

Servant Class: Basic Writers and Service Learning

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ABSTRACT: This article examines some of the tensions and contradictions between the process-oriented, learning-centered pedagogy commonly associated with basic writing and the product-based, performance-centered moment mandated by writing-for-the-community varieties of service learning. Because end-of-term “writing-for” projects cannot provide students with nearly as much opportunity to reflect on their practice and also to work through the narcissistic moment that academic discourse typically demands, it is suggested that students in basic writing classes would be better served by additional work in academic discourse rather than by being made servants by writing-for-the-community service-learning projects. Writing-for projects remove the students from the problems they would solve, whereas continued work in academic discourse encourages students to see themselves in the problems, the image of otherness helping them reflect on the new problems their solutions create.

Service learning is said to reduce defensiveness because it actively works against the objectification of students. Rather than objectifying students, service learning

disrupts this process. It positions students not as deficient or passive novices who need to learn to perform critical consciousness for teachers and for grades, but rather as agents in the world beyond campus who pair outreach work with critical reflection (writing *about* the community), who use writing to aid social service organizations (writing *for* the community), and/or who help craft collaborative documents that instigate social change (writing *with* the community). (Deans 44; see also 146)

Each of these three service-learning paradigms has a different rhetorical emphasis. Writing *with* the community emphasizes shared and sustained “inquiry and research”; writing *about* the community features journals and “academic-style essays on community issues and/or pressing social concerns”; writing *for* the community requires students to “provide needed

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writing products for agencies” and can be assessed bluntly: “Did students produce documents that will be of real use to the agencies?” (Deans 17).

For my students and me, several factors discouraged two of the paradigms: time (we would have, in each ten-week quarter, about eight weeks of instruction) and limited resources (we had no community-university institute to fund, oversee, and guarantee the continuity of the work it helped initiate) ruled out writing *with*; my desire to see what reflective practice would be made possible by comparing non-academic writing (writing *for*) with academic writing ruled out writing *about*, with its focus on “academic-style essays.” So basic writers placed into my courses found themselves writing *for* (hereafter “writing-for”) the community. Our main service-learning text was Carolyn Ross and Ardel Thomas’s *Writing for Real*, based on a writing-for program at Stanford University. *Writing for Real* generously displays finished examples of students’ writing-for documents in formats many of which my students ended up using as well—and not simply because it was convenient to imitate, an urge I would have encouraged anyway.

Based on a year-long experiment with writing for the community service-learning projects in three basic writing classes, I believe that writing-for projects do not serve our students well because rather than inquire into the complexity of making leadership collaborative, they advance the process of making student servitude seem inevitable. They reproduce the status quo they promise to question, requiring students to write for it rather than critique or change it; they privilege a formulaic-product, performance-centered pedagogy that most basic writing courses try to displace with a learning-centered pedagogy; and their logistical complexity makes impractical the reflective practice that would make them a justifiable experiment. I conclude that because writing-for projects thrust students into “fast capitalism” (i.e., doing the work of outsourced labor—without benefits and for small profit), assigning additional academic work, perhaps of the writing *about* variety, serves basic writers better.

Because I Wished to Teach Deliberately

Basic writing teachers who find service learning appealing are often committed to basic writing as part of a rhetorical education, preparing students for leadership roles in workplace and civic deliberations—preparing them, then, to imagine their reading and writing as public acts. Teachers who believe in such preparation may be dissatisfied with writing as merely conceptual intervention, the type of assignment Thomas Deans calls “an

academic exercise rather than a purpose-driven rhetorical performance that moves readily into the public sphere” (102). To help my first-year basic writing students push their writing out of non-credit-carrying courses into community work that counted, I wholeheartedly embraced the promise of purpose-driven rhetorical performances that would inspire my students to think of themselves not only as literate beings in the classroom but also as engaged citizens whose literacy had public value. Even as my students worked on their service-learning projects, they were also writing a number of conceptual-intervention assignments, such as inquiring into whether parents or peers exercised more influence over adolescents or exploring what kind of case could be made for or against U.S.-perpetrated prison abuse and torture.

