This article examines how texts are collaboratively produced in community development work when coauthors come from multiple racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds as well as business and other work experiences. We found that the term ‘wordsmithing’ became a discursive tool that limited resident input and shaped the Plan toward an external audience. We argue that pressure faced by the initiative members are similar to pressures felt by teachers in an atmosphere of increased standardization and accountability.

As Bakhtin (1986) suggests, all texts are multivoiced spaces where past, present, and future intersect in meaning-making practices. Writing research has shown that writing is fundamentally about both audience and purpose and the relationship that develops between author(s) and audience(s) (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2005). The excerpt above suggests a conventional assumption that writing it down has power to ‘deliver’ an author’s or authors’ thinking, commonly spoken of in terms of ‘voice.’ But what happens when that authorship, however multivoiced, becomes complicated by external political pressure and competition for funding? It was our intuitive query about changing, or vanishing authorship, which prompted our focused analysis in this article. Given that the authors of the written Community Plan (see Introduction [this issue] for description of the initiative) came from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and class backgrounds, we focused our research questions to ask: (1) How are texts collaboratively produced in community development work when coauthors come from multiple racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds as well as business and other work experiences? (2) How have social, cultural, historical, and political power relations among diverse groups impacted their authorship roles in the construction of the written Community Plan? The data pointed us to research on collaborative writing and political science to develop our analysis of text and interaction data. We begin with a brief discussion of prior research, followed by our theoretical framework and analysis sections. Our concluding section discusses implications for community development work and for education research and practice.

Research on Community and Collaborative Writing

Work in community writing focuses primarily on writing projects that are done in collaboration with universities to help individuals write, to consider themselves as writers, and to become better writers (cf. UIC Center for Youth and Society 2010; Stanford University 2010). Even when the goal of community writing is to develop ways in which...
writing and composition can contribute to community improvement (Collins 2001), the focus remains on an individual writer, writing from a singular voice, coming to use her or his writing in the service of the community, rather than on coauthorship of community documents. From this perspective, literacy (writing) is defined as a set of neutral skills autonomous of contexts of use (Street 1995); community members are seen as taking on the role of authentic writers when they can demonstrate that they have successfully mastered these skills. Research literature on community writing focuses on comparing literacy in or between communities or schools in ways that tend to emphasize an in or out of school binary and ways to work across that boundary or across communities (Hull and Schultz 2002; Moss 1994), or as a means to see the exchange of writing as a vehicle for crossing cultural boundaries (Freedman 1994).

Collaborative writing research has traditionally focused on classroom pedagogy in both K–12 and higher education contexts (Atwell 1998; Calkins 1994; Ede and Lunsford 1992). More recently, research on collaborative writing has included a focus on corporate and business writing that requires more than one author (Speck 2008). Through a rich Bakhtinian analytic frame, Beaufort’s (1997) research on workplace writing established that multiple discourse communities create layered meanings in texts that vary in rhetorical structure and purpose depending on the audience and genre of the text. Of particular interest for our purposes in this article was her analysis of the high stakes associated with texts that were produced to secure funding, such as grants or donor letters. Her work helps us to understand the tensions around norms for written communication when multiple authors from a diverse range of racial and ethnic communities and class backgrounds write together. Using a social practice definition of literacy, our study focused on community text construction (e.g., not school or workplace writing), adding to the body of literature on collaborative writing with its focus on writing for social justice and community transformation. Following Beaufort, we also consider the implications of our study for classroom teaching, specifically the teaching of critical language awareness. We suggest that teachers, who are caught between authentic practices and external demands, may serve as either mediators or gatekeepers to powerful discourses. Increasingly scripted curricula focusing on coverage of discrete facts bars students and teachers from investigating the various discourse communities of which they may or may not be a part (Clark and Ivanić 1999; Janks 2010). Understanding how external audiences constrained authorship roles in the production of the Community Plan will help us interpret similar pressures in schools.

The concept of hybrid literacy as alternative discourse in multicultural exchanges has been used to emphasize the collaborative potential of community-based dialogue (Cushman and Emmons 2002). Following this focus on collaborative potential to negotiate goal-directed communication across racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, we examined a collaboratively produced community text. Our research builds on prior research and practice to ask: how are texts collaboratively produced in community development work when coauthors come from multiple racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds as well as business and other work experiences? Furthermore we asked: whose purpose(s) does this text serve? To which audience(s) was it aimed? Finally, we asked how social, cultural, historical, and political power relations among diverse groups impacted their authorship roles in the construction of the written Community Plan (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Brandt 2001; Freedman 1994; McNamee 1990). We will show that the term wordsmithing served as a border marker between “official” and community-based discourses that resulted in a blurring of the audience and purpose of the text and in masking the “real” work of producing a palatable plan for noncommunity residents (e.g., external) audiences.

