

Community co-authoring: Whose voice remains?

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present our ongoing analysis of community plan documents co-authored by multiple participants and of how the authorship was complicated when external funders and NYS Department of Education as intended audiences became salient. We inquire how social, cultural, historical, and political relations among groups may have significant impact on their authorship roles and on the construction of the written community plan (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Brandt, 2001; Freedman, 1994; McNamee, 1990). Furthermore, we draw on sociological literature that offers an explanatory framework for understanding how external audiences shift textual focus from quality to quantity through processes such as reactivity and commensuration (Espeland & Sauder, 2007).

We argue that the community plan is an interactional achievement in which residents, community leaders, and outside facilitators negotiated text as co-authors (Duranti, 1986). The ultimate yet unstated goal of the work, however, was to satisfy external audiences whose purposes were largely unknown to community residents. One central figure, Julie¹, emerged as a key author who knew the goals and purposes of the multiple audiences. This role placed her in tension with community residents who were suspicious of yet another "fix it" plan brought by outsiders and external audiences who wanted things to move more quickly. More specifically, we argue that participants used the word *wordsmithing* as a mediating tool to get work done and to stop further text construction and the time delay associated with continued discussion.

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

After a brief description of the context for the ethnography and our theoretical framework, we present our analysis of the community plan documents along with specific data excerpts that illustrate when participants use the term *wordsmithing*.

Context Description

The northeast sector of the city is a community with a history of intergenerational poverty, student underachievement, mental and physical health problems, adult unemployment and underemployment, violence, and crime. Many reform efforts have been directed toward improving the lives of children in this community. One local leader claims that "We are great at starting things, but not at finishing them". This lack of follow through and consistency has produced deep and longstanding mistrust in community members and a vigorous stance that they do not need "fixing" from outsiders. In 2005, the City School District, with support from community residents, local government, and business and social service organizations, began a major community development program initially called the Rochester Children's Zone (known colloquially as the 'zone'). Due to conflicts with Geoffrey Canada regarding the name and its resemblance to his Harlem Children's Zone, the initiative's name was changed to Rochester Surround Care Community (RSC2). The RSC2 aims to bring together, coordinate, and expand existing efforts by the school district, individual schools, community service organizations, not-for-profit organizations, social service agencies, churches, the business community, residents, and local government in order to address the complex problems and challenges of this part of the city, with the specific aim of producing more positive developmental and learning outcomes for children and youth.

The comprehensive and multi-level effort represented by the initiative has unique features that make it an important site for research in human development, education reform, and community transformation. One such feature is a focus on families and communities within the area as having important resources to contribute to the reform (Ares, O'Connor, Larson, & Carlisle, 2007). Thus, of particular interest is the focus on viewing this community as being full of important resources, practices, commitments, and insights that need to be brought to the table for the whole effort to go forward and be sustainable. There is also, based on our observations and conversations with initiative stakeholders (e.g., District staff, parents of students in schools within the area, community volunteers involved in planning and implementation), both a keen awareness of the institutional, historical, and political barriers that such an effort faces; and a determination to confront those squarely. We view this as an important, unique opportunity to examine the complex and multi-dimensional factors that shape children's learning and development and to bring our insights back to the community (Ares, O'Connor, Larson, & Carlisle, 2007; Larson, Ares, O'Connor, 2008).

We use the now publicly available community plan document to present the description of the zone used by participants as they work toward change. They used the demographic factors listed below to identify the geographic area on which to focus. Initially, the City School District noted that the lowest academic performing schools (4,300 children in grades Pre-K- 12) were clustered in the two zip codes (City Sectors 9 &10) – the northeast section of the city. Upon further inspection, this geographic area also presented

with the following demographics:

- high concentrations of teen pregnancy, drug trafficking, high school drop outs, and HIV/AIDS;
- 42% of the residents are below poverty compared to the citywide poverty of 26%;
- median household income of approximately \$19,000 compared to the citywide income of \$27,000;
- 8.3% of RSC2 residents are unemployed;
- 68 % of households are headed by females;
- 96% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (13% higher than rest of the District);
- highest concentration of lead poisoning cases in the city (30 to 34 percent of kids screened had some level of lead poison.)

The RSC2 is home to approximately 50,000 residents; 50 percent are African Americans, 30 percent are Hispanics (half of the City's Hispanic population), 30 percent speak a language other than English, and 10 percent were born outside the United States. Poverty levels in schools within the zone range from 94.6% to 98.5% (based on the percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunch – a NYS measure of poverty).

The RSC2 assumes a collaborative partnership between provider organizations and community residents to improve student achievement and graduation rates (goals identified by initiative participants), the revitalization of neighborhoods and communities, and the well being of children and families. The rationale for this coordinated and targeted approach is to more effectively “deliver” integrated services that improve the health, wellness, education, living conditions, and livelihoods of children and families in the northeast neighborhoods.

The process relied on the formation of a leadership team, the Subcommittee, which was a collection of residents, social service providers, government staff, and District personnel

charged with marshalling resources and people to begin the first phases of the effort. The Subcommittee (see Figure 1 below) included collaboration between a Strategy Team (51% of whom were northeast residents), the Subcommittee (including 5 residents), and the eight Working Teams (see Figure 2 below). The Subcommittee served as a proxy for the Zone itself, given the entities the members represent i.e., residents, social service providers, city government, and school district. They bring the historical development and current milieu of the Zone with them through their own personal and professional experiences in and with the Zone.

