

Community Action: A Framework for Egalitarian, Reciprocal Community Engagement
in the Field of Rhetoric and Composition

by

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The term "community action" is bandied about from time to time in various ways and contexts by people wishing to promote community change. My first encounter with the term occurred during my participation on the English Department's Community Action Committee, which helped inspire me to make community work a core part of my academic identity. I drew great inspiration from the members of this committee, who included Buzz Alexander, Joyce Meier, George Cooper, Sarah Wolfson, Jean Borger, Julie Ellison, Rebecca Ingalls, and Cari Carpenter.

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ABSTRACT

Community Action: A Framework for Egalitarian, Reciprocal Community Engagement
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This dissertation's central aim is to articulate a framework for scholars of rhetoric and composition to engage in egalitarian literacy-based community engagement while producing intellectually rigorous academic work. In order to constitute ethically responsible outreach, it is imperative that collaborations between institutions of higher education and local communities produce mutual benefits. However, too often the academy's institutional framework subsumes the goals of enacting egalitarianism and reciprocity, which results in service that clearly benefits the academy while marginalizing the community's gain. Rather, engagement should allow all partners to serve and receive service, experience meaningful learning, and produce concrete action that improves their lives and communities in substantive ways. To that end, I conceptualize a paradigm of engagement called *community action*, which subverts the traditional dichotomies found in service learning by pursuing egalitarianism and reciprocity as its principal focus.

Community action establishes its theoretical framework from merging two recently developed praxes of engagement within rhetoric and composition: “hybrid literacies” and “tactical” collaboration. I draw from Ellen Cushman and Linda Flower, who advocate service-learning partnerships defined by “hybrid literacy” practices that are mutually accessible by all participants, and from Paula Mathieu, who promotes flexible, “tactical” engagement that positions the community *relationship*, rather than an academic service *program*, at the center of the engagement process. Through this conjoined framework I articulate a model of literacy-based engagement that engenders projects designed mutually by, and producing shared benefits for, academic and community partners. Data has been collected from published accounts of partnerships between scholars in the field and community representatives from a variety of contexts.

Community action, in its egalitarian vision of how universities and communities can develop and carry out collaborative projects, complicates our understanding of how literacy practices influence the teaching of writing. Community action can begin to reshape writing instruction by helping people perceive how their individual and community narratives intertwine, and how writing can be a practical means to enhance both. In this respect, the field can respond actively and pragmatically to economic and demographic shifts that, in coming decades, will increasingly impact both where and how writing is taught.

Chapter One

Introduction

The Promise and Peril of the Service-Learning Movement in Higher Education

This is a dissertation founded in idealism but ever cognizant of reality. I believe that institutions of higher education have a significant and vital interest in collaborating with the communities that surround them to create a more just and sustainable world. But within the walls of academe, the “scholarship of engagement” as envisioned by Ernest Boyer continues to operate in the margins, placing scholars in a difficult bind in which their objectives—the pursuit of social justice and the pressing demands of professional life—seem in constant conflict with one another. With these challenges in mind, I seek to offer a vision of the academy in the twenty-first century in which academicians can successfully integrate these dual goals into a single scholarly identity. This dissertation, then, participates in an academic tradition of self-reflection and consideration geared toward enacting the ideals of higher education’s civic mission—best exemplified in the work of scholars such as John Dewey and Ernest Boyer—of creating and applying knowledge for the benefit of all.

I take heart in the idealism of scholars like Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, who argue that institutions of higher education, with their great “status, wealth, and power” (78), offer perhaps the best means for achieving the “practical realization of

the democratic promise of America for all Americans.” Harkavy and Puckett argue that universities are “the only modern institutions both designed to encompass the broad range of human experience and devoted to the use of reason to help deal with the enormous complexity of our society and world” (559). These authors go on to say that, as a consequence of this reality, universities are the:

...closest approximation we have to a universal institution—an institution whose particular mission is the general mission of societal improvement and whose resources, when appropriately organized, enable it to contribute to achieving that general mission. (559)

In this vision, institutions of higher education can play perhaps *the* crucial role in counteracting the various social inequalities that continue to produce tremendous poverty, massive incarceration, high unemployment, and poor access to high-quality education in many communities throughout the country, especially in urban environments. Harkavy and Puckett see a moral imperative in such work, an imperative I have come to share.

David Maurrasse also notes how, in the wake of global economic labor shifts, urban universities and colleges have taken on an increasingly prominent role in the fates of their host cities:

But whether or not the housing stock is dilapidated, the streets are dirty, the crime is high, the businesses have skipped town—local colleges and universities remain.... They are sticky capital. Not only are they sticking around, they are significant sources of employment and generally essential to local economies. (4)

Unlike corporations that can move abroad, urban universities and their large acreages will remain rooted in the communities of their origin, and therefore, Maurrasse summarizes, “We can say now that the fate of communities is the fate of higher education” (5). At this historical moment, universities are increasingly perceived as *needing* to be major players in community uplift, both for the sake of these local communities and for their own

welfare. Urban universities in particular, in order to maintain student enrollment and attract faculty who will raise families in these same environments, possess a strong self-interest to engage local communities actively and productively (Maurrasse 21).

I believe there is much reason for optimism in reflecting on the status, wealth, and power discussed by Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett. Such sentiments are corroborated by Derek Bok, who points out that the American system of higher education is the preeminent system in the world, and that a “whopping 93% of Americans agree that ‘colleges and universities are among the most valuable resources to the U.S.’” (310). Yet, when it comes to using these enormous resources to collaborate with surrounding communities, higher education has a mixed record. Indeed, Harkavy and Puckett, in spite of their optimism about the potential for higher education to promote the public good, recognize that these institutions do not always follow through on this promise. Too often, these authors remark, universities in recent years “have done precious little to help collapsing urban communities, instead “allowing urban pathologies to deepen and to grow around them” (557). And when these institutions do seek to engage their surrounding communities, they do not always do so with the best intentions or results. Paula Mathieu has written about the ways in which academics, often “entitled by race and cultural capital, can launch themselves “thoughtlessly into unfamiliar streets and buildings,” totally incognizant of the “mistrust and apprehension or a sense of why people might be suspicious of working with universities” (x).

Considering Mathieu’s admonition, scholars who wish to promote social change in underserved communities must attend thoughtfully to the consequences of engagement, including both the potential advantages and drawbacks of such work. In

spite of the great promise observed by Harkavy and Puckett, there is no reason to assume that forays into community spaces will necessarily or inevitably produce positive benefits for those communities. Mathieu's warning suggests the importance of entering community spaces with a sense of humility, and her reflection on such efforts invokes a spirit of self-examination, i.e. that the process of engaging communities can always be made better.

In this spirit of reflection and institutional self-examination, I will explore throughout this dissertation the work of scholars who have made it their mission to push institutions of higher education, particularly within the field of rhetoric and composition, to work for the common good, and to merge these efforts with their scholarship. I will investigate the struggles they have faced and the successes they and their community partners have achieved. And from the beginning I want to emphasize that, although at times I will critique their work, I greatly admire each of these scholars for pushing academia forward toward realizing its civic potential. My critique is meant constructively, as it intends to push us even farther toward the collaborative ideals of reciprocity and egalitarianism. I accept Paula Mathieu's claim that collaborative projects between universities and communities are "radically insufficient"—a term whose meaning and implications I will explore in chapter four—to achieve their social justice aims. Yet, if performed conscientiously and attentively, such projects can create a sense of hope and energy that might impel participants ever closer to realizing their long-term objectives. Community engagement, then, radically insufficient though it may be, remains an imperative for civically-minded scholars.

I would like to count myself among these educators who seek to use the power of institutions of higher education to promote a larger public good. I have observed firsthand how the forces of social and cultural reproduction operate in a variety of settings; I have gotten to know incarcerated citizens and seen how the decades-long rise in incarceration rates have devastated families and propagated a stark racial imbalance in prisons (Liptak; Jerome Miller); I have worked with talented, motivated Detroit high school students who are struggling to realize aspirations that extend far beyond the cycle of high unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and limited access to higher education that continually beleaguer their neighborhoods; looking abroad, I have seen how rampant corruption in Uzbekistan's political, economic, and educational systems have stifled the necessary educational progress of an entire generation of young people who grew up after independence from the Soviet Union; and I have spent much time over the past several years trying to figure out how my anger about these injustices is relevant to my work as a citizen and a scholar. This dissertation has emerged from this process of thought, discovery, and reflection.

Social Responsibility and the Roots of Service Learning

Among the various endeavors that comprise higher education's attempts to pursue civic engagement, the most rapid growth has occurred through the practice of service learning (Galston 229). The term "service learning" has been used in a variety of ways, and as William Plater points out, "There are—and should be—as many definitions of service-learning as there are institutions that explicitly combine service with learning as a goal" (5). This observation emphasizes the idea that each service-learning program

should adapt itself to the specific local circumstances of each university and community in which it occurs, including the particular needs and resources of those involved. Hence, there is perhaps no universally agreed upon definition of service learning. However, Campus Compact, which is an expansive inter-collegiate collaboration dedicated to the “increased commitment of ... [academic] institutions to public service” (Kendall 7), offers a good general idea of the key goals and features of most service-learning programs:

Service-learning means a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully-organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience. (quoted in Plater 5)

Service learning, then, is a form of experiential education consisting of direct collaborations between universities and local communities. It is intended not merely to supplement the learning that goes on in the classroom, but to enhance it by creating a “real-world” context for curricular material. Service learning distinguishes itself from traditional community service by integrating reflection into the action of the service, and by explicitly encouraging students to develop social responsibility as a function of this action and reflection.