But even when my students found the conceptual-intervention assignments of interest, they were still writing for me—their teacher, not the public—and for a grade, not social change. It is one thing to deliberate about an assigned topic and how to present it to a teacher for a grade; it is quite another, and better, thing to deliberate on issues and contexts that are meaningful not only to the writer but also to an audience who might materially benefit from the deliberations.

To summarize what service learning promised to deliver: in principle, it mobilizes a public writer’s core objectives: the what, the how, and the why of writing. I reasoned that service learning, first of all, would animate my students’ writing, not merely their topics but, more vitally, the interventions into real problems they would propose and enact. In the spirit of John Dewey’s “reflective inquiry,” the animating power of service learning would come from, and be sustained by, writing that began in

(1) perplexity, confusion, doubt in response to a situation whose character is yet to be determined; (2) a conjectural anticipation, a tentative interpretation of the given elements; (3) a careful survey of all attainable considerations which will define and clarify the problem at hand; (4) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent; and (5) the development of a firmer hypothesis upon which to act—one which itself remains open to further testing and revision. (qtd. in Deans 31-32)

To inquire into a problematic situation and then be able to test and revise one’s hypothesis struck me as superior to the conceptual testing and

revising to which I had been subjecting my basic writing students, naturalizing classroom constraints and perpetuating power dynamics that kept them in a familiar place working at writing rather than helping to place them as writers who worked.

As writers who were doing work that would count, my students could engage more productively the why of writing. And in caring more about writing's aims, they might, it seemed to follow, care more about its means: the how of their written designs. Influenced by John Dewey, Donald Schön has created a model of teaching and learning that addresses these two objectives, caring and crafting. Intended for teaching future professionals, that is, future leaders, Schön's model articulates one of the civic aims held by basic writing teachers interested in service learning: teaching our students to inquire as leaders, to read and write as leaders (an aspiration alive in the correctness paradigm as well, insofar as it presupposes a caring, judging public for one's writing).

In contrast to pedagogical models informed by win/lose-right/wrong outcomes (Schön *The Reflective Practitioner* 226), Schön's model is informed by values that invite the learner to make a commitment, to design with care, to consider consequences. In contrast to the belief that too much reflection leads to paralysis, this model represents reflection as itself a kind of action, increasing critical understanding of and emotional investment in meritorious tasks. The undertaking of such tasks is not only inherently rewarding; their complexity requires reflection on the consequences and limits of our interventions:

- “Try to create, for oneself and for others, awareness of the values at stake in decision, awareness of the limits of one's capacities, and awareness of the zones of experience free of defense mechanisms beyond one's control”
- “Increase the likelihood of internal commitment to decisions made”
- “Try to create conditions, for oneself and for others, in which the individual is committed to an action because it is intrinsically satisfying—not . . . because it is accompanied by external rewards or punishments” (*The Reflective Practitioner* 231)

That this model values an individual's intrinsic commitment is clear; it also seemed clear that, by connecting students' rhetorical performances with social needs, writing-for service learning did rein in extrinsic motives,

successfully inspiring intrinsic motives. As my student whom I'll call Joshua (all student names are pseudonyms) put it, "I did not care as much about the grade I received on this project as I did about it being a good resource for the church and community." One of the reasons students cared about the project itself is that people besides a teacher cared, a point Christopher's term-ending assessment made:

Well for the community/service learning writing, it was something different. It seemed as though more people were interested and wanted to know more. Writing for an academic audience is something like a summary that does not relate to the audience. For instance, when people read my papers, I usually write about some things they can't really relate to, such as a summary or a response to a story. Where as, writing for a community/service, people tend to get more interested and want to get involved in some cases. Overall I took this project as something totally different and a very good writing lesson. Not only did I just focus on my own writing but it seemed as though I was writing to represent something and it made me feel more caring in my writing.