Name	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Organization
Anna R.	Asian	Female	Community Organization
Julie C.	White	Female	School District
William G.	African American	Male	Provider Organization
Sharice C.	African American	Female	Resident
David H.	White	Male	Provider Organization
Alicia J.	African American	Female	Resident
Reginald J.	African American	Male	Provider Organization
Moses L.	African American	Male	Principal
Karen L.	White	Female	Provider Organization
Netia P.	Latina	Female	School District
Derrick P.	African American	Male	Mayor's office
Helena E.	Latina	Female	Provider Organization
Jesus S.	Latino	Male	Resident
Carina W.	Biracial (Puerto Rican, African American)	Female	Resident
Terrence W.	African American	Male	Resident
Dennis	African American	Male	Facilitator
Anika	Latina	Female	Facilitator

Figure 1. RSC2 Subcommittee Members

The Strategy Team consisted of approximately 116 residents and community or agency representatives intentionally composed of 51% residents from the designated geographical area and 49% non-residents / service providers. The Strategy Team's role was to make critical decisions about the *content* of the plan for community change. The Subcommittee was comprised of individuals and organizations who represented a cross-section of the community and whose role was to maintain the integrity of the planning

process and organize information for Strategy Team decision making.

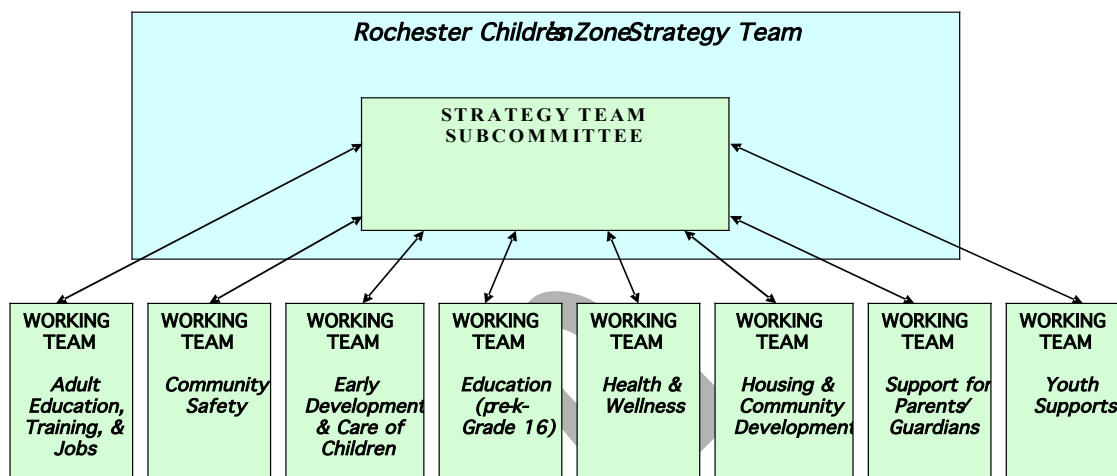


Figure 2. Organizational structure for participation in the planning process.

Two facilitators, Dennis and Anika, from the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC), an outside consultant organization, helped guide and facilitate the community planning process. The IISC (<http://www.interactioninstitute.org/>) has facilitated successful community collaborations across the country and the world, and brought their expertise and experience to this area. Between January 2006 and February 2007, the IISC provided skilled facilitation, community planning and capacity-building expertise, content management, and training to participants in the initiative's planning process.

Theoretical Framing

Consistent with the larger project, we draw on sociocultural theories of learning and development and practice theories of literacy to understand how the community plan was constructed over time and with multiple authors (Gutierrez, 2008; Street, 1995).

Additionally, we view language as social action through which audiences serve as co-authors of the initiative (Duranti, 1986; 1997). As Duranti suggests

Interpretation is not conceived as the speaker's privilege. On the contrary, it is based on the ability (and power) that others may have to invoke certain conventions, to establish links between different acts and different social personae. Meaning is collectively defined on the basis of recognized (and sometimes restated) social relationships (1986, p. 241).

To further explain the processes of text construction and the consequences of audience shifts (changing social relationships) on the language of the plan, we draw on work in sociology that articulates the concept of reactivity as the change in behavior associated with being publicly evaluated, observed, or measured (Espeland & Sauder, 2007).

Espeland & Sauder identified specific mechanisms of reactivity that facilitated these changes as feedback was elicited: 1) self-fulfilling prophecy through which “reactions to social measures confirm the expectations or predictions that are embedded in measures or which increase the validity of the measure by encouraging behavior that conforms to it” (p. 11), and; 2) commensuration that “works mainly by transforming cognition; it changes the locus and form of attention, both creating and obscuring relations among entities. Commensuration is characterized by the transformation of qualities into quantities that share a metric, a process that is fundamental to measurement” (p. 16).

Together these mechanisms serve to simplify information and decontextualize knowledge as a means for “organizing, integrating, and eliminating information” (p. 17). We found that the use of *wordsmithing* in interaction during plan construction served as an index of these mechanisms.

Wordsmithing resulted in both first order changes (moving or revising words but not changing meaning) and second order changes (fundamental alteration of meaning and context) (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). While the Subcommittee was assigned the responsibility of managing process decisions and the Strategy Team the responsibility of managing content, wordsmithing was used to blur these assigned roles. The Subcommittee was ostensibly in charge of first-order change, while work teams, etc. (residents) were ostensibly in charge of the second-order change. But this didn't always seem to be happening, especially in light of Julie's role in managing the tension between authentic resident participation and the demands of external audiences to move more quickly.