Much of the civic possibilities that have been observed in service learning have precisely to do with its capacity to offer students real-world experience that cannot occur in classrooms alone. Jane Kendall expresses this promise with the observation “*that there is something uniquely powerful about the combination of service and learning, that there is something fundamentally more dynamic in the integration of the two than in*

either alone” (19, italics in original). She continues, “The combination of service and learning touches something very fundamental about the human spirit and its relationship to other human beings and to the surrounding culture” (19). In other words, by encouraging students to engage and serve members of the community directly, service learning can make civic engagement a palpable activity for students, rather than merely an abstract concept. Because of practitioners’ optimistic appraisals of service-learning’s capacity to promote civic responsibility, the practice has spread quickly throughout the academy:

According to the results of the 2002 Campus Compact annual member survey, service-learning is gradually taking root across much of American higher education. Not only did membership in the Compact grow by over 60% between 1998 and 2001, but by 2001, 87% of Compact members indicated they offered service-learning courses—up eight percentage points from 2000. Indeed, institutions offered on average 27 such courses. (Zlotkowski and Saltmarsh 47)

In fact, “most faculty have come to recognize service-learning as the primary means of enacting civic engagement” (Plater 4).

Many practitioners of service learning locate its theoretical roots in the works of John Dewey, who wrote extensively on the importance of experiential education, the relationship of the individual to society, and the pedagogical benefits of action tied to reflection. In fact, Dewey himself was heavily influenced by the settlement house movement of the Progressive Era, which might be considered a theoretical and practical precursor to contemporary service learning. Although certainly not all settlement houses were directly linked to higher education, the “best of the settlement house movement was connected in New York and Chicago with local universities” (Fisher et al 20). In particular, Dewey’s friend and colleague Jane Addams “and the other settlers at Hull-

House in Chicago worked closely with the University of Chicago, helping to provide a model of civic engagement and social research” (20). These university-community projects “underscored the potential for community building and social change that could accrue from university-educated community workers involved in partnership with neighborhood residents” (20), so that the settlement houses emphasized the “relationship and interdependence among people and community institutions” (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 202).

Addams herself, as a result of her various encounters at Hull-House, came to understand that “the people she was trying to help had better ideas about how their lives might be improved than she and her colleagues did” (Menand 311). Working at Hull-House helped her see the vital importance of breaking down distinctions between people, so that the “obliteration of invidious group and class distinctions became her obsession” (311). She did not privilege university representatives as “experts.” Hence, by emphasizing a communal vision of “educational and social renewal,” and by placing university teachers and students in residence within urban neighborhoods, settlement houses like Hull-House fostered genuine “cultural interaction” between academic and community representatives and supported a “myriad of social, cultural, and religious associations” between peoples of different cultures (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 202).

Dewey’s regular exposure to Hull-House facilitated the development of his pedagogical and epistemological theories of learning (Menand 319). For example, in his conception of the “Dewey school,” a laboratory school connected to the University of Chicago, he sought to promote an interconnected educational environment:

...where some actual & literal constructive activity shall be the centre & source of the whole thing, & from which the work should be always

growing out in two directions—one the social bearings of that constructive industry, the other the contact with nature which supplies it with its materials. (quoted in Menand 319)

Thus, he promoted an experimental knowledge-making process that by its own operation broke down distinctions and promoted a unity of all elements contributing to the formation of knowledge. This theory was the pedagogical equivalent of Addams' cultural leveling (Menand 320).

Additionally, as Jim Ostrow explains, Dewey “contends that we need to think of human growth in relation to educational practice as being rather than having an end” (72). In other words, education is not preparation for life: it *is* life. In contrast, most educators tend to “focus on the problem of ... students' readiness for what they need to, in the end, get.” Ostrow continues:

But here the question becomes what do we mean by students 'getting it'? Students may see subject matter as an exigent text—a closed matter once learned—or as an only partially defined field of opportunities for perceiving, acting within, and changing their environment. When they see subject matter in the latter way, its import lasts—it endures as an impulse to inquiry and as a perspective for understanding. The alternative is subject matter forgotten directly following the course, because it has been discarded through the vehicles of the test and course grade; it has been learned, the student has taken it and doesn't need to take in anymore. (72)

When knowledge is conceived of as a static, closed affair, it can be neatly and arbitrarily divided into discrete, equally fixed subjects that must only be imbibed. Dewey, however, believed that learning should be an ongoing process of invention and reinvention, thought and experiment, and action and reflection.

In treatises such as *Experience and Education*, Dewey sharply criticizes traditional conceptions of learning as the “acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders,” which constitutes a “static” form of education (19).

In traditional educational practices, knowledge does not change or progress through the learning process but is rather entirely determined and dependent upon what has come before. It is an already “finished product” meant to be handed down from teacher to student. Dewey instead viewed knowledge as a malleable process of inquiry that must be made and re-made for each student; it is a lifelong, never-ending process. Additionally, it is a self-perpetuating process of continual growth, with all educative experiences paving the way for future educational experiences. The primary criteria for determining the quality of an educational experience as a form of growth, then, is whether it creates “conditions for future growth” (36). In other words, true growth begets further growth, and students should come to see how they can change their environment and themselves as a function of inquiry. In this light, meaning making is itself an act of social change, and for Dewey, “Students must have the ability ‘to take their own active part in aggressive participation in bringing about a new social order’” (Deans 39).

His interaction with Addams and Hull House also helped Dewey come to theorize “the importance of intellectual development in relation to social development, including the value of service to, and engagement with, others” (O’Grady 49). At the heart of Dewey’s pedagogy is the idea that “education is ultimately social in its aims” (Deans 33). Dewey argues that, just as learning is not preparation for a future end, but rather is an end in itself, “the only way to prepare for social life is to engage in social life” (quoted in Deans 34). Consequently:

Dewey favors any opportunity through which we can redirect curriculum from lessons that quiz individual accumulation of knowledge to projects that draw on individual talents within collaborative efforts that intervene in social settings, whether classrooms or local communities. (34)

According to Dewey, pedagogical practices that encourage a focus on the individual severely detract from the overall learning that can happen. Learning is a fundamentally social act, and educational environments, whether inside or outside traditional classrooms, should work with this reality rather than resist it.

Beyond recognizing the social nature of learning, Dewey insists on the social *responsibility* of learning:

A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his full stature. An environment in which some are practically enslaved, degraded, limited, will always react to create conditions that prevent the full development of those who fancy they enjoy complete freedom and unhindered growth. (quoted in Deans 35)

Learning in isolation for personal gain, which continues to be the paradigm of most university classrooms, stunts the growth of each individual, whereas learning dedicated to the improvement of others' welfare directly benefits everyone involved. Learning undertaken in the absence of a sense of social responsibility not only harms those who have been denied access to high-quality educational environments, but prevents those privileged enough to have such access from experiencing the full flowering of their potential as well.

The linkages between Dewey's theorization of learning and the promise of service learning are clear. Service learning, as ideally conceived of, creates the "possibility of developing an active concern for the social problems of the day, as well as an enduring, habitual sense of effecting positive change in the world, within the context of exercising an academic imagination" (Ostrow 75). As a result, service learning can significantly increase the relevance of subject matter to students' lives and the community by

perpetuating "the value of academic subject matter for understanding and for improving the human environment" (75).

The Service Continuum

The variety of service learning practices occurring throughout the academy has become enormous. And, as stated above, each particular incarnation of service learning depends on the local circumstances of each postsecondary institution and its surrounding communities. Nevertheless, in terms of the ethical and political implications of the services performed, scholars have observed prevailing trends. Keith Morton, for example, in an important article entitled "The Irony of Service," has observed the tendency of service learning theorists to view service as a continuum ranging from, on the one end, charity, to an intermediate point having to do with developing concrete projects, to social change or transformation on the opposite end.

Theorists typically articulate a negative stance toward charity, which "is often viewed as the provision of direct service where control of the service (resources and decisions affecting their distribution) remain[s] with the provider" (21). Some argue that "charity focuses on naming the deficits of those served, rather than their strengths, and creates a long-term dependency of those served on those with the resources" (21). They also believe that charity is paternalistic and self-serving, and that "little, if any, attempt is made to understand or affect the structural causes of the problem." Accordingly, these critics believe charity should only be used in times of disaster or extreme emergency.

Project models, the intermediate site on the continuum, tend to "focus on defining problems and their solutions and implementing well-conceived plans for achieving those

solutions” (21). A primary goal of this model is to develop “partnerships of organizations that collectively have access to the resources necessary to ‘make something happen’” (22). This model tends to be critiqued for reinforcing a distinction between “experts” and “lay” people, which leads to situations where “the experts necessary to design and manage a program magnify inequalities of power, and make the served dependent on the expert” (22). If the experts implement their plans without sufficient understanding of the problem or the needs of the community, they are liable to “generate outcomes that exacerbate the original problem or lead to new problems.”

Social change models, on the contrary, “typically focus on process: building relationships among or within stakeholder groups, and creating a learning environment that continually peels away the layers of the onion called ‘root causes’” (22). The explicit goal of most social change models of service is to “focus directly and indirectly on politically empowering the powerless” (23). Unlike the previous two models, social change “is a difficult model to critique because, in its idealized form, it is an end-point on the ‘good’ side of the continuum.” Evaluation of this model has to do with the “integrity” of the relationships being cultivated in the process of developing a “clear understanding of the root causes of problems and effective strategies for addressing them.”

