech not only as a social construct, but a rhetorical one as well. In short, one may say, “This is English, and This is what you use it for.” The next level of instruction in English skill after the course in the Unity Center was a Public Speaking course at the Workers’ University. Such an understanding of English demonstrates the Educational Department’s thinking about the role of language. One could reason that such an emphasis on the rhetorical function of language would also be imparted to the language learner as well.

In essence, the sponsor of literacy’s rhetorical concern with language is that language be used to address the issues of the day. The Worker’s University held courses in literature appreciation, but not in literature writing or poetry. While omission does not demonstrate evidence of some overt effort to reinforce a particular (and rhetorical)

approach to understanding language, students were nonetheless unexposed to the full breadth of what language could be. Instead, the function of using language insofar as the ILGWU's Educational Department is rhetorical.

The ability to define the roles of language and learning through larger rhetorical concerns is the pleasure of a sponsor of literacy. However, the interests of the sponsor of literacy are not necessarily the same as those of the students. The third and final question endeavors to answer how students came to understand literacy through their own economic realities beyond the literacy program.

### **Question 3**

Question: How is literacy defined by the economic realities of students of literacy programs?

The answer to this question is that, largely, student economic realities beyond the scope of the literacy program are relatively unimportant.

The perspective of students rarely appears in the course announcements. The lectures are presented as sorts of top-down learning and teaching environments where well-educated and sometimes prestigious teachers explain the wider world and complex economic issues to eager students. Students, in turn, are expected to deal primarily with the subjects of lectures.

Based on the evidence in the course announcements, students have little to offer the classroom environment. The description in the 1921 and 1923 course "TRAINING of Speakers for the Labor Movement," shares that "students will be required to prepare addresses on such subjects as the labor movement, the organization, problems and

function of the I.L.G.W.U., shop control, etc...” Perhaps the fact that the union-organized educational program would insist upon union-oriented student assignments should not be surprising. Moreover, the charge leveled against Cohn later in the program’s life argued that worker education drove too many workers from the garment trades, and a course like this kept the education germane to the union (although this course predates most of those charges). Whatever the reason may be, the challenges that students faced rest in their own pursuit of power through language.

The question this section addresses is how literacy is defined by the economic realities of students, and the unsatisfying answer is that the question depends on the perspective of the person asking. In the eyes of socialist like Fannia Cohn and many of her ILGWU compatriots, an individual’s work is her economic reality. While today one might expand an understanding of economic realities to include housing and neighborhood development, transportation, education, and access to health care, the 1920s ILGWU sought to incorporate as much of these elements of economic reality into its operation as possible. The ILGWU sponsored health clinics and educational programming to its members. The origin of the Union came from the heavy concentration of garment workers in the neighborhoods in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, thus making the Union a part of the fabric of the neighborhood. The International’s efforts to enhance the social offerings of the Educational Department, through choirs, hikes, day trips, and defraying the cost of going to concerts and theater added to the prevalence of the Union’s influence in members’ social interactions. In this context, one might reasonably believe that the health of Cohn’s own economic realities was closely aligned with that of the International.

While I may today be able to conceptualize how the economic issues of a worker are too fragmented for one organization to handle entirely, I have to stand back and acknowledge the breadth of the ILGWU's attempt to execute just that. The recapitulation figures I cite earlier point to the fact that student/workers took advantage of the programming the International provided. From an assessment angle, it may be impossible to assess the true magnitude of the educational programming. As workers left the Union, it would be hard to identify if losses were due to natural attrition, lowered demand, or an effort to make use of the education provided by the Union, although I would posit that all of these had some role. Perhaps as Jews and Italians moved into houses in the Bronx, Queens, and outer Brooklyn, workers became interested in how those communities functioned and less concerned with the Union.

I believe literacy was not defined by the economic realities of worker/students in the educational department because they did not have the pleasure to define it themselves. While I can postulate what *may* have been useful to the worker/students that was not taught in the classes, the point is moot: the literate define literacy. The language of power defines literacy. Literacy is access. Literacy is hope. Literacy is the ability to argue, defend, assert, persuade, question, disagree and ascend.

### **Literacy Reconsidered**

Brandt calls literacy a "resource" and identifies how as a resource, "organized economic and political interests work so persistently to conscript or ration the powers of literacy for their own competitive advantage." I would add that from my study of literacy, I recognize the rationing of literacy to be a tool of rationing access to civic



engagement. Just as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian taught in schools of boys and men, their efforts to afford the powerful with the tools of speech was in the service of the republics they served. Their political understanding of who was and was not a citizen of these republics is narrow by today's definitions, but in teaching rhetoric to serve democracy, they tacitly ascended to the preservation of democracy as an institution.