Christopher represents his classmates, not only his community, when he reveals that students do not typically regard teachers as a real audience. A real audience can relate, can get involved, can make writers care more. That my students felt the reality of audience so strongly in their writing-for projects has a compelling claim on me, a claim I will return to in the last section—after demonstrating what writing-for service learning did not enable.

Finally, the most-salient promise service learning held was that, from "free and informed choice" and "awareness of the limits of one's capacities," reflection about craft would also follow. My students and I rarely begin thinking the same way about revision: I say, "Design moves have consequences, so rethink what you've done here"; they respond, "You want me to change how I express myself." Our images of self are in competition—the teacher who would help a developing self and add to its rhetorical repertoire vs. the individual who would maintain integrity—a competition between teacher and student that invests the drafting process with counterproductive emotion, keeping defenses on high alert. If the draft, however, is construed as an instrument to be put into the hands of a third party, as a tool to help that party meet its needs, then teacher and student are more likely to work

together. And what they are working on, furthermore, is rhetoric in action: documents to be used, documents that must invite people in and shape their responses (see Schön *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* 127-30). The questions of ends and means to negotiate—what the document should be used for and by whom, why this content and not that, what format will be most appealing, what appeals will persuade, and so on—are pretty high stakes. To lower defenses between teacher and students before documents went public seemed essential.

Writing for a community audience rather than for the teacher should have lowered defenses, making questions of craft more substantive and discussion of them more meaningful. When teacher and student are allied in service, difference in judgment is strategic opportunity, not rank asymmetry. But the rank asymmetry I'd hoped to balance was precisely what service learning, for all its virtues, not only reinforced but exacerbated, displacing the asymmetry from one relatively accessible institution, the academy, to an institution far less accessible, the community.

Writing For the Community

The discourse of “problem” is probably not the best way to frame what went wrong (and what I have reason to believe will go wrong, even given preparation, experience, and skill far superior to mine). Deans uses the problem-frame when he discusses one of the virtues of writing-for projects: they “tend to avoid the problems of hypothetical or case study contexts and imagined audiences—they demand real-world and purpose-driven writing for an audience other than (or more accurately, in addition to) the teacher” (10). Whether imagined audiences present problems for a writer or whether the problems they do present should be avoided are matters I will save for the end. For now it makes sense to discuss the problems I failed to foresee, and to discuss them less as problems than as *contradictions*, contradictions that the service-learning writing-for component introduced into my basic writing classes.

Most overtly, the service-learning component exacerbated the difference between process-directed learning goals, “which aim to increase competence,” and product-directed performance goals, “which aim to gain favorable judgments of competence” (McLeod 57). This distinction is Susan McLeod's. In *Notes on the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom*, McLeod suggests that an “overemphasis on performance goals not only helped to create learned helplessness in some students, but it also had an effect on

mastery-oriented students, making them so protective of how their ability would be judged that they later rejected the chance to learn something new if it involved risking errors" (58). In scenes of writing that emphasize performance, students have "less control over outcomes, since they perceive that others are judging their success or failure against normative criteria rather than against their personal progress" (61). The consequence of this perception is that performance goals encourage "students to choose easy tasks to ensure success and to avoid negative judgments of their abilities"—symptoms of defensiveness rather than alleviations of it—whereas learning goals "appear to promote interest in the task itself and to create positive rather than negative responses in the face of difficulties" (61).

It is clear, I think, why many basic writing teachers try to create a process-directed, learning-goals atmosphere in their classrooms: students will be more likely to expose themselves to the difficulties that face more experienced writers. Rising to the level of challenging material, they will take rhetorical risks (and risk mistakes), experiencing difficulty as an opportunity not so much for securing correctness as for building competence. My guess is that teachers who subscribe to this pedagogy see, as I did, service learning as a meaningful frame for competence building.