This concept of a service continuum has a logic built into it, namely that a primary goal of service learning should be to move students from the charity end to the social change end. As Morton points out, the continuum “compels us to act as if ‘progress’ consists of moving students ‘farther along,’ that is, out of charity and toward advocacy” (20). This logic has become a basic assumption of many service-learning

adherents, and Morton argues that these “assumptions about progress are a powerful element in how many practitioners view, structure and assess their service-learning courses and programs” (20). According to this conception, models of service that do not lead students toward social change are inherently flawed. Unfortunately, according to Morton, these assumptions about a continuum and the need for progress along it, aside from casting charity in an irredeemably negative light, generally do not “square with how people do service or why they do it” (21).

For example, the presumption of charity as self-defeating and naïve ignores the fact that charity is a positive term for many students who engage in service. For them, charity constitutes “recognition of their obligation to help, and an expression of their recognition that our society affords them very few opportunities to make a contribution” (25). Although enhancing, challenging, and complicating students’ understanding of what service means should be an important goal of service learning, the dismissal of their conception of charity reflects a condescension toward students that ironically mirrors the condescension these theorists assume to be inherent in the very nature of charity. It is difficult to imagine how such an attitude toward students’ own motivations for service can be pedagogically productive. Furthermore, Morton notes how his own understanding of charity was complicated by interviews with various religious leaders. A Jewish colleague informed him that the Hebrew word for charity is “based on the idea of anger at injustice provoking one to remedy that injustice” (24), which is a description of charity much more closely aligned with social change. Other religious colleagues, including a Quaker and a Congregationalist, offered definitions of the word that “began with the

radical act of recognizing the worth of every person.” For these people, charity can reinforce, rather than detract from, the dignity of those who are served.

Consequently, Morton rejects the service continuum and conceives in its place three paradigms of service learning: charity, project, and social change, each of which “is based upon distinctive worldviews, ways of identifying and addressing problems, and long-term visions of individual and community transformation” (21). Morton explains that each “paradigm has ‘thin’ versions that are disempowering and hollow, and ‘thick’ versions that are sustaining and potentially revolutionary” (24). Rather than trying to move students down the path from charity to social change, intended growth should occur within each paradigm from “thin” to “thick” service, or “from expressions which lack integrity or depth to those which have integrity or depth.”

The thin versions of the paradigms include:

...paternalistic or self-serving charity that imposes services on unreceptive ‘others;’ projects that magnify or institutionalize inequalities of power, produce outcomes that are worse than the original problem, or lead to unrealistic and unsustainable dependencies; social change work that is only rhetorical, narrowly selfish, and against a wide range of offenses without offering alternatives. And any of the paradigms can raise false expectations, inflame social divisions and leave people tired and cynical.
(28)

Whereas the thin versions of the first two paradigms are often emphasized by service-learning theorists, Morton’s conception of a thin version of social change is particularly insightful precisely because so many theorists tend to assume social change to be the gold standard of service learning. Indeed, their conception of social change tends to assume a political transformation of students in line with their own political views, an outcome which might differ significantly from the goals or political beliefs of either the students or the people in the community whom they serve.

The thick versions of the paradigms are “grounded in deeply held, internally coherent values; match means and ends; describe a primary way of interpreting and relating to the world; offer a way of defining problems and solutions; and suggest a vision of what a transformed world might look like” (28). Morton’s idea that a “thick” version of charity is possible is as refreshing as his critique of “thin” versions of social change. Ultimately, Morton suggests that, at their thickest, the “paradigms seem to intersect, or at least to complement one another,” for insisting “on the humanity of another person in the face of sometimes overwhelming pressure to deny that humanity can be a motive for charity, for project and for social change” (28). Yet, although the thick versions of the paradigms blend in some respects, at the level of “efficacy and action” the differences between the paradigms become clear.

To clarify his concerns about how the model of service learning for social change can be enacted in thin ways, Morton narrates a pedagogical experience from a time when he adhered to the continuum; these assumptions led to “ironies” of service that he also finds evident in many examples of service learning for social change. In this earlier course he tried to “incorporate ‘movement’ politics and address knotty issues such as racism while having students engage in tutoring or care for infants at an AIDS center.” The students, who “grasp[ed] the content intellectually, ask[ed] over and over again what their service ha[d] to do with the course content” (29). Ultimately, he realized that the students were raising fundamental questions at “the heart of experiential education.” If “experience is a way of knowing,” the students were asking, then “why do you have us doing service that is at best only partially consistent with what you are teaching? Why do you teach change and have us help manage programs or do direct service” (29)? The

irony Morton came to see in this course reflects a problematic assumption in much service learning in higher education, that “the learning consequences of service may differ significantly from the nature and immediate purpose of the service itself.” In fact, these disparities can create mixed signals for students and ultimately reinforce the idea that social change is merely an abstract concept that does not apply to the actual practices of service. As Dewey argues, experience leads to quality education through a give and take between action and reflection, but the example of service learning offered by Morton did not provide opportunities for direct experiences of action for social change. The reflection that should have moved students along the continuum remained confined to abstract discussions of social inequities in the classroom, a problem that contradicted the purpose of the experiential education.

A second but related problem had to do with students who resisted “the logic of the continuum, saying, in essence, ‘That is not me. I’m not moving.’” “What,” Morton asks, “should be done with these students?” Rather than trying to move students along an ultimately artificial continuum that dismisses their own motives for service, he believes it is more productive to help students “articulate more fully what they believe and think about the practice and meaning of service, and to challenge them to work with ever-increasing integrity and insight” (30). Hence, it is important to recognize that there is nothing inherently disempowering about charitable forms of service. Likewise, there is nothing inherently empowering about service that claims to promote social change. Everything depends on *how* these forms of service are undertaken; we must evaluate the actual processes of service, not merely their intentions.

Morton's articulation of three service paradigms makes it possible to reorient one's perspective on the wide variety of service that exists throughout the academy. It creates an opportunity to recognize that charitable forms of service, when practiced with integrity and depth, can lead to positive outcomes, and reminds theorists not to assume the moral and ethical superiority of service learning that actively claims to promote social change. In the article's conclusion, Morton recounts a definition of service offered by Nadinne Cruz, who defines it as "a process of integrating intention with action in the context of a movement toward a just relationship" (31). "Irony," Morton points out, "is ... the gulf between intention and action," and the central irony he describes here is "the gap between the content and outcomes of our teaching, on the one hand, and the type of service in which we engage on the other."

Having given a basic impression of the varieties of service learning that exist throughout the academy, I will now turn my attention to the particular subset of courses that explicitly and actively promote service learning as a site for potential social change. I am heartened by Morton's attempt to resurrect charity as a potentially positive form of service learning, and I agree wholeheartedly with the idea that charity and projects can be necessary and important approaches toward service. Although I have grave doubts about the percentage of such models that, in practice, express the integrity and depth advocated by Morton, it is not my intention here to critique these forms of service. Rather, as a citizen and scholar who is outraged by the frightening and overwhelming persistence of oppressive social inequalities in our society, who is very much invested in calls for social change, and who wants to believe that as an academic I can play (however small) a role in promoting justice, I believe it is crucial for higher education to promote social

responsibility. Furthermore, I agree with scholars who believe that service learning is the most important method yet devised within institutions of higher education for promoting such responsibility. Yet I am greatly concerned by the “ironies” of service described by Morton, and I possess significant misgivings about whether service learning is capable of producing the kinds of social transformation sought by its proponents. For these reasons, I will explore the ironic practices that sometimes accompany service learning for social change.

The Problems of Service Learning as a Site for Social Change

As explained by Morton, the majority of service-learning theorists who promote social change assume a continuum of service with charity on one end and social change on the other. Expressing disdain for the patronizing tendencies of charitable service, they wish to push students toward the social change end of the continuum, even when the activities the students engage in resemble much more closely the direct service traditionally aligned with charity. This disparity between the instructors’ purposes and the nature of the services performed highlights the ironies of service described by Morton. As will be shown, perhaps more discomfiting is the fact that the continuum only seems to exist for the students themselves. Although a primary goal of service learning for social change is to empower the powerless, theorists rarely describe efforts to move the community representatives to a social change perspective.

In a 1999 study cataloging 599 college service-learning programs throughout the country, the Department of Housing and Urban Development found that:

50% of all programs were direct-service programs (tutoring, serving food, clothes collections, blood drives), 42% provided technical assistance

(leadership classes, computer training, planning studios, grant-writing assistance), 7% were mostly involved in physical revitalization (business incubation, tree planting, housing renovation), and only 1% were political advocacy programs (building tenant councils, drafting legislation, challenging officials with organized groups of residents). (Robinson 145)

The forms of service described here as “direct service” indicate charitable models of service, and the “technical assistance” and “physical revitalization” programs fall into Morton’s category of the project model. These statistics indicate that 99% of the service-learning programs cataloged in the study constituted one of the two more heavily criticized forms of service. Since far more than 1% of practitioners explicitly promote service learning for social change, it becomes clear that the great majority of social-change focused courses, in practice, do not provide students experiences that complement classroom discussions about inequality and social transformation.

A specific and typical example of service learning intended to promote social change will elucidate these ironies more clearly. The example comes from a sociology course taught by Jim Ostrow, who provides an excerpt from a student’s reflection on a transformative experience that occurred during her service in a food program. The student writes:

I heard one of the children say, “Mom, where are we going to sleep tonight?” The mother’s voice was quiet, but as I walked I strained to hear her response, “We’ll find somewhere, we always do.” I clenched my grip around the apple carton. I became so angry, I felt like throwing the box on the floor ... I wanted to invite all of these people back to [the college] and give them a place to stay. I wanted to do so much but in reality all I could do was pass out apples, and try to get to know and understand them. I was starting to understand. (77)

In this moment of epiphany, recounted in her course journal as a sudden sense of indignation at the plight of a homeless woman and her child, this student displays the beginning of a new social awareness about poverty, structural inequality, disempowering

dependence on inadequate social service systems, and the limits of volunteering. As Ostrow explains, the moment creates “grounds for inquiry into the experience of homelessness and existing social attitudes. The student now perceives homeless individuals as being underserved, disadvantaged, as opposed to being necessarily lazy, or in some other way flawed in their character” (77). Placed within the context of the course, her epiphany can help the student find more productive responses than passing out apples. For Ostrow, “Sociology provides the vehicle for broader and deeper understanding, inquiries that might lead to solutions” (77).