Methods and Data Corpus

This is a long-term ethnography, which has required that the methods used develop as the study proceeds. We began the study in the spring of 2006 by using participant observation in various settings to get to know members of the community, schools, and other organizations (Ares, O'Connor, Larson, & Carlisle, 2007). Concurrently, we gathered historical and demographic data and other documents to describe this area of the city and the process of the RSC2 project thus far. Data sources include the following: 1) audio and videotaped interviews; 2) videotaped or audio taped observations; 3) field notes taken during participant observations; and 4) documents collected in the field. For the analyses reported here we used a grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2006) to develop patterns, themes, and claims that are representative of the meaning-perspectives of participants. Once these initial themes and patterns were identified, we used discourse

analysis to consider how language, both spoken and written, constructs and is constructed by social, cultural, historical, and political identities (Duranti, 1997; Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2004). We align our work with the four criteria for high-quality qualitative research: trustworthiness; transferability; confirmability; and theory- or model-building (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) in order to be able to translate this work to RSC2 community members, other urban transformation initiatives, and researchers. Figure 3 represents our approximate data corpus at this time. Because data collection is ongoing, we can only take a snapshot in time.

Data Source	Approximate Corpus (Data collection on going)
Interviews	21; 54 files (audio and transcription, 3.3 GB)
Observations (video)	200 hours
Observations (field notes)	50 sets
Documents (including newspaper, meeting minutes, handouts, historical, plan drafts)	250 files

Figure 3: Data Corpus

To develop the data corpus for this analysis, we searched the larger corpus for uses of the word “wordsmithing”. We put together a subset of data that includes: field notes and their associated videotapes, formal Subcommittee meeting minutes, and multiple drafts of written documents with the handwritten suggestions for revisions. In all, the corpus consists of 22 documents, 37 sets of documents with handwritten suggestions, and 11 videotapes (approximately 22 hours) from both Subcommittee and Strategy Team meetings.

Writing the plan

Our analyses indicate that the planning process was textually articulated as four phases:

1) development of vision, 2) identification of problems/assets, 3) listing potential solutions and 4) construction of an action plan with goals. Eight focus areas were envisioned as overlapping concerns and documented in the first community plan in March 2007: Education, Adult Education Training & Jobs, Youth Support, Community Safety, Early Development & Care of Children, Support for Parents/Guardians, Housing & Community Development and Health & Wellness. In the analysis of the major working papers of the community plan, the themes of roles, positioning, agency and schooling emerged as salient. When external audiences complicated the social and power relations during the planning phase, the plan was revised through an iterative series of meetings and revisions. Specifically, the revision of particular segments of text, what participants referred to as *wordsmithing*, emerged as a potential strategy for reducing resident voice.

At 35 pages, the original community plan document released in March of 2007, titled “It Takes a Vision to Raise a Child: Rochester Children’s Zone Community Plan / Improving the Lives of Children in Northeast Rochester,” is the longest by far of the three published versions of the plan. It begins with an in-depth Executive Summary (p.3-6) that outlines the project, continues with an Introduction (p. 7) that describes the organization of the document, and then provides a rich Background section (p. 8-13) describing the context of the initiative, including the history of the area, the stated commitment to resident engagement (p. 11), and even a brief explanation of the role of the ethnography team (p. 13). The Findings section, which takes up almost a third of the

document (p. 14-25), lays out the objectives and strategies (described in more detail below). Next Steps (p. 26) outlines the process leading toward implementation of the plan through September 2007; the document concludes with an extensive list of acknowledgements (p. 27-31) and a Research/Sources/References section (p. 32-34). Once available on the initiative's webpage, it has since been removed and does not appear readily available.

This plan, with its 40 multi-year objectives and over 186 specific strategies, is represented as coming directly from the community and appears, in its use of pictures of community members, acknowledgement of many residents, and rich contextualization of the project, to be directed specifically at members of the community. This version of the plan states, "there has been strong commitment to engaging parents, youth, residents, politicians, funders, service providers, businesses and community leaders" (p. 3). It later states that over 450 people participated in creating the plan (p. 14).

After the March 2007 community plan was unveiled, the plan then moved into an "implementation" phase, in which certain objectives and strategies were prioritized and selected to be carried forward. An analysis of the documents available from this process indicates that several people or groups of people participated in this process, during which they were asked to rank which objectives or strategies they viewed as most important. It is not clear how many people participated in this process, but it seems to have been much shorter than the original drafting process, and fewer people seem to have been involved. Julie then collected the documents on which people had made their

choices and synthesized the results—no small task, given that people’s priorities often seemed to conflict and that she was working with many pages of documents.

This process may explain some of the paring down of the plan seen in its next two iterations, but it does not explain the changes in language or the regrouping of objectives and strategies. From the documents and observation data, we can see that people were asked to rank their priorities and to vote on them (essentially giving feedback), but at no point does *changing* the content of the actual objectives or strategies seem to be an option—yet this is what has actually occurred in the later versions. The process of second-order change has been performed outside of the public view. Even though residents may have discussed their preferences, their actual suggestions seem to have been taken up haphazardly, if at all, as indicated by the third iteration of the plan, in which the RSC2 Board of Directors simply takes full responsibility for prioritizing the areas of focus.