After discussing our theoretical framework, we present our analysis of the Community Plan documents along with specific data excerpts that illustrate when participants used the
term *wordsmithing* and show how this term marked boundaries between groups in spite of an articulated goal not to do so, blurring the audience and purpose of the text.

**Theoretical Framing**

Consistent with the larger community ethnography’s sociocultural theoretical framework (see Introduction [this issue]), we draw on practice theories of literacy to understand how the Community Plan was constructed over time and with multiple authors (Gutiérrez 2008; Street 1995). From this perspective, literacy is not thought of as a neutral set of skills autonomous of social and cultural contexts but, rather, as ideological social practices inseparable from social, cultural, historical, and political contexts of use that are imbued with relations of power (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Larson and Marsh 2005; Street 1995). From this perspective, what people do with text, how it is constructed, its audience(s) and purpose(s), shape and is shaped by context, power relations, and, in the case of our study, authorship roles. Rather than viewing writers as mastering (or not) the standard conventions of writing, a social practice framework uses these aspects to examine the various discourses at play in a text and around its construction and reception (Gee 2004). This framework helped us understand how authorship was complicated when external funding sources and the State Department of Education as intended audiences were introduced at the end of the planning year (see Introduction [this issue] for a detailed explanation of the larger context). Given this shift in political focus and the need to secure funding, pressures for standardization and accountability typical of current government funding initiatives became the focus of discussion and writing—and consequently the discourses concerning the text construction and in the text itself changed.

Flower’s (1997) definition of hybrid literacy adds a focus on community discourses to our social practice understanding of literacy:

> The discourse of community problem-solving dialogue is not going to be anybody’s home discourse. Aside from the emphasis on sustained analysis and writing, it cannot rely on the practices that are the property of any one group. It needs to create a hybrid discourse in which there is a collaborative structure that gives everyone a space, and in which multiple ways of talking and writing and representing problems and actions are privileged. [Cushman and Emmons 2002:107]

Along with Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of the multivoicedness of text, this view of hybrid discourse helps us understand the complexity of discourses at play in the text construction we describe here. We want to move past what might be construed as a restrictive discursive context. We draw on Blommaert and colleagues’ (2005) view that language practices are constituted spatially as well as indexically to investigate how authors “entered” the hybrid discourse and who was permitted such entrance. In other words, understanding language as indexing both space and context helped us see how space in the “environment, as structured determination and interactional emergence, enables and disables” (Blommaert et al. 2005:213) participants to use their discourses in the construction of the Community Plan. Furthermore, we view language as social action through which audiences, both proximal (e.g., residents) and distal (e.g., potential funders), served as legitimately indexed coauthors of the initiative however exclusive the discourse of power proved to be in the final version (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. [1986:241]
We show that the use of *wordsmithing* by Julie (the person put in charge of the initiative by the school district superintendent) in particular indexed the power she had to invoke conventions that would make the Community Plan palatable to an audience who demanded standardization and accountability in ways that blocked resident entry into the hybrid discourse of authentic community change.1

To more deeply theorize the consequences of external demands for accountability, we needed to find a robust theoretical tool. We turned to sociological literature that offers an explanatory framework for understanding how external audiences shifted textual focus from quality to quantity through processes such as reactivity and commensuration (Espeland and Sauder 2007). This work articulates the concept of reactivity as the change in behavior associated with being publicly evaluated, observed, or measured (Espeland and Sauder 2007:11). Espeland and Sauder identified what they call 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”; 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” (Espeland and Sauder 2007:16). Together these practices serve to simplify information and knowledge as a means for “organizing, integrating, and eliminating information” (Espeland and Sauder 2007:17). We show that the use of *wordsmithing* in interaction during plan construction served as one index of these accountability strategies and that it not only eliminated information but also limited resident authorship.