While the social transformation beginning to occur in this student is remarkable and heartening, it is important to register that Ostrow’s explicit objective is for students to develop a sophisticated *understanding* of the sociological forces producing such tragic circumstances in the hopes that this understanding will lead to social-change efforts at some indefinite point in the future. However, within the confines of the course itself, understanding (for the students), rather than political advocacy or some form of concrete, collaborative action for social change, is the de facto endpoint. In other words, the actual services performed by the students fall in *practice* into the category of charity. Due to the nature of this service, the student has little choice but to focus on the deficits of the “service recipients,” and certainly the act of passing out apples does nothing to combat the problem of debilitating long-term dependency on social services. At the end of the excerpt, the student self-identifies herself as a person beginning to understand, i.e. she appears to be moving toward the social change end of the continuum; but we learn nothing about what this understanding really means or, more importantly, what it will lead to in the future. There is merely an assumption that this epiphany will lead to future

social advocacy efforts, an assumption that, as Jeremy Leeds points out, lacks concrete foundation.

In a critique of service learning for social change, Leeds observes that “*there is no evidence that service-learning is an effective vehicle for social transformation*” (119, italics in original). Hence, “Even if all students come out of all classes with the social change perspective, it is a dubious leap of faith or logic that any actual social transformation will occur as a result.” Leeds’s argument applies directly to the case of Ostrow’s student because we learn nothing about what role social transformation will play in her future. This problem is particularly relevant for service-learning courses that emphasize vague goals such as “empowerment” and the elucidation of the “root causes” of sociological inequity. Can we be certain that this student has been “empowered” by her epiphany and that it will lead her to social advocacy, or is it equally likely that she will despair and hence feel disempowered by her new critical awareness of the sheer crippling scale of society’s structural inequalities?

Perhaps more significantly, Ostrow has little to say about the outcomes for the “service recipients,” such as the clients of the food program. It would seem equally important, if not more so, that the woman in the student’s journal become indignant about her own situation and develop the same “tools of sociology toward social change” that Ostrow desires his students to develop. But the direct service described here is not intended to produce a similar epiphany, and the empowerment it might lead to, for that woman. Since it is the existence of “service recipients” that makes the service necessary in the first place, it is curious that so little attention is paid to measuring the impact of the service on them. In *practice*, in many service-learning courses like Ostrow’s, the

“service recipients” often “serve” as socioeconomic guinea pigs for the civic development of the students. One could even argue that, according to this characterization, the *students* are the real “service recipients” in this relationship. Indeed, this inattention to outcomes for the community representatives themselves seems to reinforce the ironies described by Morton.

In an article strongly criticizing this tendency to de-emphasize or even ignore community outcomes, Carol Wiechman Maybach points out that very few courses “build service-learning projects around a model that is accountable for the results of the service experience on the service recipient” (224). Instead, “The focus of the majority of research on effectiveness of service-learning projects has ... been on the growth of the student.” This absence of attention to community impacts undermines the service aspect of the project, for “despite the complexity of the issues of service, students are encouraged to engage in service provision without a clear understanding of how their service is affecting the communities around them” (224). For example, in spite of the services Ostrow’s students provide, at the end of the day (and, presumably, every other day) that mother and child are left searching for a place to sleep.

Service-learning theorists like Ostrow encourage students to develop the grounds and motivation for becoming civically engaged in ways that will lead to positive social change. However, these courses often do not promote that same civic understanding and social responsibility in community members. Fisher et al express the negative implications of this distinction: “Of course most civic engagement projects ... are more paternalistic, that is treating the neighborhood as an object of study or development rather than as real partners who both participate in and benefit from the projects with”

institutions of higher education (18). By emphasizing the differences between “service providers” and “service recipients,” such courses can ironically, in spite of their good intentions, encourage a sense of paternalism in students in their relationship to community representatives. The courses do not emphasize the resources community members bring to such collaborations, how they might actively fulfill students’ needs, or how the two groups might work as partners to solve mutually-agreed upon problems.

These problematic incarnations of service learning for social change lack the thickness of integrity and depth called for by Morton. Rather than adopting Nadinne Cruz’s “process of integrating intention with action in the context of a movement toward a just relationship,” these practices emphasize the distinction between the university and its community counterparts, and thus ironically reinforce the power imbalances that already tend to characterize the relationship between institutions of higher education and their surrounding communities. As explained by Donna Cherry and Jon Shefner:

Town and gown differences include perceptions of the university’s expertise. One danger is the assumption that institutional knowledge surpasses the community’s understanding of its needs. This perception may lead universities to dominate problem-solving efforts, to prioritize university interests over those of the community, and to “treat the community as deficient.” (227)

The authority of the “expert’s” knowledge can silence the voices of other constituents. Such dynamics do not allow for meaningful, productive utilization of the diversity of resources people from both sides bring to the table. Instead, it is too easy for the university to assume a dominant position, and service-learning projects that privilege outcomes for the university side enhance this problem. Whereas Morton shows that the university’s “expertise” tends to define project models on the service continuum, the

social change model also promotes the university's "expertise" over the "lay" knowledge of the community.

In fact, even the way such collaborations are described emphasizes this distinction. The dichotomy of "university" and "community" subtly implies that the university is not itself a community, as if "'community' means only the disadvantaged and needy and does not include those performing service" (Barber 249). The power imbalance in the relationship becomes reinscribed in the terms themselves, with the term "community" bearing a negative, if not explicitly acknowledged, taint. "Community" tacitly means dysfunctional and needy, a group of people who always receive service and never provide it. This dichotomy also minimizes the significance of the important urban community-building efforts that communities have performed for decades without the aid of academia, efforts that "have convened people from all walks of life in solving many of the challenges facing urban areas" (Maurrasse 5). In fact, as Jeremy Leeds explains, "most (all?) meaningful social change and transformation to this point in history has come with no connection to service-learning" (119). Social-change proponents, then, should be careful not to assume that the practical significance of their work "is of much greater significance than it really is." Higher education must not conceive of itself as what Nancy Thomas refers to as the "legendary 'white knight' rescuing the local community" (78).

Re-Imagining Engagement as a Process of Shared Interests, Shared Resources, and Shared Benefits

As explained by David Maurrasse, "Community partnerships have the potential to create a smarter higher educational system—one that is truly in tune with the critical

issues facing the cities, the farms, and all in between” (16). Genuine engagement with the community, rather than a hierarchical affiliation that reinforces the university’s superior, expert status, is the best way to achieve this potential. However, making such engagement possible requires a sophisticated understanding of communities both inside and outside academia. Steven Timmermans and Jeffrey Bouman observe that “community is not only a place, but also a set of relationships” (91). Hence, it is imperative that scholars interested in engagement “understand the complexity of relationships between the community and the institution of higher education from which partnership should emerge.” They explain that partnership “arises out of shared community interests, thereby requiring institutions of higher education to shed their authoritarian stance and become part of the community.” They cite a longitudinal study of a community development program by The National Society for Experiential Education, which found that sustainable partnerships have the following features:

Thinking, caring, active people within organizations who form a bond with other groups based on trust and open dialogue to arrive at shared values, goals, responsibilities, action and reflection; and to celebrate with style and grieve with passion when called for by accomplishment or loss. (91)

The primary bases of partnerships, according to this passage, have to do with trust, dialogue, and a mutual determination of and handling of objectives, values, and responsibilities. One side of the partnership cannot silence or dominate the other. And perhaps most importantly, both the benefits and costs of these relationships must be shared reciprocally.

Scholars interested in engaging local communities to promote social change, then, must “re-imagine” their relationship to “knowledge, learning and the community” (Fisher

et al 32) in order to match this understanding of community development. Fisher et al believe that such a re-imagination must occur in order for higher education to “function in reciprocal relationships fostering resource development that mutually benefit both parties” (32). This re-imagination must occur, in fact, not “simply because it is the right thing to do but also because the future of the university and the community are understood to be part of a fragile ecology of mutual dependence and possibility.” This re-imagining of engagement, I will argue in the following chapters, must include re-imagining the purpose and definition of social change itself.

In fact, the implied sense of expertise inscribed by some forms of engagement extends to the notion of social change, as some scholars who adhere to the service continuum assume consensus about what the term “social change” means and how it should be achieved. Such scholars promote a narrative of social change that involves societal transformation undertaken on a mass scale to overturn structural inequalities; indeed, the ideology of the service continuum reflects an assumption that this is the only valid interpretation of the term. Thus the service continuum implicitly dismisses other possible perspectives of social change, particularly ones that apply directly to a more localized or even individual level, although such perspectives might be held by community partners and students. This grand narrative of social change, then, may bear little relevance to the day-to-day experiences of community members, and thus can make cooperation less feasible.

However, not all scholars who seek to actively promote social change assume this consent about what the meaning of the term. Some scholars adhere to less hierarchical models of engagement and convey different perspectives about the purpose and meaning

of social change. As a result, throughout the dissertation I will maintain an ongoing examination of how the term is understood differently by various scholars. As I turn now to my own field of rhetoric and composition, I want to register the importance of these different visions of change, which are sometimes stated explicitly and at other times merely implied by the framework of engagement. In some cases, rhetoric and composition scholars, like the service-learning practitioners described above, also impose their definitions of social change upon the community with little regard to whether community partners share the same understanding or not. These scholars implicitly adhere to the service continuum, along with a literacy continuum that I will examine in detail in chapter two, and their praxes reflect the domination of the collaborative space by the university.