A second iteration of the plan, the much shorter Community Plan now available on the website, with a copyright date of 2007, also lists eight objectives but has reduced the total number of strategies to 35. Drawing on Espeland & Sauder’s (2007) concept of reactivity, this version of the plan enacts the mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecy and commensuration with the reduction of text and the transformation of qualities into quantities that are more easily measured by external audiences. Some of these eight objectives match the eight March 2007 “strategic areas of focus,” but others appear to have changed. “Prenatal & Early Childhood Development;” “Community Safety &

Environment;” “Health Status;” and “Adult Education & Employment” seem to carry through four of the prior areas of focus (Early Development & Care of Children; Community Safety; Health & Wellness; and Adult Education, Training, & Jobs) from March 2007, despite some name changes. However, March 2007’s “Education (pre-K-grade 16)” has become “High School Graduation,” which seems to reflect a narrowing of focus that parallels demands from New York State Department of Education for clearer accountability needed to secure state funding. March 2007’s “Housing & Community Development,” “Parent/Guardian Support,” and “Youth Support” have disappeared as categories; in their places are “Resident Capacity,” “Financial Efficacy,” and “Coordination of Service Delivery.”

Further complicating an understanding of the shift in plans is the lingering involvement of the City School District, which maintained a webpage devoted to the RSC2 even after leadership of the initiative had moved out of the district. In 2008, seven Action Teams met throughout the year to work towards the goals of the third version of the community plan released by the Board of Directors. Information about these Action Teams is available both through the RSC2 website and through the district website. According to information still available on the City School District’s website:

In order to make a visible, measurable difference in the lives of children and families in the Zone as quickly as possible, the RCZ, Inc. Board has identified seven focus areas and outcomes from the Plan, which should be achievable within the first year of implementation activities and with initial State funding

[\(http://www.rcsdk12.org/rcz/\)](http://www.rcsdk12.org/rcz/)

Although the website reminds readers, “please keep in mind that this chart shows only the Year One priorities for community action. As soon as we demonstrate success in these areas, we will set new priorities to achieve our Multi-Year Objectives,” it is telling that the Board is stated as the entity responsible for cutting down the plan in this iteration, apparently without any input from residents. Additionally, no explanation is given as to how the original eight objectives got cut or combined to create seven focus areas.

The seven revised focus areas are Health & Wellness; Prenatal & Early Childhood Development; Parent Support/Adult Education & Employment (which collapses two categories); Financial & Language Literacy; High School Graduation; and Community Safety & Environment. For each of these focus areas, an Action Team was established: Health & Wellness; Early Development & Care of Children; Parent Support; Housing & Community Development; Youth Support; and Community Safety. Here we see the original language of the March 2007 plan reflected in the names of the Action Teams; yet, some of the “outcomes” with which the Action Teams are charged don’t seem to line up with might be expected based on the title of the team or with the original strategies suggested by the community. For example, the Housing and Community Development Action Team is oddly matched with the Financial and Language Literacy focus area, and the Parent Support Action Team is charged to “collaborate with the City of Rochester Literacy initiative, various program providers and funders to assure adult literacy” and to “deliver accessible financial education and literacy programs within the RCZ.” In the March 2007 community plan, “Increase parent and adult literacy” was indeed an objective for the Parent/Guardian Support Focus Area. However, other objectives and

strategies were listed, including the City School District's delivering professional development to teachers to help them communicate with parents and students (p. 23). The removal of these other objectives and strategies consequently narrows the initiative's focus, targeting residents as in need of certain kinds of services.

This brief overview illustrates how the formal community plan was changed when the possibility of state funding and private donations became part of the audience. With these external audiences, accountability defined as identifiable quantities changed goals and objectives (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Where this revision work happened and whose responsibility it was to do this work is the focus of the next section. We found that participants, especially Julie, invoked the term and concept of *wordsmithing* to mask content revision that was supposed to be the charge of the larger Strategy Team. In the following section, we first illustrate how *wordsmithing* was used in different occasions and for a variety of purposes, and then show how Julie asserted her authorial responsibility during one representative example from a Subcommittee meeting.

Wordsmithing

Using the community plan as a central analytic focus, we illustrate several themes that seem to explain the varying purposes of invoking the term *wordsmithing*. We identified these themes using fieldnotes, audiotapes and videotapes of meetings, formal meeting minutes, and a detailed analysis of the written papers used by participants, including their handwritten notes on the papers themselves. The major themes identified include the following:

- To get things done within a specific timeline
- To introduce content
- To end the audience revision process
- To assert external audiences

As we discuss the textual changes, we will bring in interactional data that illustrate these themes.

To get things done within a specific timeline

At a design team (the previous name for the Subcommittee) meeting in March 2006, team members discussed how they would get more “grassroots stakeholder” involvement in the planning process. At this point in the process the design team included one person from the facilitation organization, the school district official responsible for the planning phase, four executive directors from local service provider agencies, a representative from United Way, a representative from a local funding agency, and two residents. The group wanted to expand its membership to increase involvement, resident buy-in, and a membership structure that was more representative of residents. However, they needed a definition of resident in order to do so. Developing this definition turned out to be an incredibly complicated and contested process. Furthermore, they developed the definition, what could be thought of as *content*, without input from the Strategy Team, the body designated as responsible for creating content. At the meeting described below, wordsmithing was used to index two members spending out-of-meeting time working on the definition of “grassroots stakeholder”.

Excerpt 1: Getting things done

Key criteria for grassroots include:

- *Selection by a particular constituent group of residents affected by a specific issue to represent their cause.*
- *Cannot be presently representing the concerns of an organization or institution which is a corporation.*
- *Must not be a representative for the purpose of fulfilling a contract or employment obligation.*

Anna and David agreed to wordsmith the definition further and bring it back to the Design Team for the next meeting.