**Analytic Methods and Data Corpus**

To develop the data corpus for this analysis that would help us understand how this text was discursively produced, we searched the larger corpus (see Introduction [this issue] for details of study design and data collection) for uses of the word *wordsmithing*, using Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of utterance as our unit of analysis. In this view, each text (or utterance) is heteroglossic, that is, it is inhabited by the writer’s (or writers’) past interactions and of anticipated future interactions. Wertsch’s (1991) work on voice and ventriliquization helped us understand how individual utterances were in relation to semantic context, to the utterances of others, and to the voice of authority. Understanding literacy as a social practice allowed us to see how the text was constructed in contexts of use, rather than assuming a process by which authors straightforwardly converted their voices into text.

The term *wordsmithing* was something we began to notice during data collection. It had been used at particular moments in ways that seemed to change the writing dynamic. Based on this initial inductive intuition seen in analytic memos, we searched the database for instances of the use of this term. We put together a subset of data that included: field notes taken at Subcommittee and Strategy Team meetings and their associated videotapes, formal Subcommittee meeting minutes, and multiple drafts of written documents with the handwritten suggestions for revisions. We were also given access to research journals and memos written by Julie as she documented her overlapping roles in the initiative as a participant, a liaison between the Subcommittee and external audiences, and a student pursuing a doctoral degree. In all, the corpus for the analysis presented here consists of 32 documents, 37 sets of documents with handwritten suggestions on the text and in the margins, and 11 videotapes (approximately 22 hours) from both Subcommittee and Strategy Team meetings. To analyze these data, we began by using constructivist grounded
theory (Charmaz 2006) in a process of open coding. We followed by comparing data to data to build themes. All three authors open coded the data and we met to establish agreement. We used the qualitative software nVivo8 to facilitate analysis with multiple researchers.

We open coded two different versions (March 2007 and August 2007) of the Community Plan, noticing specifically that the first version seemed to portray actions or qualities while the later version seemed to portray outcomes or quantities. Focusing on this apparent difference, we created an audit trail (Lincoln and Guba 1985) with the major work documents that resulted from Subcommittee and Strategy Team meetings. To analyze the plan itself, we used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 1999; Janks 2010) to examine the language used in the various iterations of the plan. We observed how the description of the initiative and its goals either changed or was carried through the various versions, and how residents were positioned throughout the text.

The Written Plan

At 35 pages, the original Community for the Children of Lakeview (CCL) Community Plan document released in March of 2007, titled “It Takes a Vision to Raise a Child: [Lakeview] Children’s Zone Community Plan: Improving the Lives of Children in Northeast [Lakeview],” was the longest by far of the three published versions of the plan. Our document analysis indicated that the planning process was textually articulated as four phases: (1) development of vision, (2) identification of problems and 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 and Jobs, Youth Support, Community Safety, Early Development and Care of Children, Support for Parents and Guardians, Housing and Community Development, and Health and Wellness.

This plan, with its 40 multiyear objectives and over 186 specific strategies, was represented as coming directly from the community and appears, in its use of pictures of community members, acknowledgment of many residents, and rich contextualization of the project, to be directed specifically at members of the local resident community. This version of the Community Plan stated, “there has been strong commitment to engaging parents, youth, residents, politicians, funders, service providers, businesses and community leaders” ([Lakeview] City School District 2007). It later stated that over 450 people participated in creating the plan.

After the March 2007 Community Plan was unveiled, the initiative then moved into an “implementation” phase, in which certain objectives and strategies were prioritized, and selected to be carried forward. Documents indicated that both resident work teams and the Subcommittee participated in this process, during which they were asked to rank which objectives or strategies they viewed as most important (see Figure 1). It is not clear how many people participated in this process in total, but the written result is much shorter than the original draft, and fewer people were involved in the prioritizing process than in the initial writing. 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 conflicted and that she was working with many pages of documents. Julie’s authorship role in crossing discourse communities encompassed a network of social relationships and institutional goals that enabled her to have authority to choose words and persuasive strategies that she perceived would have positive effect on external audiences (Beaufort 1997).

This complex revision process may explain some of the paring down of the plan seen in its next two iterations, but it does not fully explain the changes in language or the
regrouping and rewording of objectives and strategies into measurable outcomes. Documents and observation data show 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 occurred as evidenced in the later versions.

These revisions 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 et al. 1994). The Subcommittee was assigned the responsibility of managing process decisions (first-order change) and the Strategy Team composed of a majority community residents had the responsibility of managing content (second-order change). However, Julie’s role in managing the tension between authentic resident participation and the demands of external audiences to move more quickly blurred these roles and the use of wordsmithing contributed to this ambiguity. We found that the process of second-order change (Gioia et al. 1994) was performed outside of the public view.