But other scholars in the field reject the service continuum and the assumption that social change must involve large collaborative efforts to redress structural inequalities. I will examine examples of these counter-narratives of social change in chapters three, four, and five. Over the course of these chapters, I will illustrate how these scholars' visions of change reflect an increasingly sophisticated understanding and attentiveness to the needs, interests, and resources of community partners. And, as I move toward articulating my own framework for community engagement in chapter five, I will argue that for engagement to move ever further toward the ideals of egalitarianism and reciprocity, it is necessary for academic and community partners to deliberate together what they mean by the term "social change" and how their collaborative work will promote such change.

Toward Egalitarian Engagement: Rhetoric and Composition's Suitability for Service Learning and the Path to Community Action

The field of rhetoric and composition has been a particularly welcome home to service learning in recent years. As Thomas Deans notes, "First-year composition remains the most-taught course in U.S. higher education and the place where most service-learning writing initiatives are launched" (82). Accordingly, the American Association for Higher Education chose to make composition studies the focus of its first volume in a series of "monographs on service-learning and the individual academic disciplines" (Zlotkowski, v), further emphasizing the widely perceived correspondence academics have found between service learning and composition studies. To a large degree the pedagogical practices that have emerged in rhetoric and composition in recent decades highlight the field's appropriateness as a location for service learning. Deans states that the:

...pedagogical values now universally lauded in composition—active learning, student-centered learning, cooperative learning, lifelong learning, cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, authentic evaluation—are built into the very blood and bone of most community-based academic projects. (2)

These Deweyan values promoting active learning, collaboration, and reflection, have become hallmarks of first-year writing courses and, as explained above, are among the pedagogical ideals most advocated by service-learning practitioners.

Active reflection, for example, is a particularly vital pedagogical principle of both composition studies and service learning; reflection essentially puts the "learning" in service learning. Anne Ruggles Gere and Jennifer Sinor illustrate the significance of this congruence:

While reflection is the feature that distinguishes service learning from other forms of volunteer work, reflection occupies a less certain position in writing. Of course revising or rethinking any piece of writing also requires reflection. The writer looks back over a composition to identify its strengths and weaknesses in preparation for composing the next version. And the current move toward portfolio assessment gives reflection a central place. Catherine Lucas, for example, traces what she calls a “profound shift in attitudes toward the role of evaluation” which she attributes to the implementation of portfolios and “reflective” versus summative evaluation (1). She applauds the increased attention being given to formative feedback in composition studies and credits the reflective components of the portfolio process with increased self-esteem and growth in student writers. This “reflective turn” in writing assessment creates a closer alignment between composition and service learning.

As composition has moved away from exclusively product-oriented writing instruction to an increasingly rich understanding of and emphasis on the importance of revision and the *process* of student writing (exemplified by the use of portfolios as a form of “reflective” evaluation), it has increasingly emphasized the vital role of reflection as a developmental tool in the writing students actually perform, their perceptions of themselves as writers, and instructors’ processes for evaluating student writing.

Of even greater import regarding the natural correspondence between the field and service learning is that, as Deans observes:

...the disciplinary discourse of rhetoric and composition, as it has unfolded over the past decade, posits a sound theoretical footing for community-oriented pedagogies. As a discipline, rhetoric and composition has adopted the broadly defined ‘social perspective’ on writing. The discipline prefers to see itself as having evolved from studies of the lone writer to more contextual understandings of composing; from a narrow, functional definition of literacy, focused on correctness, to a broader definition; from an exclusive focus on academic discourse to the study of both school and nonacademic contexts for writing; from presuming white middle-class culture as normative to analyzing and inviting cultural difference; and from gatekeeping at the university to facilitating the advancement of all students. (8)

The field has often been characterized as occupying a “gatekeeping” function in the academy, weeding out students unable to display sufficient facility with academic discourse. And although some scholars (e.g. Crowley; Smith) argue that gatekeeping continues to be a primary function of first-year writing courses, many compositionists pursue pedagogical practices that promote student success regardless of their cultural backgrounds, even if students’ “home” literacy practices do not conform to the academic mainstream.

Literacy itself has traditionally been defined as an individual and autonomous cognitive process having to do with discrete skills related to reading and writing. However, as Deans argues above, the recent historical development of the field has entailed a “social turn” away from acontextual, skill-based literacy development toward understanding the contextually-nuanced social forces embedded in literacy practices. This “broader definition” of literacy has accompanied a plethora of theoretical work that transcends composition’s previously “exclusive focus on academic discourse” by studying “both school and nonacademic contexts for writing.” Similarly, composition has moved away “from presuming white-middle class culture as normative to analyzing and inviting cultural difference” (8).

In particular, a number of compositionists have explored the complexity and sophistication of nonacademic¹ literacies, both from the present day and in previous eras,

¹ The very idea of *academic* and *nonacademic* communities, two phrases I will use throughout the dissertation for the sake of simplifying the relationship between formal institutions of postsecondary education and community organizations not directly tied to such institutions, ultimately fails to capture the geographical and cultural complexity of these spaces, as well as the interrelations between these spaces. As I will stress repeatedly, people always possess multiple discourses. Students do not cease being members of nonacademic communities, and in some cases underserved communities, when they become members of the academy. And many members of nonacademic communities with whom members of the academy work have strong academic ties and have pursued postsecondary education themselves. Hence, the

including the workplace, homes, inner-city communities, extracurricular locations, writing societies, underground antebellum slave schools, and the Civil Rights Movement. Much interdisciplinary ethnographic, linguistic, and historical research from scholars including Shirley Brice Heath, Ellen Cushman, Anne Ruggles Gere, Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, Linda Flower, and James Paul Gee has shown clearly that literacies traditionally devalued in academic spaces are no less rich or complex than academic literacies.² The tendency to devalue or dismiss such literacies in the past and today has had much more to do with their being culturally different from—rather than inferior to—the mainstream, traditionally middle-class literacies typically validated within the academy. These scholars have urged the field and higher education as a whole to abandon “deficit theories” of non-mainstream, “non-schooled” literacy practices.

While confirming the idea that composition’s increasingly social understanding of literate practices correlates well with service learning, Aaron Schutz and Anne Ruggles Gere nevertheless offer a cautionary addendum to this optimistic perspective, one reminiscent of Morton’s characterization of the ironies of service:

Service learning has found an especially comfortable home in composition programs.... For instructors who teach classes that grapple with social issues related to literacy, or who wish to provide a venue for students to connect with the situated complexities of issues and communities outside the classroom, service learning provides a ready and practical solution—although ... truly effective and ethical service learning is not easy to initiate. (130)

Service learning in writing courses makes it possible for students to write for audiences unavailable to them in traditional classrooms, and it complicates their understanding of literacy by illustrating the multiplicity of its meanings and uses in different contexts.

antipodal distinctions implied by the terms “academic” and “nonacademic” are artificial and should not be taken as absolute categories.

² These developments in the field will be explored in detail in chapter three.

Service learning, then, corresponds naturally with the “social perspective” in composition by making possible genuine outreach to literacy practices beyond the classroom.

However, the authors note that in spite of service-learning’s potential for creating spaces of engagement with nonacademic communities and literacies, in practice this engagement often fails to reach into the community in either an ethical or successful manner. Over the course of the next several chapters I will explore the implications of how this warning relates to service learning in rhetoric and composition, in particular regarding programs that seek to promote social change in underserved communities. Some scholars, I contend, have heeded this warning better than others.

In this respect, in chapter two I will begin to argue why the field of rhetoric and composition has a central role to play in promoting ethical engagement with community partners. Developments in the field over the past few decades have made the scholarship of engagement increasingly relevant to the discipline, while simultaneously making the discipline a primary location within academia to envision truly egalitarian, reciprocal community partnerships. Yet, I will also argue that in some cases, the socially-situated literacy scholarship that has emerged in the research has insufficiently influenced the pedagogy of engagement with communities outside the academy, leading to composition’s distinctive manifestation of the “ironies of service.” These ironies reflect the divide between “expert” and “lay” described above and operate through the adherence to a literacy continuum in which academic literacy is associated with a superior “critical literacy” while community forms of literacy are dismissed as oppressively functional in nature, dooming those who pursue them to hegemonic capitulation to dominant cultural narratives. This continuum, I contend, has deleterious consequences for engagement,

constricting possibilities for egalitarian, mutually beneficial collaborations by defining community associates in terms of what they lack rather than focusing on the resources they already possess. I ultimately argue that, in order to create possibilities for ethically responsible and reciprocal engagement, scholars of service learning must abandon the literacy continuum and adopt a more nuanced and locally-specific understanding of the different kinds of literacy practices operating in spaces of collaboration. This conclusion leads into my examination of the New Literacy Studies (NLS), which is the main subject of chapter three.

In this third chapter I examine in depth the interdisciplinary NLS's use of ethnographic research of nonacademic sites of literacy to illustrate the sophistication and complexity of all literacy practices. These scholars seek to break down traditional dichotomies between "oral" vs. "literate," "critical" vs. "functional," and "academic" vs. "community." Perceiving literacy as a social practice fundamentally linked to the contexts in which it manifests itself has great significance for relationships between academic and nonacademic communities, and I demonstrate that this scholarly movement's impact on the field of rhetoric and composition, as exemplified by Ellen Cushman's conceptualization of "activist research," makes the field an ideal place to enact greater reciprocity and egalitarianism in these relationships. Cushman's protocol of activist research allows her to demonstrate her subjects' critical capacities and to actively promote benefits for them through the research. Nevertheless, I conclude this chapter by arguing that significant limitations exist in the capacity of activist research to produce egalitarianism and reciprocity, and these constrictions also have implications for Cushman's paradigm of service learning, which I examine in chapter four.