(Meeting minutes, 4/25/06)

This excerpt is taken from the formal meeting notes that were taken at each meeting. As facilitators, Dennis and Anika typed minutes during the meeting and projected their typing onto a large screen at the front of the meeting room. In doing so, participants could watch what they were writing and make corrections in the moment. Meetings usually lasted 2-3 hours and they seemed to never have enough time. As this excerpt shows, the group has written several criteria together, but were not finished. Discussions around the definition were dynamic and it took much longer than they had planned for. In an effort to move on with the agenda, Anna and David volunteered to work on the definition outside of this meeting and then present their work to this group at the next meeting. The notetaker used the term wordsmithing to index the work Anna and David would do. In this use of the term, it seems to reflect a positive strategy that will help them get work accomplished in a timely manner and one that would allow the rest of the group to move onto other, equally complicated issues.

Early in our observations, we began to notice that a significant amount of “work” appeared to occur in between meetings. We wondered where this work was happening and who was doing it, especially in light of the stated commitment that the Subcommittee

would only deal with process while the Strategy Team was responsible for content. This commitment was in line with participants' choice to privilege resident voice in the initiative. This choice was not something that was originally thought of by school district officials and the small group who conceived the idea. The superintendent assigned Julie the responsibility of leading the initiative and gave her a small staff. However, Julie knew that residents were suspicious of "outsiders" coming in to "fix" problems given they have been through multiple such initiatives in the past. In this way, Julie walked a contested line between internal (resident) and external (school district and potential funders) forces that we saw across the data. It is in this negotiation that we see the principles of reactivity at work most often. In particular, Julie's work to transform the qualities of change decided upon by the Strategy Team into measurable quantities required by the shift in audience (attention) became crucial in order to understand how the plan was revised.

To introduce (or not) content

The excerpt below is taken from the Strategy Team meeting where the "final" plan was revealed to the group. The tone was celebratory and excited. Julie did quite a bit more public speaking at this meeting than she had done in the past. She seemed comfortable asserting her leadership in public. When the audience began to ask questions and make some changes to the text, Julie asked that they communicate their ideas later, but quickly, given they needed to make the plan public right away.

Excerpt 2: Don't wordsmith

6:30 Julie asks folks to give her their feedback in the next 18 hours but not to wordsmith or be grammarians; only focus on burning issues or nuances that are missing. She announced the press conference next week. I know they are planning on a meeting with potential funders this Friday so they are in a big hurry. She does not discuss the funders meeting

with this group. Julie tries pretty hard to make her language clear without being patronizing to the audience but I wonder whether people get her nuanced references or her use of words like “offline” when talking about discussing an issue out of this meeting.

(Fieldnotes, 1/27/07 – Strategy Team meeting)

Her use of wordsmithing in this context seems more negative or controlling in ways that were designed to limit further changes. With the upcoming press conference and a meeting with a local funding organization, she didn't want changes to text beyond identifying things that seemed to be missing or particularly important. “Giving feedback” is articulated as saying what you like or don't like, but wordsmithing has the effect of limiting Strategy Team members' power to craft the actual language (content), even though this was their role. The feedback mechanism serves to shift the focus of attention from the community to external audiences (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). In this use of the term, Julie is negotiating her complex role as interloper between residents and external audiences who are demanding the process go more quickly and that she meet specified deadlines.

To end the audience revision process

The concern that they meet deadlines in a timely manner was prevalent throughout the data and occurred most frequently when the term wordsmithing was invoked. The following excerpt from Subcommittee minutes illustrates how wordsmithing was used to stop revision and keep the process moving. Once again, the line between process and content was blurred.

Excerpt 3: Ending the revision process

The process for getting this to completion:

- *A little concerned about how we present this. With a group of 100 people, concern that we present saying, “I’m sure every one of you has another idea” – acknowledge that we could wordsmith this forever and that this is a group that was delegated to do this and see if we can live with it.*

(Subcommittee meeting group memory (minutes), 11/06/06)

We argue that wordsmithing was used consistently when Subcommittee members, in particular Julie, wanted to resist hearing more ideas for what to put into the text. The “this” in the excerpt refers to the vision statement the team was developing. Julie expressed that she was worried about how they would be able to finalize the vision and move forward if they kept taking more ideas from the Strategy Team at their upcoming meeting. We can here see again that she is in between insider and outsider demands for timeliness. Furthermore, the distinction between first order (word work) and second order (meaning) change is blurred. She seems to assert that what people want to do is tinker with words but not change the meaning substantially, when meaning could be what is most at issue. By asserting that they have to “see if we can live with it” rather than explicit agreement, Julie closes off discussion.

In a subsequent meeting where they were finalizing what would be presented about the vision to the Strategy Team, they continued discussion about how to gather input with that many people. To facilitate writing the vision statement, the Strategy Team had designated a smaller group of residents from both the Subcommittee and Strategy Team to write the text. Given how much discussion had ensued at meetings when this group brought drafts, the group had begun to feel resentment about continued arguments since they had been selected to do the writing. The Subcommittee was aware of their growing

discomfort and discussed how to handle it. The excerpt from meeting minutes shows how they had decided to present the statement. The first bullet indexes the 11/06/06 meeting discussed above.

Excerpt 4: Vision Statement work

Vision Statement

- *Talked about Monday.*
- *The strategy team will provide input on the draft vision at the meeting tonight.*
- ***How will we gather input?***
 - ***We could wordsmith this for years and never get to a point where everyone's happy with it.***
 - *If you can't live with this, please provide additional input on the copy of the vision statement*
 - *Negative poll question will be asked – can anyone not live with this?*
 - *Input would go back to the committee.*
 - *Residents that gave their input should be leading this.*
 - *Could limit the process so that we come back one more time with input.*

(Subcommittee meeting, 11/9/06)

This excerpt illustrates the decisions made about how to deal with potential attempts to further revise the vision. They decide to ask a negative poll question (“can anyone not live with this?”) in an effort to get consensus. If someone couldn’t live with the vision as it is written, they would be asked to write their comments on the draft itself rather than use precious meeting time for this discussion. These plans also seem to be an effort to accommodate the discomfort the small group who were assigned to write the vision were feeling.