A second iteration of the plan also listed eight objectives but reduced the total number of strategies to 35. This version of the plan represented self-fulfilling prophecy and commensuration (Espeland and Sauder 2007) with the reduction of text and the transformation of qualities into quantities that were more easily measured. The removal of these other objectives and strategies consequently narrowed the initiative’s focus, discursively constructing residents as “in need” of certain kinds of services, which directly contradicted the initial focus on the community as resource rich that was evident in earlier drafts.

Even though residents may have discussed their preferences throughout the revision process, 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 initiative Board of Directors simply took full responsibility for prioritizing the areas of focus, which by then had been reduced to five measurable outcomes.

This brief overview of the revision process illustrates how the formal written Community Plan was changed when the possibility of state funding and private donations became an explicit part of the process. For these external audiences, having identifiable quantities marked accountability, thus the revised work changed goals and objectives in terms of
quantities (Espeland and Sauder 2007). Our research focus on how the plan was discursively produced when diverse social, cultural, historical, and political power positions attempt collaborative writing helped us to see the use of wordsmithing as one discursive move that masked content revision and backgrounded resident voice. In the following section, we first illustrate how wordsmithing was used on different occasions and for a variety of purposes, and then show how Julie asserted her authorial responsibility during one representative example of interaction from a Subcommittee meeting.

Wordsmithing as Discursive Power Play

When external audiences complicated the social and power relations during the planning phase, the Community Plan was amended through an iterative series of meetings and revisions. Specifically, during revision of particular segments of text, participants began to use the word wordsmithing, for a variety of purposes we will discuss below. We found little research on the linguistic use of wordsmithing in collaborative writing to help us understand its use here. The common understanding of wordsmithing is as an editing tool to finalize text (Ewart 1999) or to get the “correct” meaning to outsiders (Gioia et al. 1994). Carr (2009:324) uses the term to index a particular way of both speaking and writing in which speakers or writers use a “powerful vocabulary...to direct their words’ trajectories within institutional networks of current and future funders, clients, bosses, and other potential readers.” Carr’s work appears particularly germane to our own, because our analysis showed how wordsmithing became a bureaucratic strategy for changing content for outside audiences in contrast to the community’s focus on transforming the deficit narratives of the past to future narratives of success. However, Carr’s attention to wordsmithing is relatively narrow; our work expands on the idea of transforming text to meet outside demands while trying to maintain the integrity of the initiative. We found that the term wordsmithing itself was multivoiced and multipurposed, depending on the context in which it was used.

Through constant comparative analysis (Charmaz 2006), we identified several themes that seem to explain the varying purposes of invoking the term wordsmithing. We identified these themes using field notes, audio- 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 purposes of wordsmithing we identified include the following:

- To get things done within a specific timeline
- To end the audience revision process
- To change content

We could say that this sort of discursive work is common, even expected, when documents are being prepared for political or funding processes. In one sense, this is accurate. However, community residents were fundamentally working toward changing their living conditions and were told that this social justice work was the purpose of the initiative. The changed purpose (e.g., finding funding) effectively eliminated the social justice goal the residents thought they were working toward. What we discuss below is how the use of wordsmithing contributed to this loss.

To Get Things Done within a Specific Timeline

At a Subcommittee meeting (formerly called “Design Team”) 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 team included one person from the
external facilitation organization hired by the initiative’s board of directors, the school district official responsible for the planning phase (Julie), four executive directors from local service provider agencies, a representative from a national charity organization’s local office, a representative from a local funding agency, and two residents. The group wanted to expand its membership to increase resident involvement and buy-in, and create a membership structure that was more representative of residents. However, they needed a definition of the term *resident* to do so. Developing this definition turned out to be an incredibly complicated and contested process. Excerpt 1 is taken from the formal meeting notes that were taken at each meeting. As facilitators, Dennis and Anika typed minutes on a laptop computer during the meeting and projected their typing onto a large screen at the front of the meeting room (see Figure 2). In doing so, participants could watch what they were writing and make corrections in the moment.

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, April 25, 2006]

In this example, *wordsmithing* was used to index two members spending out-of-meeting time working on the definition of “grassroots stakeholder.” The note taker used the term *wordsmithing* to index the work Anna and David would do later. This use of the term serves to help them get work accomplished in a timely manner that would allow the rest of the group to move onto other, equally complicated issues.