In the fourth chapter, I explore how the work of the NLS has led some compositionists to enact relatively more responsible praxes of community engagement. Linda Flower and Ellen Cushman exemplify this progress with their development of “hybrid literacies” mutually accessible by all parties in a collaborative relationship as a foundation for producing reciprocal literate action. Cushman’s concept of the “public intellectual,” who spearheads such programs and combines the primary academic missions of research, teaching, and service, provides the key figure for this model of service learning. However, in spite of these promising developments, I argue that Flower and Cushman continue to emphasize institutionalization of their programs in ways that put academic interests above the needs of community partners. I apply Paula Mathieu’s concepts of “strategic” engagement to illustrate that, as long as they seek to extend the academy’s strategic modus operandi to the collaborative space, these scholars cannot achieve true reciprocity and egalitarianism. I propose, then, that hybrid literacies be combined with what Mathieu calls “tactical” approaches to service learning in order to solve this problem. This merging of hybrid literacies with tactical engagement becomes the framework for my articulation of *community action* in chapter five.

In this penultimate chapter I conceptualize my own model of community engagement within rhetoric and composition, one that I have come to call *community action*, in part because the term “service learning” is often used in ways that overlook how the community partners also engage in active service. Moreover, the term “learning” too often refers only to the benefits students accrue from these relationships. On the contrary, in the paradigm of community action I propose here, both university and community representatives serve and learn, and both sides partake in an exchange of each

other's resources in the service of concrete projects developed in unison and with the intent of engendering mutual benefits, which includes active reflection of the work and productive learning by all participants. Such collaborative goals and processes are at the core of community action. In elaborating the meaning of community action, I focus on the nature of the relationship between academic and community partners, the co-development of literacy projects, and the orientation toward evaluation and research. Although community action is an ideal of engagement that has not yet been fully realized in practice, I argue that the field of rhetoric and composition is well-suited to fostering community relationships that can come ever closer to achieving this ideal.

Essentially, community action is a model of engagement in which academic and community partners pursue social change through co-defined projects that operate through mutually accessible hybrid literacies. Such projects maintain a pragmatic flexibility in response to the shifting contingencies and logistical realities of collaborative spaces. Community action, then, enacts an egalitarian and reciprocal relationship between academic and nonacademic communities. Within rhetoric and composition, these relationships can complicate our understanding of how different literacy practices are relevant to writing instruction, providing opportunities for reshaping the teaching of writing to help scholars, students, and community partners perceive how their personal narratives are intertwined with the narratives of the communities that matter to them, and how writing can offer a practical means for enhancing the welfare of both the individuals and these communities.

Community action is not intended to be a mere subset of the larger umbrella of service learning for social change (which is itself a subset of the much larger set of

service learning practices found in the academy). Rather, I intend for community action to mark a shift in thinking about how universities engage underserved nonacademic communities, the kind of work they do, and the implications this work has on the nature of both communities. Over the long term, then, I hope that community action will promote institutional change in both the academic and nonacademic communities from which participants in these projects emerge. This hope for institutional change draws on a relatively optimistic perspective on the nature of institutions as articulated by Jeffrey Grabill, a perspective I will examine in chapters four and five.

In the final chapter, I explore some of the implications of trying to enact the ideals of community action in practice. In particular, I delve into Kirk Branch's attempts to maintain a balance between his individual goals as an educator and the larger goals of the various institutions in which he has worked, from academia to local detention facilities. His argument that there are often irresolvable conflicts between the educational literacy practices of justice minded scholar-activists and the more normative practices of their institutions presents a sobering reminder of the difficulties faced by those who seek to promote institutional change in "morally ambiguous" contexts (189). In concluding the dissertation, I reflect on these difficulties and their implications for community action, focusing in particular on how the realities of these conflicts have affected my own efforts to pursue egalitarian, reciprocal community engagement. I recognize the significance of Branch's argument, but I argue that his proposed response to these problems, which involves heavily sacrificing one's ideals in the name of institutional compromise, betrays his own optimistic narrative of activists who have historically pursued socially just educational literacy practices. Ultimately, then, as someone pursuing ideals of

community engagement, I retain a greater sense of optimism than Branch for what can be realistically achieved, while remaining ever attentive to the complicating factors that persist.

Chapter Two

The Ironies of Service Learning for Social Change in Rhetoric and Composition

Over the course of the next few chapters, I will argue that the field of rhetoric and composition is uniquely suited to lead institutions of higher education to promote more egalitarian, reciprocal community engagement, and to make this scholarship of engagement more central to the mission of academia. In this chapter I will begin this process by arguing that scholars in the field have a vested interest in pursuing such engagement, an interest that will likely only increase in years to come. In fact, a growing number of scholars in the discipline have recognized the importance of engaged scholarship, in particular through service learning, and I will begin to analyze these efforts in the second part of the chapter. Since I am particularly interested in higher education's role in improving the welfare of underserved communities, I will focus on efforts to use service learning explicitly to promote this goal. I will zero in most closely on a seminal article by Bruce Herzberg, who depicts one of the field's most evocative and influential models of service learning for the promotion of social change. In this article, Herzberg seeks to promote critical consciousness in students as a way to redress societal injustices. Although I applaud Herzberg's desire to use teaching to break down the structural inequalities that define much of American life, and which prove particularly harmful for underprivileged communities, I will argue that his model of service learning

actually constricts possibilities for producing social change, thus leading to the ironies of service described by Keith Morton.

I will contend as well that the vision of social change articulated by Herzberg inscribes a “literacy continuum,” one which mirrors the service continuum critiqued by Morton, and which assumes a faulty dynamic of “critical literacy” defined by broad-scale political efforts to foment structural change over a more “functional literacy” sought by community counterparts and the university students taking these courses. Toward the end of the chapter, I will examine recent examples of service learning for social change that, while not directly emphasizing egalitarian literacy perspectives, nevertheless more explicitly advocate for collaborative efforts to produce substantive material changes in the lives of community members. These changes represent progress in conceptualizing how service learning can promote social change. However, these newer models still appear to project academic dominance over the collaborative space, and thus do not transform the structure of engagement into a more fundamentally egalitarian one. To achieve such a goal, as I will argue in the following chapters, it is necessary to embrace a more social perspective of literacy, and in so doing, to perceive social change through a less politically circumscribed lens.

Why Community Engagement Matters to Rhetoric and Composition, and Why Rhetoric and Composition Matters to Community Engagement

Anne Ruggles Gere advocates that scholars in the field attend more closely to the broad range and scope of writing occurring among groups of people who voluntarily come together to produce writing in spaces outside traditional classrooms. She and other scholars such as Shirley Brice Heath have illustrated the long history of such groups,

including various kinds of writing clubs and literary societies dating back as early as the American Colonial period. And, just as importantly, they have stressed that such groups continue to flourish today. Gere in particular has written extensively about the “enormous number of individuals who meet in living rooms, nursing homes, community centers, churches, shelters for the homeless, around kitchen tables, and in rented rooms to write down their worlds” (76). Calling their work the *extracurriculum* of composition, Gere argues that too often the histories and achievements of these writing groups have been overlooked or ignored by scholars composing histories of the field. She writes that, “In concentrating upon establishing our position within the academy, we have neglected to recount the history of composition in other contexts; we have neglected composition's extracurriculum” (79). As rhetoric and composition has sought professionalization, then, as well as greater respect as a serious and rigorous discipline, field historians have generally not included narratives from these other spaces of writing.

Yet in important respects, the processes and productions of these groups resemble those of composition classrooms. In looking at two particular groups, the Tenderloin Women's Writing Workshop in San Francisco and the Lansing, Iowa Writers' Workshop, Gere points out:

Few of the participants ... had much formal education, and many had negative experiences with schooling. They did not think of themselves as writers because teachers had taught them they could not write. Yet these individuals wrote effectively in workshops, published their writing, and gained personal and community recognition for their work. Although it remains largely invisible and inaudible to us, writing development occurs regularly and successfully outside classroom walls. (78)

Gere advises us to pay greater heed to these non-classroom sites of writing, arguing that these “ongoing and vital manifestations of the extracurriculum challenge us to take a

wider view of composition” (86). This wider view does not mean abandoning classrooms, but acknowledging “the extracurriculum as a legitimate and autonomous cultural formation that undertakes its own projects.” Such an inclusive perspective, Gere believes, can lead us to “tap and listen to messages through the walls, to consider how we can learn from and contribute to composition’s extracurriculum in our classes” (86). Gere also cautions against following a path to professionalization—a process that has been much discussed within the field in recent years—that requires excluding all aspects of writing not traditionally understood to be legitimate academic work. Such perspectives can transform writing into a “barrier to be overcome rather than an activity to be engaged in” (88). She reminds us of the importance of valuing and learning from amateurs, stating that, “After all, as the Latin root *amatus* reminds us, members of the Tenderloin Women's Writing Workshop or the Lansing, Iowa Writers Workshop write for love.”

Gere maintains that writing instruction in classrooms has been influenced by non-classroom writing in the past, and that attention to the extracurriculum of composition can help writing instructors develop a more complex understanding of power relations in classrooms. Noting Frederick Rudolph’s observation that the “extracurriculum of the nineteenth century vested students with power in curriculum decisions,” and that “power acknowledged (and usurped) today as student film societies become departments of and courses in film studies,” she contends that rhetoric and composition can also “draw upon and contribute to circulations of power in its extracurriculum.” The incorporation into writing courses “of the workshop practices that originated in student literary societies,” she points out, constitutes one such example (88).