In the following excerpt, we see Subcommittee members discussing decision making processes and gathering input at an upcoming Strategy Team meeting. The issues around

process and content are evident in discussion about who is making decisions and whether documents are “internal”.

Excerpt 5: Changes to language

Female: I appreciate you bringing that up because lets go back to the level of decision making around this document. It is Julie gathering input from the group members and Julie making her final decision on it, guided by the wisdom of the group, so I appreciate your question Julie. So she’s asking ... how do other people react to the language that potential change in language? Do you have other proposals?

*Male: I think there’s some sense to that we need to have the language, but most of it I’m not too worried about because again we talked earlier that its an internal document, but its an internal document of okay who else could see it, who’s internal would be another discussion, but its this group ... **I’m feeling much more comfortable than having to wordsmith everything to the degree do we have the concepts down I think is what’s important for me***

(Subcommittee meeting, 12/4/06)

Meeting participants seem to be paying particular attention to audience here and the role audience plays in authorship, specifically around language. The audience they refer to in this example is the Strategy Team given this is a Subcommittee meeting where they are preparing for the upcoming meeting where the vision statement will be discussed. It is noteworthy that they are still working on the vision statement in December when previous meetings were supposed to have finalized this part of the text.

A Question of Audience

Central to the writing of the community plan is the question of audience—for whom is the plan being written? At the Subcommittee retreat (February 2-3, 2007), during which the Subcommittee members discussed and revised the plan, Anika (the facilitator) indicates that more than one audience is possible and that separate plans can be designed

for each audience. Although the term wordsmithing is not used, this excerpt makes clear the tensions between authentic resident engagement and external audiences.

To fully understand the significance of the segments of interaction we present below², it is important to know that the day before the retreat, two meetings took place at which only certain Subcommittee members were present. The first meeting was held over the phone with Julie, Anika, and Dennis; at this meeting the two facilitators and Julie discussed the agenda for the two-day retreat. As facilitators, Anika and Dennis deferred to Julie, ultimately giving her the power to determine how the retreat would be run (fieldnotes 2/1/07). The second meeting (the one which Julie mentions in the transcript below) was with Julie, Nina (one of Julie's staff), Moses, Terrence, and members of the local Ad Council; the participants at this meeting discussed the audiences for the community plan and determined a primary, secondary, and tertiary audience. As Julie and Terrence indicate, the group agreed that community residents were the first audience, that service providers and government agencies were the second audience, and that funders were the third.

Excerpt 6: Identifying audiences

- Anika: [Ok.
When you do a plan like this, who is it for?
((Julie walks back to photocopier.))
- Alicia: It's for the people.
- Jesus: I'm sorry. What was the question.
- Anika: You're doing a plan. When you get it written up, who is it for?
((gesturing with papers in hands))
Who are your audiences?

² See appendix for full transcript of the focal event.

- ((Julie, who has been putting papers in a folder, returns to her seat with her right arm raised, finger pointed.))*
- Jesus: The community.
Group, shouting out: “The community,” “Residents,” “There’s multiple,” “Leaders,” “Residents,” “Children’s service providers”
((Julie sits down but raises hand slightly again.))
- Julie: Can I just say one thing real quick,
we were-we spent time with the ad council yesterday
and identified our primary and secondary audiences
((Julie is flipping through papers, Derrick walks out of room; all other SC members are now seated, looking at Julie and then Terrence. Anika remains standing in the front of the room.))
- Terrence: Yes we did.
- Julie: Um,
((chops her hand across her body to gesture to Terrence))
- Terrence: Um, our, our primary target is,
are the residents.
Okay our secondary audiences are community leaders a:nd um
((raises hand in the air))
- Jesus?: °Funders.°
- Terrence: What was it government agent providers
- Julie: agency kinds of people who provide services
- Terrence: Yes
- Anika: and who are the other audiences that you want to make sure//
- Terrence: //potential national funders [down the line
- Anika: [Yes,
- Julie: YEah down the line

In the excerpt above, we can see Julie’s control of the meeting even though Anika is the one standing in the front of the room and asking the questions. The participants, including Julie, don’t necessarily orient to Anika as in charge of the conversation; while Anika talks they busy themselves with other tasks, including a side conversation. Although Anika attempts to guide the conversation, all of the participants don’t fully and consistently attend to the discussion at hand until Julie speaks. Anika’s attempts to gain control of the group can be seen when she repeatedly uses the markers “Ok” and “All right” to try to get people’s attention. She succeeds at gaining the floor temporarily with Terrence’s assistance, but when the group begins to call out answers again, she is

silenced. She doesn't speak again during this interaction except to echo what has already been said. Of course, we must keep in mind that this interaction occurs after lunch, and settling down to business after a break often takes some time. Still, the relative quickness with which the group comes back to attention when Julie speaks underscores Julie's power in the process, and the responsibility she has gained to orient the work to external audiences. Julie's power is also illustrated when she gives Terrence (a resident and a new member of the Subcommittee) the floor to speak about the decisions made in the Ad Council meeting, but steps in to supply information when Terrence hesitates. She is clearly directing the conversation.