But writing-for projects turn the distinctions McLeod makes between process and product into a troubling contradiction. The nature of such service learning is normative performance resulting in a term-concluding product that preempts the potential for reflective practice. In this normative, product-driven environment, the decisions students make are few—my students made and chose their own community contacts; they had some latitude in deciding how to lay out the final product—and so they are made comparatively helpless. There is, contrary to Schön's prediction, little "likelihood of internal commitment to decisions made" (*The Reflective Practitioner* 231). The potential for students' strong commitment to actions whose aims are "intrinsically satisfying" (*The Reflective Practitioner* 231) is real, but those aims are extrinsic to writing. And they are extrinsic because the symbolic actions are dictated by "normative criteria," not by the desire for "personal progress." The why of writing is scarcely at issue, not because it is insignificant but because it is, without question, significant, so significant it is not for a basic writer to question.

This absence of a writing question reduced anxiety. Because performance goals are supposed to raise anxiety levels, it was noteworthy how little anxiety the writing-for projects generated, compared with that surrounding our learning-goals framework. A framework in which Dewey's "perplexity,

confusion, and doubt” were high-value heuristics, the learning-goals assignments were, according to my students, more rhetorically challenging and more materially intriguing than the performance imperatives of service learning, which challenged them primarily logistically and mechanically. For them “logistical” meant trying to arrange meetings in easternmost Los Angeles County with stressed-out, budget-challenged community contacts and then arranging rides in a region notorious for its poor public transportation; Justin wrote that “getting the signature for the community writing contract is the hardest part of the project.” And for them “mechanical” meant they were the typo-avoiding objects of schemes rather than typing-mad schemers with objectives. What Nina wrote was typical: the biggest risk the “agency project” posed was “in maybe looking bad, like no apostrophes or run ons.”

My reading of Deans’ national survey of writing-for programs suggests these problems are widespread. When students work with nonprofit agencies, he notes, it is the nonprofit agency staffs who “define community needs and what documents are required”; furthermore, when students write such documents to fulfill those needs, they do so “in collaboration with the agency contact person, to his or her specifications” (146). My students wrote flyers for Habitat for Humanity, Boy Scouts of America, and recycling centers; blood-drive handouts for American Red Cross; short articles about college requirements and the college “experience” in high school newspapers for students in the non-college track; safe-sex brochures for local health clinics; and so on.

Consider Cesar’s one-page flyer for the La Puente Public Library, a project that represents some agency on the writer’s part. Cesar’s supervisor needed a short document that would appeal to parents and children, something that would get them through the door. “Education Is For Everyone,” the title of Cesar’s flyer, is centered at the top. There are three columns of typed print. The top-left column begins with a heading, “The Benefits Of Using The Library Service,” followed by a brief note about the author and a two-sentence paragraph about the library as a self-education center. One-third of the way down is the next heading, “What Type of services?” This section consists of two short paragraphs, one on services (such as storytelling and read-aloud activities for children) and one on computers with Internet access (although this paragraph ends with two sentences about tutors available to help with homework). The middle column begins with a new heading, “Other Services,” followed by three paragraphs: one on traditional holdings, one on video materials with an image from the *Matrix* movie inserted below

it, and then a paragraph on kids' videos with an emphasis on "free." The top-right column elaborates on "free," touting the superiority of the library over video stores like Blockbuster (this comparison and the *Matrix* image were Cesar's ideas). This column—and thus the flyer as a whole—ends with the heading "Library Atmosphere" and two paragraphs, one on the problematic distractions of home and one on the quiet of the library as their solution.

Cesar's supervisor was happy with this flyer's promise: it would attract new patrons. The supervisor did not point out the contradictions between selling the library for its noisy sociability and for the quiet solitude it affords. If soundproof rooms for educational videos make both logistically possible, the supervisor still did not point out the possibly conflicting, unarticulated representations of learning: the social, collaborative model of learning Cesar himself preferred (he liked the service-learning project because he "learned better by being active with the community and when it is hands on") under the same roof as the traditional quiet solitude that will help "students pay more attention to their work and learn better." How this conflict of representations might affect readers, what it said about learning, how it might affect the organization of libraries, whether organizational and thematic coherence mattered were questions that remained unexplored.