Meetings usually lasted 2–3 hours and they seemed to never have enough time to accomplish their written agenda. As Excerpt 1 shows, the group as a whole had written
several criteria for the resident definition together, but was 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. In addition to representing a traditional view of wordsmithing as a tool for corrections (Gioia et al. 1994), its use here represented a goal of efficiency of time management.

To End the Audience Revision Process

The concern that they meet deadlines imposed by external audiences 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 of finishing the plan moving. Once again, the line between process and content was blurred. In this case, continued revision with multiple authors was seen as inhibiting plan completion.

In Excerpt 2 below, Julie revealed her concern about the difficulty of getting a large group of people to agree to specific wording of the vision statement that preceded the Community Plan. She suggested that rather than continuing to revise the statement, group members should determine if they can accept the statement “as is,” even if it is not exactly to their liking.

Excerpt 2: 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 minutes, November 06, 2006]

Julie used wordsmithing here as a means to stop gathering more ideas. Julie expressed that she was worried about how the Subcommittee members would be able to finalize the vision and move forward if they kept taking more ideas from the Strategy Team (comprised of majority community residents) at their upcoming meeting. Furthermore, the distinction between first-order (word work) and second-order (meaning) change was blurred when content was masked by efficiency. Julie asserts 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 have an explicit agreement, Julie closed off further discussion and resultant revisions.

In a subsequent meeting where Subcommittee members 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 because they had been selected to do the writing. The Subcommittee was aware of their growing discomfort and discussed how to handle it. The excerpt below from meeting minutes shows how they had decided to present the statement. The first bullet indexes the November 6, 2006, meeting discussed above.

Excerpt 3: 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 minutes, November 9, 2006]

This excerpt illustrates the decisions made about how to deal with potential attempts to further revise the vision. They decided to ask a negative poll question (“can anyone not live with this?”) in an effort to get consensus. If someone could not live with the vision as it was written, they would be asked to write their comments on the draft itself, rather than use precious meeting time for this discussion. These written margin comments were on the documents Julie subsequently used to revise the plan.

In the following excerpt, Subcommittee members discuss decision-making processes and gathering input at an upcoming Strategy Team meeting. The issues around process and content were evident in discussion about who was making decisions and whether documents were “internal.”

Excerpt 4: Changes to language
Female: I appreciate you bringing that up because let’s 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 too that we need to have the language, but most of it I’m not too worried about because again we talked earlier that it’s an internal document, but it’s an internal document of okay who else could see it, who’s internal would be another discussion, but it’s 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 video transcript, December 4, 2006]

Meeting participants seem to be paying particular attention to audience here and the role audience played in authorship, specifically around language. The audience they refer to in this example was the Strategy Team, given this was a Subcommittee meeting where they were preparing for the upcoming meeting at which the vision statement would be discussed. It is noteworthy that they were still working on the vision statement in December when previous meetings in November (discussed above) were supposed to have finalized this part of the text. One way to read this continued revision is that using wordsmithing as a strategy to stop further revision did not work because residents were still insisting on second-order change revisions. That this discursive move did not stop revision may explain why Julie simply moved on and completed revisions on her own. We are not arguing that she did this with ill intent or devious purpose, only that efficiency trumped meaning in the end.

To Change Content

Excerpt 5 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 unlike her stance in previous Strategy Team meetings. When the residents in the audience began to ask questions and suggest further changes to
the text, Julie asked that they communicate their ideas later, but quickly, given they needed to make the Community Plan public right away.

Excerpt 5: 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.

Julie’s use of wordsmithing in this context also reflects a focus on efficiency and time management but goes further by invoking a controlling discourse that put a stop to further changes. With the upcoming press conference and a meeting with a local funding organization, she did not want changes to text beyond identifying things that seemed to be missing or particularly important. Here Julie invoked her power to block residents’ entry into the discourse of the plan (Flower 1997). “Giving feedback” was articulated as saying what you like or do not like, but wordsmithing had the effect of limiting Strategy Team members’ power to craft the actual language (content), even though this was their authorship role. The feedback mechanism she outlined served to shift the focus of attention from the community to external audiences (Espeland and Sauder 2007). In this use of the term, Julie negotiated her complex role as intermediary between residents and external audiences who were demanding that the process go more quickly and that she meet specified deadlines. In her research journal, Julie wrote explicitly about this tension, explaining that while the community members wanted to know about “who is making decisions, and why,” the external audiences, whom she labeled as “decision makers,” wanted to know “what has been achieved, what will be achieved and when” (researcher journal November 10, 2006).