Julie's interjection can be read as both different in important ways from the contributions of the other participants and as strategic; she inserts herself into what is initially a brainstorming session (as evidenced by people shouting out answers) and steers the discussion into a different genre: a report on decisions already made. Her speech effectively ends the process by which the Subcommittee members can have input into who they think the audience should be. Although the Subcommittee does identify external audiences ("children's service providers") while brainstorming, their emphasis is on the resident audience, as evidenced by the number of times they mention "the community" and "residents." Julie and Terrence, while still asserting the residents as the primary audience, move the group into more formal thinking about external audiences.

This interaction thus illustrates the Julie's complex role in the process. While she is clearly moving the discussion forward per the agenda of the outside audiences, her

repetition of Terrence’s phrase “down the line” in regards to national funders seems to indicate her awareness of the members of the Subcommittee’s priorities.

At first, the decisions made at the Ad Council meeting seem to confirm that residents were both democratically involved in the production of the plan and were the most important audience. But if the two short versions of the plan published on the RSC2 and school district websites were indeed directed at non-resident audiences, this seems contradictory. In other words, despite the stated commitment to resident voice and engagement, after its initial release the resident-created plan was tucked away, while on the RSC2 website the shortened plan was represented as “the” community plan with no mention that it had been abridged from a longer document, even with some resident feedback, and on the school district website, important choices had been made about which objectives to pursue, seemingly without any community input this time. Although the Subcommittee was charged with writing plans that could address *multiple* audiences, the residents’ plan fades away as the agencies’ and funders’ plans become the public face of the initiative.

Skeptical from the start, some residents seem to have sensed that outside agencies and funders were really shaping the direction and the timing of the plan. In the minutes of a Subcommittee meeting, a member who is also a resident complains that the process feels contrived:

One team member wondered whether we are just going through the motions – whether the plan is already developed. Feels like a meeting after the meeting.

(Subcommittee Team Group Memory (minutes) 11/18/06)

This resident's sense that they are just "going through the motions" indicates an awareness that despite the stated commitment to resident engagement, other powerful forces were at work in shaping the plan. This city, like many others, has a history of both failed initiatives and of leaders and politicians who are less than transparent in their dealings with the public. These two factors have led to cynicism from residents, who don't see their day-to-day lives changing. Despite the RSC2's attempts to not do "business as usual" and to fully engage residents in the process of community change, the pressure from powerful external forces did in fact shape the community planning process and ultimately changed the final community plan document to meet those external needs.

Conclusions/Implications

We have presented our analysis of the use of the word *wordsmithing* during the writing and revision of a community changes initiative's public plan. We argued that the revision of the plan reflects more of an external audience than the original and that this change in audience limited, or completely eliminated, resident voice. Wordsmithing was often invoked as what may be a cover for this audience shift. Since the community project holds a high priority in representing the voice of residents, this analysis examined whose voice remains as the text was revised over time and for different audiences. Our analysis indicates that the first document completed and approved by residents in March 2007 focused on literacy, residents as agents of change, neighborhood and community, desired interventions and possible opportunities. Once the audience changed to NYS Department

of Education and potential funders with the August 2007 version, topics shifted in ways that positioned residents as less agentive and more as needing help.

After series of meetings and revising work drafts, periods of wordsmithing were intended to organize, integrate and simplify the information for the external audience and represented what Espeland & Sauder (2007) call reactivity. Wordsmithing was used as a mediating tool to get things done within a specific timeline, to end the audience revision process and to assert priorities of external audiences, all consequences of external accountability. The underlying task of co-constructing the community plan was not transparent to the residents. Our analysis showed that commensuration shifted the attention and sensemaking when the qualities in the March 2007 community plan were reduced to quantities shown in the August 2007 community plan. Consequently, the residents experienced some effects of reactivity and that the process of commensuration was to arbitrarily satisfy the external funders. To answer the question of whose voice remains during the community co-authoring process, our data showed how the co-authorship was altered as a result of wordsmithing for a different audience and that the residents' voices faded. It seems as though resident skepticism that their voice would be a legitimate part of the plan may have been warranted.

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Complete transcript:

Subcom Retreat Tape 4 1:24

1 Anika: *((holding papers in front of her))*
 2 Ok. So, here's what we're getting ourselves ready to do
 3 *((looks down at papers)).*
 4 Jesus: The hard part.
 5 Anika: We are going to spend a couple of hours getting set up to dig
 6 *((leaning forward emphatically, lunging onto right foot))*
 7 into the conversation about the multi-year strategies.
 8 *((moves back to standing))*
 9 The first thing on hand is to get us acquainted with a format for the
 10 plan
 11 *((Anika puts papers down)).*
 12 We are coming close to getting this thing together.
 13 *((William glances back at camera/ethnographer as ethnographer*
 14 *walks to camera. William turns back to table and begins shuffling*
 15 *through papers.))*
 16 The mini conversations are gonna start getting written up,
 17 *((Sharice stands, hands paper to Netia))*
 18 they're going to start taking shape.
 19 You see a draft
 20 *((Anika looks around, then walks toward Terrence, picks up papers,*
 21 *walks backwards to front of room, all while speaking))*
 22 of um a report that was done in Springfield that—one version,
 23 there's many versions,
 24 *((Sharice walks over to Netia))*
 that put together all their good work in-in a-in a report form.
 25 Alicia: *((Approaching her seat, taking a bite of something in a bowl/cup in*
 26 *her hand.))*
 27 Yuch.
 28 *((Turns around and leaves room.))*
 29 Anika: And so, we're gonna spend the next hour-no sorry,
 30 half hour, doing is discussing the plan outline.
 31 *((Sharice and Netia are talking individually to Anika's right; can hear*
 32 *voices but not what they're saying. Anika walks towards Jesus and*
 33 *gives him some paper. As she walks backwards to the front of the*
 34 *room, her gaze is at first directed at Sharice and Nitia, but she shifts*
 35 *her gaze back towards the middle of the table—Terrence, Jesus and*
 36 *David))*
 37 And so let me just say something about
 38 *((Terrence stands and sits back down))*
 39 plans and reports and documents, and like—
 40 *((Sharice returns to her seat; Derrick walks into room followed by*
 41 *Alicia.))*

42 Welcome back!
 ((to Derrick))

43 Alicia: He::y!

44 Julie: A lot's happened since you were gone, Derrick!
 45 ((picking up laptop and walking to the tables.))

46 Sharice?: Yeah, Derrick.

47 ??: gotta report!