Such indifference to the relations between content, form, and audience was a predictable outcome, one which contradicted what other forms of service learning could do and what basic writing classes (as articulated above) ought to do. Writing for an audience other than me, their teacher, was supposed to give my students more agency, but in their assessments they wrote (accurately, as far as I could tell) that they had less latitude, less agency. In Steven's words, "When I am writing my own paper, I have the freedom to interpret it the way I see fit. Service learning has too many rules and regulations." The students' freedom to interpret—in their own writing as well as any agency-assigned reading—was powerfully effaced because their supervisors—another single-person audience, it must be noted—told them explicitly what was what, what to do, and in what form ("too many rules and regulations"; cf. Deans 44). Although my student Eduardo liked being told what to do, the way he puts this is revealing: "Writing for the community is a lot easier than writing for an academic audience. I think it is easier because, writing for the community is mostly based on facts than ideas and opinion." In the what and how of writing, then, the supervisor, not the student, *named* what information or facts were significant, even though such an act of naming is instrumental not only to a student's sense of commitment but also to her development as a reader and writer (see Bartholomae

and Petrosky 20). The supervisor also determined the shape—not to the extent Judy Hale Young fears (“an easily stamped-out, cookie-cutter-shaped product” [12])—but close enough to render audience-inspired reflection on form automatic, if not moot. That is, because their supervisors either dictated or suggested what form the writing should take, my students’ reflections on how consideration of audience affected their writing were often limited to “it was what the supervisor wanted.”

This supervisor-centered agency objectifies students, whose conscientious teachers, then, have little recourse but to adopt a teacher-centered pedagogy, as in Deans’ representative example of a writing-for teacher, who

devotes a large portion of the semester to teaching the genres and textual dimensions of nonacademic writing: résumé, cover letter, memo, proposal, publicity packet, personality profile, biographical sketch. She taught these genres, as well as some grammar and usage, before initiating the service-learning projects because, in her words, “I wanted to give them a good enough prep through all of those writing assignments” before risking the agency project. (66)

I, too, taught the rhetoric of cover letters and letters of introduction, contracts, and proposals, though the latter were precluded by the agencies’ pressing needs, needs that left little room for negotiation. Most necessary, as Nina and her peers had accurately determined, was attention to mechanical correctness. Not wanting to look bad and knowing that the usefulness of their “for real” writing depended significantly on correctness, students paid attention in proofreading workshops—more attention, it can fairly be said, than in draft workshops for academic-only papers, where correctness was often subordinated to other questions, such as how the draft was representing the assigned readings or class discussions and how the audience was being appealed to, constructed, ignored.

Succeeding in getting students to pay more attention to mechanics is not tantamount to returning authority and ownership to student writers, as real-world writing is alleged to do (see James Britton, qtd. in McLeod “Pedagogy” 156). To a person, my students claimed that this kind of writing-for project reduced the authority and ownership they felt, even as it felt good to do something useful for the community. In writing-for projects, in contrast to their academic writing, students experienced more certainty, not less. And they were not less developmentally ready (a fear expressed by Joseph Harris, qtd. in Cushman 49) but more developmentally ready to write

them; the reason they were more than ready was that the precircumscribed format-driven demands of writing-for projects removed students from the exactly uncertain contingencies of the rhetorical stance (see Deans 60, invoking Wayne Booth's phrase), returning them to familiar, old-school fill-in-the-blanks/follow-the-steps information hunting. In most cases, however, students didn't even have to hunt for information, but rather just cut and pasted it into the tri-fold brochures they adorned with brand-name graphics (sometimes having to "downgrade" for the sake of the supervisor, as when Javier had to convert his Microsoft 2003 Publisher file because his "mentor" worked with Publisher 2000). It is precisely because these contradictions so closely resembled so much of the rote aspects of students' overcrowded, cash-strapped (and therefore especially vulnerable to the curricular depredations invited by budgetary incentives attached to high-stakes-testing performance) K-12 language arts experience that they lacked heuristic value. The contradictions were redundant, much less something to learn than to unlearn, and a de facto subversion of my expectation that trying out design moves would help students discover the implications of their choices and revise more meaningfully.