A Question of Audience

Central to the writing of the Community Plan was the question of audience—for whom was the plan being written and why? At a Subcommittee retreat (February 2–3, 2007), during which the Subcommittee members discussed and revised the plan, Anika (the facilitator) indicated that more than one audience was possible and that separate plans could be designed for each audience. Although the term wordsmithing was not used, this excerpt made clear the tensions between authentic resident engagement and external audiences and revealed Julie’s central role as final arbiter of the text.

To fully understand the significance of the segments of interaction we present below, 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. In spite of being official initiative facilitators ostensibly responsible for the agenda, Anika and Dennis deferred to Julie, ultimately giving her the power to determine how the retreat would be run (field notes, February 1, 2007). The second meeting (the one that Julie mentions in Excerpt 6) was with Julie, Nina (one of Julie’s staff), Moses, Terrence (see Introduction [this issue] for roles of Subcommittee members), 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. Julie and Terrence asserted that community residents were the first audience, service providers and government agencies were the second audience, and that funders were the third.
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?
  (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, Dennis 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 primary target is,
  are the residents.
  Okay our secondary audiences are community leaders and um
  (raises hand in the air)
Jesus?: °Funders.?°
Terrence: What was it government agent providers
Julie: agency kinds of people who provide services
Terrence: // potential national funders [down the line
Anika: [Yes,
Julie: YEah down the line


In the excerpt above, Julie controlled the meeting even though Anika was the one standing
in the front of the room and asking the questions. The participants, including Julie, did not
necessarily orient to Anika as in charge of the conversation; while Anika talked they
busied themselves with other tasks, including a side conversation. Although Anika
attempted to guide the conversation, all of the participants did not fully and consistently
attend to the discussion at hand until Julie spoke. Anika’s attempts to gain control of the
group can be seen when she repeatedly used the markers “Ok” and “All right” to try to get
people’s attention. She succeeded at gaining the floor temporarily with Terrence’s assis-
tance (Terrence held up his hand and said, “One mic,” a gesture, borrowed from work
with youth, which is meant to quiet the audience and ask them to focus on one speaker),
but when the group began to call out answers again, Anika was silenced. She did not speak
again during this interaction except to echo what had already been said. Of course, we
must keep in mind that this interaction occurred after lunch, and settling down to business
after a break often took some time. Still, the relative quickness with which the group came
back to attention when Julie spoke underscored Julie’s power in the process, and the
responsibility she had gained to orient the work to external audiences that she seemed to
have defined as “decision makers” instead of the resident audience the group thought
they had decided. Julie’s power to run the meeting was also illustrated when she gave
Terrence (a resident and a new member of the Subcommittee) the floor to speak about the decisions made in the Ad Council meeting, but stepped in to supply information when Terrence hesitated.

Julie’s interjection can be read as both different in important ways from the contributions of the other participants and as strategic; she inserted herself into what was initially a brainstorming session (as evidenced by people shouting out answers) and steered the discussion into a different genre: a report on decisions already made. Her utterance effectively ended the process by which the Subcommittee members could have input into who they thought the audience should be. Although the Subcommittee did identify external audiences (“children’s service providers”) while brainstorming, their emphasis was 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, moved the group into more formal thinking about external audiences as something that would happen “down the line,” although the timing of that was unclear. As our analysis of the Plan documents indicated, “down the line” ended up being sooner than residents thought.

This interaction illustrated Julie’s complex role in the process. Although she was clearly moving the discussion forward per the agenda of the external audiences, her repetition of Terrence’s phrase “down the line” in regard to national funders seemed to indicate her awareness of the members of the Subcommittee’s priorities. Julie’s own research journals shed some light on her (evolving) role, especially as someone who was very aware of the pressure of time:

> It is also painfully slow to sit in these meetings with facilitators who are extremely process driven. They are so intent on gaining consensus, that they often move too slowly. In addition, they are so intent on not allowing me to dominate (and yet I am very diligently trying not to over assert myself), that they don’t allow me to contribute when it is critical that I do because I have the information or perspective necessary to move forward!! [researcher journal June 18, 2006]

But by the time of this retreat, the facilitators seem to have accepted Julie’s role, as evidenced by both facilitators deferring to her during the preretreat meeting and Anika’s apparent inability to stop Julie from taking over in the previous excerpt, and Julie has allowed herself to step in and take over when she thinks it is necessary.