Drawing on Gere's work to extol the extracurriculum of composition's promise to enhance writing instruction within classrooms, Shirley Brice Heath argues that the field essentially has little choice but to realize this promise. In a chapter from an anthology dedicated to examining the place of composition in the 21st century, Heath contends that significant changes in the needs of students will occur in coming decades that will force composition instructors, and the academy as a whole, to increasingly engage the extracurriculum. Heath focuses primarily, although not exclusively, on underlying economic factors that influence how people choose to develop their capacities to communicate through various media. These include "the abstract forces of deindustrialization, a new international division of labor, a reliance on contingent workers, loss of trade unions, declining real wage, and rising importance of service sectors" (234). The ongoing birthing process of the new economy will require that new and diverse communication skills (beyond composition) be developed by members of the workforce. In turn, there will have to be changes in the way various institutions meet these future workers' needs. Already, changes in work and community demands are leading an increasing number of people to feel the need "for new forms of symbolic mediation, whether these be computer graphics, printed forms, dramatic role playing, or new numeracy requirements. To these more pragmatically driven needs may be added the mental health needs met by outlets of creative expression" (232). These shifts are producing concomitant changes in how various institutions respond to such needs.

According to Heath:

...a variety of institutions are responding to personal, spiritual, and civic needs, as well as business changes, to develop opportunities and add courses or build programs to meet these needs. They do so not by announcing an end to existing structures but by adding on to the existing

infrastructure of community youth programs, businesses, or postsecondary institutions.... These efforts are not “purely” or even primarily academic, but they are vocational, community-building, health-improving, and spirit-renewing. (231)

The futures of people participating in these various institutional settings often do not hold a “trajectory of either two-year or four-year college attendance progressing through a sequence of predetermined courses.” In regard to one particular group utilizing such community-based sites of composition, she notes that for “those who saw some sort of postsecondary education ahead for them, they expected to dip into and out of college, pulling from it what they saw as current needs” (233). In other words, college composition in its traditional context bears little relevance to these peoples’ objectives. They are looking to develop “communication skills and knowledge about how to ‘get along with people,’” and college writing courses are not their primary site for developing these skills. Heath believes that the life and career paths marked by attending a four-year institution right after high school will be rejected by more and more people, who will instead look to less conventional means to satisfy their educational, professional, and civic aspirations. For Heath, the exigency of this transition is particularly salient for literacy instruction.

In such extracurricular environments, people learn that “there is no one language, dialect, register, or genre of power. There are several, and in some cases many, and to survive work, class, and category dominations from the larger society, they [have] to know and use as many as possible” (233). They are learning, then, about a multiplicity of literacy practices, that some practices are more useful in certain contexts than others, and that people must have access to more than one literacy practice in order to survive and flourish in a rapidly changing society. She continues:

To those entrenched within composition and concerned about protecting their own jobs in a shrinking economy, it is tough to look ‘out there’ Those in leadership positions in the institutional situations described [by Heath] are not in English departments of the college or university. Will their innovative efforts replace those of teachers of freshman composition? (233)

Although Heath does not believe these changes will happen in the immediate future, she argues that they will likely take place over the next several decades:

For the first time in U.S. history, this future generation may well choose to be less well-educated than their parents, whose college diplomas were not able to ensure for them the upward mobility of the prior generation. Postsecondary choices will consequently have to look very different from their current configuration, for they will need to be much more tightly tied to vocational, personal, and community-building goals than the current four-year college norm. (233-4)

Considering these broad demographic shifts brought on by economic and professional necessity, Heath believes that writing programs cannot complacently perceive themselves as isolated from writing in community contexts.

She summarizes these points by stating that a major shift is ongoing in how people, especially from low-income communities, intend to acquire the necessary tools for economic success. They are increasingly “steering away from formal education as currently conceived” and instead “placing their reliance on gaining sufficient communication and self-management skills through their arts performances and participation in community organizations.” Heath believes that this shift, along with the changes in the larger economy described above, will “surely shape education in the coming decades” (236). She declares:

If reasonable reorganizations and new directions follow from what appears to be greatest need, then colleges and college classes will do things quite differently. They will first build networks, as many technical and community colleges have already done, to job opportunities, community-based organizations, and health-delivery systems. Within these networks,

they will link communication skills, oral and written, to a host of needs—social, aesthetic, and personal, as well as vocational. (236)

These writing activities considered extracurricular in the past, then, “will become the curricular” for people linked to these various community organizations, as well as the kinds of writing groups discussed by Gere. Heath envisions traditional composition courses giving way “more and more to what are now experimental programs often viewed as marginal and run jointly between community-based organizations and workplaces, on the one hand, or postsecondary education institutions, on the other.” These kinds of programs that are now labeled “continuing” or “outreach” education and relegated to the margins of academic life, will “increasingly move to more central awareness among college administrators” (237).

Although Heath focuses primarily on its economic implications, other possible impacts of engaging the extracurriculum include counteracting what Eli Goldblatt calls the “throughput” model of education. As Goldblatt describes it, the throughput model is a system whereby educators:

...move students along a path marked by diplomas and certificates, occupy them with reading and writing tasks, determine their achievements with tests or papers.... After four or five years of this, they graduate and move on to jobs or further study. Even most community-based learning courses follow this model; they simply substitute engagement with genuine outside learners for the texts that might otherwise represent the outside world. (276)

Although Goldblatt notes that there is nothing inherently wrong with the throughput model, this prevailing feature of higher education’s contemporary mission does little to help students develop a sense of themselves as members of communities whose welfare depends, in large part, on their active civic participation. “Of course we want individual students,” he states, “to succeed as they move from general education to major, from

wide-eyed (and scared) first-year student to world-weary (and scared) senior,” and we have a “responsibility to help students move through their school careers and be able to function in jobs afterward” (293-4). However, this “model is almost entirely focused on individuals developing a knowledge base and skill set.” The danger, he argues, is that “the ‘throughput’ system defines our consciousness and masks the reality of other community and individual objectives in settings off campus” (293).

In order to overcome these problems, higher education must develop what Goldblatt refers to as a “more collective view of education,” and I believe this view has strong links with Gere’s conception of the extracurriculum. Indeed, fostering a practical understanding of literacy within its various social contexts among participants in such collaboratives should be at the core of this collective education. Goldblatt asks:

How do a writing program, a general education curriculum, and a department-based major foster a sense in individuals that they are connected to other citizens in larger and small ways? How do we in writing programs make manifest our understanding of literacy as social, local, or efficacious beyond having students read articles that say so? The crucial thing is that we need not see our programs as merely forming a conduit; instead we can position our entire institution as one among many that engage a wide range of people. (294)

Writing programs can make community engagement within institutions of higher education more effective than it has been in the past. Having students participate in literacy practices outside the walls of academe, rather than merely going through rhetorical exercises that simulate such engagement, has great power for helping students and community partners understand the complexities of different real audiences and purposes within various rhetorical contexts, and how different literacy practices are likely to meet varying levels of success depending on these contexts’ specific local and social characteristics. This engagement with multiple forms of literacy will also help people see

how they are connected to one another, and promote a sense of responsibility for each other's welfare. Goldblatt, then, posits rhetoric and composition at the forefront of helping institutions of higher education move toward this more collective view of education.

Considering these bountiful opportunities afforded scholars in the field by the prospect of community engagement around literacy issues, along with the present and future shifts in the contexts of writing instruction described by Heath, it behooves writing teachers and writing programs to work proactively to manage these changes and to embrace the possibilities that accompany them, rather than ignoring them or submitting to the inertial forces of past practices. Just as importantly, I believe these changes offer wonderful pedagogical opportunities for writing instruction everywhere, including within university classrooms. In other words, scholars in rhetoric and composition can work with community partners as allies in the process of embracing new perspectives and possibilities for the teaching of writing.

Along these lines, engaging the extracurriculum could have direct benefits on pedagogical practices within rhetoric and composition. For example, engaging the extracurriculum of composition can help challenge traditional rhetorical understandings of successful communication, understandings that, as Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede have pointed out, have a long history of excluding dissent, conflict, misunderstanding, and disagreement. They observe that:

...the rhetorical tradition's focus on success in communicating and persuading others is longstanding and enduring, discernible in the western emphasis on efficiency, "getting the job done," and clarity, as well as in traditional theories and definitions of rhetoric. (173)

Traditional western understandings of successful communication, especially as they apply to students' developing mastery of academic discourse, work hand-in-hand with Goldblatt's conception of the throughput model of education, in which students are disciplined into an individualist mindset of personal advancement. This constricted definition of success, Lunsford and Ede argue, exerts a "hidden price:"

For how better to avoid misunderstanding and failure (and to make "successful" communication more likely) than to exclude, to disenfranchise those who by their very presence in the arena of discourse raise increased possibilities for communicative failures. (174)

In making this point, the authors point to the ways in which this traditional narrative of rhetorical success can silence the voices of people, whether they are basic writers or the writing workshop members detailed by Gere, who do not as easily master academically "legitimate" forms of discourse.

In making this point, Lunsford and Ede do not seek to discourage students from mastering the academic discourses that enable them to be successful communicators according to traditional western rhetorical standards. They understand, as do I, the importance of helping students, especially those from traditionally underserved backgrounds, to develop the rhetorical tools they require to meet the "needs and expectations" of academic audiences (174). Nevertheless, pedagogically speaking, these exclusionary tendencies:

hide from view any value that misunderstanding, resistance, or similar "failures" might have in complementing and enriching our notion of "success" by opening up spaces for additional voices, ways of understanding, conversations, and avenues of communication. (174)

The dismissal of forms of communication that do not conform to traditional conceptions of "success" closes down opportunities for people in composition classrooms to engage

extracurricular voices, to heed Gere's entreaty to "tap and listen to messages through the walls." These excluded voices tend to be, of course, the same voices that are most often barred from access through the gates of the academy. To embrace these voices, on the contrary, is to open up composition to the complexities of multiple discourses and literacy practices, and to competing audience expectations—in general, to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of what it means to communicate in the real world.