Gramsci, on the other hand, viewed the ability to train speakers and thinkers in labor as a way to affront the institution of capitalism. His interests in a "worker's intellectual tradition" further affronted the dichotomy of the *homo sapiens* (man thinking) and *homo faber* (man the maker) in academic tradition. Gramsci understood the power of a worker's education as a transcendent enterprise, while perhaps a bit narrow in its approach and untested in its utilization remains a way of imagining the world as something that it was not and actively sought an education that redressed the plights of people without access to power.

The work of the ILGWU is somewhere between the classical rhetoricians and Gramsci. In part, the educational programming is oriented to affirm, maintain, and consolidate the power of the International. The International stood to gain immensely from an educated, trained, and proactive membership ready to take on leadership roles. Its programming operated in a large part to assert the power of the Union and perpetuate the existence of the Union and the American Labor Movement as institutions.

However, the institution also perpetuated Gramscian ideas about worker's education. Students who otherwise may not have access to educational and literacy programming found spaces where they could learn and practice their new skills and grow intellectually. The educational programs provided opportunities for students to see how

theories of psychology and economics mix with history, math, and literature contribute to a unique sort of learning environment that could grow a worker's intellectual tradition. A worker's intellectual tradition could comment on capitalism, but possibly also socialism and the ways democracy operates from the perspective of the worker. The educational programming of the ILGWU could edify both institutions and individuals.

Perhaps I will leave some readers unsatisfied by not defining literacy in this text. However, if this text concludes anything essential about literacy it is this: literacy cannot be defined outside of the context of who wants to define it. Those who define literacy may be individuals or institutions, but the key to understanding how anyone defines literacy is in understanding the power dynamics written into that definition.

I am not trying to mitigate the power of literacy or the encouragement that people become literate. The access literacy *can* provide individuals is to me a persuasive reason to seek it out continually and throughout life, even though that access may be imperfect to members of marginalized communities. Yet when I hear literacy discussed as a tool for economic and political capital, I believe the question of context becomes more important. The definition of literacy is in essence always an argument. It is at first a rhetorical move to include and exclude individuals from a conversation. The wary participant in conversations about literacy may be stewards of the power of literacy by actively interrogating the rhetorical position of that word.

Whether an individual defines literacy through reading, writing, speaking, or technical function, "literacy" is always located within an economic and institutional context that privileges some participants and keeps out others. The role of rhetoric in this situation is to affirm the fidelity of democratic interaction by recognizing the power of

literacy in these situations, and understand the rhetorical implications of defining participation through language comprehension. In doing so, rhetoricians, educators, public officials, and the public may begin to comprehend the innately rhetorical nature of “literacy.”

### **Areas of Future Research**

The research started here expands the opportunities to address literacy. This final section explores some avenues I considered while conducting either research that I could not fit into this study without compromising the integrity of the research, or items I observed as useful areas to examine “later.”

#### *Personal Narratives of Literacy from the 1920s-1930s*

I received good advice early in this project to seek out memoirs and other personal narratives that dealt with literacy acquisition from the time I researched. Such texts would have helped me address my third research question, as I would imagine such narratives would explain what a learner *wanted* out of literacy education, which I could have contrasted from the ILGWU’s programing objectives.

I tried in earnest to locate such texts, but I would often come up with texts that fell short of matching the context of my study. I may have a text written by an Immigrant Jewish woman in Cleveland rather than New York City, or an Italian cigar roller in Tampa. While I think including these texts may have been enlightening to the overall scope of this project, I feared that my move toward understanding the institutional

operations of the educational department would not grant the sort of intellectual space to the memoirs that they deserved.

One of the benefits of the research I conducted is that I have a wider vocabulary for analyzing the ways in which institutions instantiate literacy, and so as I begin to read and analyze memoirs that discuss literacy acquisition, I can interrogate both the contexts of the learner and the eventual literacy sponsors.

### *Opening Discussions about the Ethics of Archival Research*

My work on archival research methods is just beginning. I am satisfied with how this study examined archival materials as “data” that could be analyzed on their own rather than stringing information together to compose a narrative. While I believe narratives are important to writing researchers, I also believe that data handled and analyzed through methods used in social science research, which may supplement narrative texts. I plan to engage this in future writing.