In no way I could discern did their service learning constitute what Edward Zlotkowski has called "theoretical and epistemological challenges to the status quo" (qtd. in Julier 134), a status quo which was, if anything, reinforced. Far from writing "themselves into the world" (Deans 8), my students had little presence to assert. They may or may not, in Laura Julier's terms, have reproduced "condescending models of charity and missionary work that do more to undermine than to advance the goals of multicultural education and social transformation" (142), but there is little doubt that they themselves were patronized, graciously, by those with more power and privilege (and patronized more for their availability than for their ethnicity and working-class status).

There was, to be sure, more public in their projects—more public because they met more people (and they saw what workplace writing meant to such people). What my students wrote went public in ways that pleased both their supervisors and themselves. And why not? Either their projects had already gone into circulation, or their supervisors had indicated their projects would soon be used—a publication rate of 100% across three terms. Best of all, they were connected to these projects, as Huburt pointed out: "I enjoyed the opportunity to help out *my own* community" (my emphasis). Making them feel at home, allowing them to help their home communities, writing-for projects did not estrange students the way academic assignments can.

Another way of saying this, however, is that if my students' writing went public, it did not go very far. And although their writing did go public, that does not mean that they themselves did, that their roles as writers did. On the contrary, the earnest, unilateral predetermination of writing roles in writing-for scenarios renders moot the question of negotiating a dauntingly overdetermined public, even as the erasure of their relative autonomy and ownership raises questions about what has been sacrificed. Although writing instruction that directs students away from private purposes toward public purposes is undeniably rhetorical (see Richard Larson, cit. Julier 140), the loss of (the restless struggle for) ownership in my students' writing—the loss, that is, of responsibility and liability—was a blow to their rhetorical development.

Being Heroic Versus Sounding Heroic

Not all products are created equal or take equal effort to create. The problem with writing-for projects, then, is not that they favor product over process but that they necessitate a process so involved that it shifts scarce time and attention away from reflection and revision for a product that, despite its social merits, is undeserving.

One may object that it is possible to build ongoing reflection into a class that incorporates writing-for projects. The disconnect between “ought” and “is”—what I thought ought to happen and what did—certainly provided reflective material for me. But it did not for my students, for several reasons. Too little time is one. If a fifteen-week semester is said to be too little time for writing-for projects (Deans 62), what can be said for a ten-week quarter? Once the extended add-drop period and in-class examinations are subtracted, there remain eight weeks, eight weeks to work on critically reading and annotating difficult, non-fiction texts (texts which students claim to find dauntingly different from the mostly literary texts that constituted their secondary school language arts curriculum), four hours a week in the classroom to workshop drafts and argue about revision. Then there is the logistical burden of service learning: the overtime odyssey of making contact, studying the agency, securing the contract, doing the work. To get the project in on time is an achievement, essentially ruling out the kind of reflective, comparative assessment a portfolio of their revisions across several genres might enable. Last, the reflection the students did was insufficient, but not because they mistook the complexity of writing-for projects. They understood the requirements of these projects very well, insofar as they resembled many formulaically

formatted projects of years past. What they did not understand and needed more sustained, recursive work to understand, was what it meant to take responsibility for the complexity of a subject, the implications of how they claim it, and their designs on an audience.

So what? Why is this reflection important? Compared with what students like Christopher and Huburt said about working on behalf of and with their own communities, isn't the loss of a little abstract reflection a small loss at most? Writing-for projects helped my students be heroic in their own communities—not to the extent possible (“to bring about a new social order” [Dewey 134-35]), but to an extent they themselves found meaningful. “I feel that this is one of the best projects that I have done,” my student Justin wrote, “because I feel that what I did will actually help people, and almost nothing makes me feel better than me helping out in guiding someone.” If he sounds like a do-gooder, at least he did something. And if what he did was at his supervisor's bidding, at least it had social utility.