At first, the decisions made at the Ad Council meeting seemed to confirm that residents were both democratically involved in the production of the Community Plan and were the primary audience. But after its initial release the resident-created plan was no longer accessible to the general public, while on the initiative website the shortened plan was represented as “the” Community Plan with no mention that it had been abridged from a longer document or that it had been created with some resident feedback. On the school district website, important choices had been made about which objectives to pursue, seemingly without any community input. Although the Subcommittee was charged with writing plans that could address multiple audiences, the residents’ plan faded away as the agencies' and funders' plans became the public face of the initiative.

Skeptical from the start, some residents seemed 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 was also a resident complained that the process felt 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 minutes November 18, 2006]

This resident’s sense that they were just “going through the motions” indicates awareness that, despite the stated commitment to resident engagement, other powerful forces were at
work in shaping the plan. This city, like many others, had a history of both failed initiatives and of leaders and politicians who were less than transparent in their dealings with the public. These two factors led to cynicism from residents, who did not see their day-to-day lives changing. Despite the initiative’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 and Implications

We have presented our analysis of the use of the word *wordsmithing* as a discursive tool to limit resident voice during the writing and subsequent revision of a community change initiative’s public plan. Central to our analysis was not only for whom was the Community Plan being written but also whose voice remains. We argued that the revision of the plan reflected 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 in spite of a stated priority in representing the voice of residents. Our analysis indicates that the first document completed and approved by residents in March 2007 focused on resident-articulated topics such as literacy, residents as agents of change, neighborhood and community, desired interventions and possible opportunities. Once the audience changed (or was revealed to be) to the State 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.

We argue that while the Community Plan was an interactional achievement in which residents, community leaders, and outside facilitators negotiated text as coauthors (Duranti 1986), the ultimate yet unstated goal of the writing was to satisfy external audiences whose purposes were largely unknown to community residents. One central figure, a school district leader (Julie), emerged as a key author of the plan 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 argued that participants’, Julie in particular, use of the word *wordsmithing* indexed commensuration strategies that were designed to change qualities into quantities.

After a 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 and Sauder (2007) call “reactivity.” 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. For example, a complex set of goals around education (literacy, increased achievement, parent education, financial literacy) was reduced to “100% graduation rate” in the final plan. Consequently, the residents experienced some effects of reactivity (e.g., obscuring relations among residents and funders) and that the process of commensuration was to arbitrarily satisfy the external funders. To answer the question of whose voice remains during the community coauthoring process, our data showed how the coauthorship 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.

Our work has implications for teachers who are also in tense relation between authentic teaching and learning that cannot be easily quantitatively assessed and external demands designed to measure quantity in a political context obsessed with accountability.
standing that Julie performed a vital role as a mediator, getting important work done to
insure the success of the initiative, helps us to see a connection to teachers, especially
teachers of marginalized students, who have been especially affected by the accountability
movement. Yet paradoxically, like teachers, her role as a gatekeeper also served to limit
other participants’ access to powerful discourses; despite Julie’s very real intentions of
creating community change, this gatekeeping ultimately perpetuated the very inequality
the initiative was meant to overturn. Likewise, in educational settings, teachers may serve
as both mediators and gatekeepers. When they are allowed, for example, to teach their
students critical awareness of language, they serve as mediators, helping their students
understand “how discourses can work ideologically in social relations of power” (Fair-
clough 1999:74), and therefore how to work within those relations of power, and also how
to fight against them. For marginalized students, such mediation can mean that the
students learn how to transform both themselves and their communities. However, when
teachers are limited to scripted curricula or “teaching to the test” in an attempt to meet
external demands for accountability, they function more as gatekeepers, preventing their
students from accessing and challenging societal power relations. These students may
succeed in passing standardized tests, but many are left without access to discourses of
power and consequently cannot work to change their circumstances. Understanding how
these demands are enacted discursively may help researchers and teachers rekindle a
focus on meaning.

Notes
1. All names are pseudonyms. See Introduction for chart indicating each participant’s role in the
initiative.
2. See Appendix for full transcript of the focal event.
3. According to their website, Ad Council is a “community-based service organization committed
to bringing voice to community issues and needs in partnership with nonprofit organizations from
all segments of the community” http://www.adcouncilroch.org/about/.

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Fairclough, Norman

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Freedman, Sarah

Gee, James Paul

Gioia, Dennis, James Thomas, Sean Clark, and Kumar Chittipeddi

Gutiérrez, Kris

Hull, Glynda, and Kathy Schultz

Janks, Hilary

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[Lakeview] City School District
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Larson, Joanne, and Jackie Marsh

Lea, Mary, and Brian Street

Lincoln, Yvonna, and Egan Guba

McNamee, Gillian Dowley

Moss, Beverly, ed.