48 Jesus: Aw, yeah!

49 Anika: All right.

50 Multiple A new report
 51 speakers: A lot of videotape
 52 ((laughter; Julie drops off laptop at the table, walks back to
 53 photocopier, picks up some papers, and walks back to seat.))

54 Anika: ((speaking over the conversation))
 55 Ok. So when you do, when you do a plan like this
 56 ((holding up paper))

57 Alicia?: You didn't see the news?
 58 ((Julie is standing in front of her seat talking to Nitia and Derrick,
 59 who is still getting settled next to Nitia.))

60 Anika: All right, one conversation

61 Terrence: ((raising right fist straight in the air while Jesus knocks on the table))
 62 One mic.

63 Jesus: Thank you very much.

64 Anika: ((raising arm the way Terrence did; as she puts it down she points it
 65 towards Terrence.))
 66 Thank you.

67 Terrence: You're welcome
 68 ((nods))

69 Alicia: [Point of order.

70 Anika: [Ok.
 71 When you do a plan like this, who is it for?
 72 ((Julie walks back to photocopier.))

73 Alicia: It's for the people.

74 Jesus: I'm sorry. What was the question.

75 Anika: You're doing a plan. When you get it written up, who is it for?
 76 ((gesturing with papers in hands))
 77 Who are your audiences?
 78 ((Julie, who has been putting papers in a folder, returns to her seat
 79 with her right arm raised, finger pointed.))

80 Jesus: The community.
 81 Group, shouting out: "The community," "Residents," "There's
 82 multiple," "Leaders," "Residents," "Children's service providers"
 83 ((Julie sits down but raises hand slightly again.))

84 Julie: Can I just say one thing real quick,
 85 we were-we spent time with the ad council yesterday
 86 and identified our primary and secondary audiences

87 *((Julie is flipping through papers, Derrick walks out of room; all other*
 88 *SC members are now seated, looking at Julie and then Terrence.*
 89 *Anika remains standing in the front of the room.))*
 90 Terrence: Yes we did.
 91 Julie: Um,
 92 *((chops her hand across her body to gesture to Terrence))*
 93 Terrence: Um, our, our primary target is,
 94 are the residents.
 95 Okay our secondary audiences are community leaders a::nd um
 96 *((raises hand in the air))*
 97 Jesus?: °Funders.°
 98 Terrence: What was it government agent providers
 99 Julie: agency kinds of people who provide services
 100 Terrence: Yes
 101 Anika: and who are the other audiences that you want to make sure//
 102 Terrence: //potential national funders [down the line
 103 Anika: [Yes,
 104 Julie: YEah down the line
 105 Anika: FU::nders and POlicy-makers.
 106 *((Helena walks into the room.))*
 107 So you uh-your plan is-
 108 is meant to grab the attention of lots of different (inaudible).
 109 *((Helena is talking to Alicia.))*
 110 And so um
 111 Terrence: We have three levels of target audiences that we have (inaudible)
 112 *((Helena walks to her seat to the left of the room.))*
 113 Sharice: For the ad campaign?
 114 Terrence: Yes.
 115 Three-three different levels of target audiences.
 116 Yeah that we intend
 117 Anika: Ok. So residents
 118 Terrence: Um, community leaders, agency providers, and funders.
 119 Because our message to national funders
 120 has to be different than uh
 121 our asking for ownership in the community.
 122 Anika: Um,
 123 and so you-
 124 for uh any one of those audiences you might find,
 125 as has been done in other communities—
 126 Cherish Every Child in Springfield being an example—
 127 they did a different versions of their documents
 128 depending on who they were trying to reach.
 129 Um and so this was their executive summary
 130 and it was done in a very
 131 you know sort of accessible graphic way//
 132 William: Case (inaudible).

133 Kinda made the case for why we need to do something.
134 Anika: And short, and to the point.
135 Um they also-they also have a plan that has many many more pages
136 with a lot more information that explains much more in depth
137 how the process unfolded,
138 what happened when and so on and so forth.
139 And they realized that they needed to use different documents for
140 different audiences.
141 So in terms of thinking about a plan outline,
142 which is the conversation we're about to engage in,
143 these are some of the questions we would keep in mind,
144 or we ask you to keep in mind,
145 your audiences um what's the message that you're trying to
146 communicate. Um, how do we best communicate the message?
147 Alicia: With a smile
148 Anika: You know you can just put together a whole lotta numbers
149 and a whole lotta action statements and say this is our plan,
150 and you're gonna wonder,
151 what are we really saying?
152 What are you trying to say with that?
153 Terrence: Verbiage is important.
154 Anika: Yeah. So there's
155 Terrence: Um
156 cuz you have to be able to communicate with all different facets
157 and still be able to get your message across.
158 Anika: Yes.
159 And in whose voice—
160 in whose voice is the message getting written and delivered?
161 Jesus: It's gotta be the person's-the community's voice.