Compare these perceptions with heroic-sounding academic discourse, whose paper battles project an imagined future. We give assignments that, as John Gage puts it, “may not address some of the clerical writing tasks these students will be required to perform in the business of their lives, but . . . may nevertheless prove more adequate to the conflicts and cooperations that are necessary to improve the condition of the human parliament, as Kenneth Burke called it, that we are all born into” (169). The kind of writing asked for sounds heroic. The language game it implies requires “a willed, brash toughness of mind that enables a writer to bluff his way into a high stakes struggle for turf, for priority” (Bartholomae “Wandering” 113).

This struggle for priority on paper can sound grandiose while remaining unreal. There seems to be a real difference between service learning and academic discourse, the difference between being heroic and sounding heroic. Christopher noticed this difference: for him, service learning was actual heroism, doing good—something real for others, something others who counted would attend to and value. In contrast, sounding heroic was bluffing the teacher, as Thuy did in a paper on peer influence:

One may say the lack of quality education is from the lack of parent participation. Others may say it is, because of the lack of educational supply. In reality, none of these situations are the case. It is because of peer pressure. Most high school students are going through a stage of identity. During this stage of their lives, they are being pressured by many of their peers, to do many of the imaginables.

In possession of the truth, Thuy sounds important. She is warming up her voice for a life beyond the classroom, a role in public deliberations.

This projected future, however, may be founded on myth. Consider Jim Henry's 2001 account of the realities of workplace writing. As predicted by the modernist sensibility that still informs our epistemology (and I would argue this is so for Bartholomae as well as Gage), the

educated writer . . . would be able by virtue of her rhetorical savvy and elevated literacy to draw upon her sense of moral responsibility and code of ethics (most often grounded in liberal humanism) to assume agency, to effect changes in the community and the workplace, through democratic processes undergirded by the bond between government (at the local, state, and national levels) and the corporation. But globalization has broken this bond. And at the same time, workers in this new scenario find themselves obliged to work more and more hours (under the constraints of "flexibility") and to retrain constantly, limiting their time for civic engagement that earlier composition epistemology presumed. Otherwise stated, the "subject" we imagine under twentieth-century composition epistemology has become an anachronism. (5)

Insofar as Henry is approximately right ("broken" may be too strong), then the likelihood of being heroic *as a writer* is small—and, I would add, not just small but tiny compared with the immense certainty of sounding stochastically, possibly foolishly heroic. But wouldn't the significance—the usefulness—attached to the small chance of being heroic outweigh the guaranteed outcome of sounding heroic?

I say no. For one, whether globalization has broken or weakened traditional bonds of deliberation is something for students to examine, not accept. For another, to so examine and take a stand on such a significant, abstract charge is to undergo the kind of critical consciousness-raising easily parodied as "sounding heroic." Given the kind of pre-formed writing that has formed them, however, my students find a productive, anxious otherness in sounding heroic, its many failures only gradually, recursively understood through the humbling processes of writing as symbolic action: the epistemic energy of invention that disrupts attempts to arrange that are themselves inventional; the discovery in revision that style is a kind of proof; the imperative to speak for, or talk back to, the given facts. Such processes, as series of failures gradually understood, are relatively absent

in writing-for projects (hence the absence in my students' term-ending projects and assessments of the reflective practice *on writing* I expected). Without such reflective practice, the subject—whether anachronistic or emergent—will not encounter the other it objectifies. And if this encounter with the other does emerge, it may be partly because our interventions as teachers, “stimulating the imagination by playing the role of the Other for the student and fostering dialogue” (Johnson 85), pressure student writers to see themselves in the problems they’re solving and to see their solutions as successes that are also failures.

Thus my response to my students who, like Christopher and Hubert, felt at home in their writing-for projects. Their audience was not so much other to them as an extension of them (which is also why their do-gooder postures were comparatively justified, not so much offensively patronizing as communally responsible). Endorsed by their audience, not in dialogue with them, they carried out projects administered by others. Their writing-for projects, then, did not begin the necessary process of working through *their* narcissistic projections of the other.