Speck, Bruce
Appendix: Complete Transcript of 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 plan
10 ((Anika puts papers down)).
11 We are coming close to getting this thing together.
12 ((William glances back at camera/ethnographer as ethnographer walks to camera. William
turns back to table and begins shuffling through papers.))
13 The mini conversations are gonna start getting written up,
14 ((Sharice stands, hands paper to Norma))
15 they’re going to start taking shape.
16 You see a draft
17 ((Anika looks around, then walks toward Terrence, picks up papers, walks backwards to
18 front of room, all while speaking))
19 of um a report that was done in Springfield that—one version,
20 there’s many versions,
21 ((Sharice walks over to Norma))
22 that put together all their good work in-in a-in a report form.
23
24 Alicia: ((Approaching her seat, taking a bite of something in a bowl/cup in her hand.))
25 Yuch.
26 ((Turns around and leaves room.))
27
28 Anika: And so, we’re gonna spend the next hour-no sorry,
29 half hour, doing is discussing the plan outline.
30 ((Sharice and Norma are talking individually to Anika’s right; can hear voices but not
31 what they’re saying. Anika walks towards Jesus and gives him some paper. As she walks
32 backwards to the front of the room, her gaze is at first directed at Sharice and Norma,
33 but she shifts her gaze back towards the middle of the table—Terrence, Jesus and David))
34 And so let me just say something about
35 ((Terrence stands and sits back down))
36 plans and reports and documents, and like—
37 ((Sharice returns to her seat; Dennis walks into room followed by Alicia.))
38 Welcome back!
39 ((to Derrick))
40
41 Alicia: He:ey!
42
43 Julie: A lot’s happened since you were gone, Derrick!
44 ((picking up laptop and walking to the tables.))
Appendix: Continued

46 Sharice?: Yeah, Derrick.
47 ??: gotta report!
48 Jesus: Aw, yeah!
49 Anika: All right.
50 [57x634]Multiple
51 speakers: A new report
52 ([laughter; Julie drops off laptop at the table, walks back to photocopier, picks up some
53 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, who is still getting
59 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 towards Terrence.))
65 Thank you.
66
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 with her right arm
79 raised, finger pointed.))
80 Jesus: The community.
81 Group, shouting out: “The community,” “Residents,” “There’s multiple,”
82 “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 SC members are
88 now seated, looking at Julie and then Terrence. Anika remains standing in the front of
89 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.°
Appendix: Continued

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
Anika: FU::nders and POlicy-makers.
((Helena walks into the room.))
So you uh-your plan is-
((Helena is talking to Alicia.))
And so um
Terrence: We have three levels of target audiences that we have (inaudible) ((Helena walks to her seat to the left of the room.))
Anika: OK. So residents
Terrence: Um, community leaders, agency providers, and funders.
Because our message to national funders has to be different than uh
our asking for ownership in the community.
Anika: Um,
and so you-
for uh any one of those audiences you might find,
as has been done in other communities—
Cherish Every Child in Springfield being an example—
they did a different versions of their documents depending on who they were trying to reach.
Um and so this was their executive summary and it was done in a very
you know sort of accessible graphic way//
William: Case (inaudible).
Anika: And short, and to the point.
Um they also-they also have a plan that has many many more pages with a lot more information that explains much more in depth
how the process unfolded,
what happened when and so on and so forth.
And they realized that they needed to use different documents for different audiences.
So in terms of thinking about a plan outline,
which is the conversation we’re about to engage in,
these are some of the questions we would keep in mind,
or we ask you to keep in mind,
your audiences um what’s the message that you’re trying to communicate. Um,
how do we best communicate the message?
Alicia: With a smile
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Character(s)</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Anika:</td>
<td>You know you can just put together a whole lotta numbers and a whole lotta action statements and say this is our plan, and you’re gonna wonder, what are we really saying? What are you trying to say with that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Terrence:</td>
<td>Verbiage is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>Anika:</td>
<td>Yeah. So there’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Terrence:</td>
<td>Um cuz you have to be able to communicate with all different facets and still be able to get your message across.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Anika:</td>
<td>Yes. And in whose voice—in whose voice is the message getting written and delivered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Jesus:</td>
<td>It’s gotta be the person’s-the community’s voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>