Another important element of archival research was the many ethical decisions I had to make as I conducted this research. Although I encountered no collections of student writing, part of me was always hoping such a find might arise. Although the papers and data were old, I wondered if any student work I found and sought to use in my research would be subject to standards of human subject testing. Researchers who deal with case studies, ethnographies, focus groups, surveys, and any other research method that involves human response are held to Internal Review standards that ensure subjects are not placed at risk and that subjects consent to participation. While I cannot necessarily harm the dead (at least not physically), any student writing, and perhaps many

of the letters I encountered in the archives I visited, were written by people who would never wish to have their texts seen by anyone other than the addressed recipient. Was this a violation of consented participation in my research? Where ought researchers draw these lines?

Having spent the last three years in archives that at times offered me scant information; I have difficulty saying archival researchers should explore potentially reducing what they can use further. However, I think that opening a discussion about the nuance of protecting the identity of subjects, perhaps contacting writers' kin for consent, or establishing a protocol for dealing with personal writings may enhance research.

#### *Research into Brookwood Labor College and the Workers' Education Bureau*

The areas I can expand this research that deals most clearly with the subject of this research is into the establishment and operations of the Brookwood Labor College and the Workers' Education Bureau. Fannia Cohn was a member of both of these organizations, and as the ILGWU's internal troubles shut down the work of the central Educational Committee, Cohn spent more time dealing with the other two organizations.

Brookwood, established in 1921, was a college located about forty miles north of New York City where motivated workers could receive an education through their unions. The ILGWU, in addition to several other local unions such as the American Federation of Labor, supported the mission of this college. The college closed in the 1937, offering a tightly-defined case to research. I would continue my focus on the rhetorical and literacy training of worker/students, and I may use my work in this study to analyze how the ILGWU program and Brookwood contrasted (or not) in their operations.

The Workers' Education Bureau (WEB), also founded in 1921, worked to establish labor colleges and worker education centers around the United States. This organization, like Brookwood, operated through the collaboration of several unions with different membership populations, such as the United Mine Workers. These new contexts for labor education can not only help me understand the broader role of education in the American Labor Movement, but also a sense of how unique the ILGWU's program actually was, and how different contexts of literacy, language, and power throughout the United States may have influenced how the WEB envisioned and carried out its work.

### *Contemporary Implications for Literacy*

I wrote earlier in this chapter about the ways my framework for understanding literacy may have applications to contemporary issues. I think this is potentially the most important work of this study. My belief that literacy is in large part a rhetorical construct has implications for not only literacy, rhetoric, and writing researchers, but extends to education, sociology, anthropology, political science, and psychology. I envision writing a text titled "The Rhetoric of Literacy" in which I address a contemporary literacy issue (perhaps the English-only movement in some localities to establish linguistic hegemony through local ordinances) and explore the rhetorical implications of the use of "literacy." I would follow that text with another called "The Literacies of Rhetoric" wherein I take on a rhetorical debate (perhaps the discussion of object-oriented rhetoric, or rhetorics of the body, but the topic is not as important here as it is in the earlier text) and analyze how literacy traditions and institutions instantiate themselves in the rhetorical moves.

I want to write two works that complement each other because I sense something emerging further once rhetoric becomes accountable to issues of language and access. Here, I am not writing about rhetoric as a discipline, but in how argument operates. I think this research interrogates the sense that rhetoric is a study of what Aristotle called “the available means of persuasion” by asking how the “means of persuasion” would differ from access to persuasion through literacy.

Such a line of inquiry has implications not only for rhetoric, but also for technical and professional communication. Texts exchanged in intercultural professional contexts involve negotiations of literacy and rhetoric. I believe even at lower stakes, involving simple letters from customers and vendors, engineers and management, employers and job seekers; texts inscribe literacy expectations, and part of being persuasive to an audience is qualifying ones’ access to the literacy traditions of another. This course of study is part Burke, part Cicero, part Booth, and probably part a little bit of everything else.

I envision literacy and rhetoric as sisters begotten by language. One offers access, and the other offers operation. In my work examining how literacy is defined by an educational program, I was able to comprehend the institutional and contextual thinking that went into the program’s existence and administration. I could analyze what sort of outcomes the administrators of the program wanted, and the reasons they believed an educational program would perpetuate their program and their Union. This story is not unique, but the import relationship between literacy and rhetoric in theory, history, and teaching will only become recognized through its analytical application in a diverse array of cases, archives, and classrooms.

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