In her paper on peer influence, Neary, the daughter of immigrants, inquired into the source of hurtful stereotypes, using Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s essay “Beyond the Tortilla Curtains” to assert that

“American identity has historically depended on opposing an ‘other,’ be it cultural, racial, or ideological. Americans need enemies against whom to define their personal and national boundaries.”
. . . Those who are against immigrants forget that they too are descendants of immigrants. Which makes them hypocritical.

What is other here is not the topical other—still a fairly common topic in composition readers—but the other Neary’s prose has constructed, the hypocritical immigrants who, to assimilate, need an enemy. The members of Neary’s draft group suggested she explain better the charge of hypocrisy. In her revision of this draft, Neary added to her paragraph as follows:

Those who are against immigrants forget that they too are descendants of immigrants. In the similar case as Amy Tan’s mother they were treated unfairly because of their lack of being fluent English and of their race as well. Which makes the American who says it hypocritical for the reason that their ancestors were also immigrant from Europe. Therefore I agree with Gomez-Pena of what he saw and believed happened to new immigrants of America.

Neary followed this paragraph with testimony to her own propensity to stereotype, blaming television for its bad influence and then concluding that teenagers, who tend to watch a lot of television, are most vulnerable to its misleading images. She wanted to argue, I think, that teenagers are motivated in the same way adults are said to be motivated: to define themselves they need to define enemies. Television encouraged teenagers to laugh at others, reducing others to their ridiculous difference.

It struck me that Neary, someone with the potential and desire to have a voice in her community, should do more unpacking of “hypocrisy,” a received discourse that does more to silence Neary than to illuminate the dynamics of prejudice. As a social practice, what if some timely hypocrisy is necessary, or what if hypocrisy at certain times is experienced not as hypocritical but as commonsensical self-interest, self-interest that new immigrants and unpopular teenagers in their turn are also trying to advance? Neary’s non-hypocritical rehabilitation of immigrants also leaves untouched the logical structure of objectification, implying that it is okay, for example, if men objectify women, as long as those men were never once women themselves.

We could not stick with this line of inquiry, however, because Neary was producing a poster display on composting for a nearby community’s organic garden. Although I am not saying that one or more weeks immersed in sounding heroic would have made Neary fluent in critical reading as a revising strategy, I am saying more time would have helped. And it certainly would not have hurt, neither misleading her about what academic literacy is nor mistreating her as a developing writer. For that is, finally, what happens with writing-for projects: they do to our students what every ethical authority on service learning tells them not to do to their community partners.

My writing-for service learning experiment can be framed as follows: my students and I experienced service learning together, but in tellingly different ways, even though we all came to resemble the professional writers Henry describes. I retrained and retooled, under mild duress in the “university of excellence” (Readings), adding service learning components to lower- and upper-division courses in a bid for institutional currency and favor—and in a bid to bind the ties between our work in the classroom and our surrounding communities. But in the big picture, I may have weakened the ties it’s my job to fasten, and I may have done so by thrusting my students into fast capitalism, requiring them to become free-lance information workers: non-union, temporary, second-class, no ownership, out-sourced, the privatizing State’s stop-gap substitutes for laid-off labor in underfunded programs in a country that forces its young men to register for selective

service, yet none of us to register for national-service alternatives.

This reflective experiment was useful for me because I was “in the problematic situation” I was seeking to “describe and change” (Schön *The Reflective Practitioner* 347). My experiment, intended to solve certain pedagogical problems, changed the “social reality” of basic writing, a change which created new problems and dilemmas (347)—new problems and dilemmas for *me*, however, not for my students. When writing for the community, students do good—but very little seeking, describing, naming, acting, and changing. Helping our students develop their rhetorical abilities is the best service we writing teachers can provide. If the case I have made against the writing-for variety of service learning is at all plausible, then we should reconsider whether our best purposes are served by writing-for projects.

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