Another pedagogical feature of engaging the extracurriculum, as Gere argues, is that scholars can:

...benefit from examining how the extracurriculum confers authority for representation and how we might extend that authority in our classes. Our students would benefit if we learned to see them as individuals who seek to write, not be written about, who seek to publish, not be published about, who seek to theorize, not be theorized about. (89)

Although student writing tends to be associated with apprenticeship undeserving of an audience outside the writing classroom, and student writing has generally been ignored in narratives of the field's development, Gere suggests that student work be reevaluated as serious scholarship. Reappraising the value of student writing and developing higher expectations for what students can achieve with writing would lead, she argues, to higher quality intellectual work on the part of students.

Moreover, Gere believes that changing the ways in which writing instructors conceive of students might produce concomitant changes in how such instructors conceive of their own work, and how this work is viewed by others within the academy. Building on Susan Miller's argument that archetypal conceptions of composition students as innocent babes have negatively influenced academic perceptions of the discipline,

Gere illustrates the significance of recognizing the subjectivity of students for raising the status of composition scholars as well:

Ultimately, however, we in composition studies would benefit from this shift because, as Susan Miller reminds us, “placing those who teach composition in the role of hired mothermaid has a great deal to do with the presexual, preeconomic, prepolitical subjectivity imposed on composition students” (192). By helping to change the subjectivities of our students, we open the possibility of enhancing our own (professional) positions. (89)

The failure to recognize the intellectual subjectivity of students in writing classrooms impacts, in turn, the subjectivity of those who teach students in these spaces. As long as first-year writing students have the tinge of the neophyte about them, as opposed to students of more “serious” subjects such as literature, compositionists will have a difficult time “proving” their own value as rigorous scholars of a “serious” discipline. But a reevaluation of the work of students as serious scholarship could simultaneously raise the status of their teachers.

Similarly, Richard Miller envisions a “social history” of composition studies, one in which student writing, rather than being passed over amidst narratives of scholars debating scholars over time, would be at the center of intellectual inquiry. Miller seeks to “reread the institutional history of English studies in light of the solicitation and treatment of student writing” in a manner that would draw “attention to the political possibilities that composition’s unique location in the academy affords” (“Composing English” 174). Rather than continuing to participate in interminable debates about composition’s subsidiary place in relationship to literary studies, Miller wishes to capitalize on the knowledge that compositionists specialize in producing and applying in practice. Such a disciplinary historiography, he argues, would necessarily mean rejecting the notion of a

single institutional history and embracing the idea of a “series of institutional histories.” This manner of documenting the discipline would “have to ground itself in local, institutional settings and seek to explore the rationales, resolutions, and sustained tensions achieved at these separate sites” (176). Miller argues that this approach to developing an institutional history would “rescue the student from theoretical oblivion ... and provide a record of the range of local solutions to the problems all English departments face in teaching students how to read and write in the academy” (177).

I believe Gere’s and Miller’s characterizations of the importance of recognizing student subjectivity can be extended to the realm of community engagement. Achieving this goal will, of course, mean recognizing the intellectual subjectivity of community partners. Although I will argue in this chapter that some forms of service learning within the field have not done enough to recognize this subjectivity, instead operating under an assumption that academic literacy practices are superior to community practices, over the course of the dissertation I will also examine models of service learning that display an increasingly strong commitment to community subjectivity. Moreover, this recognition is a crucial feature of community action’s prioritization of egalitarianism and reciprocity, as I will argue in chapter five. Put another way, I believe it is coming time to rescue the community partner from theoretical oblivion, just as the student. In turn, emphasizing the subjectivity of community partners might also raise community engagement’s status within academic circles and help to re-position civic engagement toward the center of academic life.

This thesis is ultimately an argument, then, about institutional change, about making institutions of higher education more conducive to the scholarship of

engagement, as well as rhetoric and composition's key role in bringing about such change. I mean to establish a theoretical framework for community-university relationships that can become budding participatory institutions in which equal participation, the valuing of different literacy practices, and mutual benefits are the priorities. The development of such institutional relationships, along with their capacities for telling their own institutional stories, could extend Miller's vision of composition's institutional histories to those of community-university collaborations. I will ultimately argue that community engagement, in addition to helping students, teachers, and community partners perceive in practice how multiple literacies work in real environments, and how their individual narratives intertwine with their community narratives, might, in slightly modifying Miller's words, "provide a record of the range of solutions to the problems all *communities* face in determining *how to use literacy to change people's lives for the better.*" I believe that under such conditions, the more these relationships develop as institutions on their own terms and with their own literacy practices, the more power they may develop to create institutional change in the home institutions of their participants. Such a process might feed into itself, changing institutional conditions within both the academy and surrounding institutions to increase the likelihood of more community-university relationships emerging in the future. I will argue, then, that through egalitarian, reciprocal community engagement, rhetoric and composition can help push the academy toward enacting what Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett call the "practical realization of the democratic promise of America for all Americans" (78).

It is clear from the preceding list of opportunities that I see enormous potential for community engagement to expand the scope, as well as prominence, of scholarship and pedagogy in rhetoric and composition, and a primary goal for this dissertation is to illustrate and reflect upon this wonderful promise. Yet, as I described in the previous chapter, along with the opportunities proffered by community engagement, in particular through service learning that seeks actively to promote social change, come significant challenges and risks, and in the rest of chapter two I will begin to examine these hazards. Ethical engagement, I will emphasize throughout the dissertation, requires the ability to embrace the kinds of misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflicts described by Lunsford and Ede, although these rhetorical inevitabilities tend to be labeled “failures” of communication. To turn away from disagreement and dissent, as Lunsford and Ede have shown, is to silence nontraditional voices. In keeping with my focus on the academy’s role in responding to social injustice in its surrounding communities, I will focus in particular on programs that seek to promote social change among the underserved. I will argue that in some cases the socially-situated understanding of literacy that has emerged in the research has insufficiently influenced the pedagogy of engagement with communities outside the academy, leading to the kinds of silencing described by Lunsford and Ede and producing composition’s distinctive manifestation of the “ironies of service.”

I want to begin my analysis of the pursuit of social change through service learning by examining in considerable detail an example of this praxis. Specifically, I will focus on a paradigm of service learning articulated in Bruce Herzberg’s article “Community Service and Critical Teaching” from the 1994 volume of *College*

Composition and Communication, where Herzberg describes a two-semester service-learning composition course at Bentley College. I concentrate on this article because Herzberg is so adamant about using service learning to transform his students into socially responsible citizens ready and willing to create a more just society. Moreover, since the article's publication, virtually all literature in composition studies that deals with service learning for social change makes reference to it, and it has been reprinted in multiple books.³ Because of Herzberg's strong conviction that service learning should be used to promote critical consciousness in students, and his reservations about service alone being able to promote such consciousness, the article has been much lauded by practitioners in the field who are committed to promoting civic engagement and social change.

However, I believe that in spite of Herzberg's praiseworthy emphasis on the importance of students developing a social conscience, the service-learning praxis he describes in this article severely constricts the capacity of students (and community collaborators) to pursue social change. Indeed, this article unintentionally reveals significant dangers of practicing service learning for the pursuit of social justice when community members are not welcomed to participate as equal members in the process. By separating his students and the community members they "serve" in terms of educational goals, and by privileging a politically circumscribed vision of social change, Herzberg's article exemplifies the ironies of service described in the first chapter.

³ Although I will critique Herzberg's praxis heavily at times, I also commend him for having the courage to combine his passions as an activist with his scholarly and pedagogical goals as an academician. I also want to emphasize my admiration for his trailblazing scholarship in the field. His work has helped pave a way for others to seek a merging, or hybridization, of activist and academic pursuits.

The Challenge of Promoting Social Responsibility and Social Change through Service Learning

In the fall semester of Herzberg's course sequence, which is part of a school-wide commitment to service learning at Bentley College, students learn about socioeconomic issues related to literacy and are trained to become adult literacy tutors, while in the spring they tutor residents of a local homeless shelter.⁴ However, Herzberg emphasizes that the "composition course is not devoted to literacy tutoring, but rather to the study of literacy and schooling," whereas in the class itself, the "goal is to examine the ways that literacy is gained or not gained in the United States" (310). The classroom component includes reading and writing about texts that deal with the debilitating effects of unequal access to education on disadvantaged students, including Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*. This process progresses into research papers that arise from the class's studies. The service experience, then, is distinguished from the writing done in the classroom. In other words, the actual writing students do in the course emphasizes traditional essayist academic discourse, and the audience for this writing is Herzberg himself. Herzberg is able to focus much of the course's energy, then, on pushing students to understand key socioeconomic and political issues related to the acquisition, or failure to acquire, literacy.

Herzberg notes several benefits from the service portion of the course, including the fact that many "students become eager volunteers after the ice is broken by class projects and they see where they can go, how they can help.... Most agencies are eager for new volunteers. And of course, the students perform real and needed services" (308). Based on evidence from the institution-wide community program at Bentley, he believes

⁴ In the spring semester, students are also enrolled in a section of introductory Sociology, so three courses comprise this interdisciplinary program.

that service learning does help generate “a social conscience, if by that we understand a sense of the reality and immediacy of the poor and homeless along with a belief that people in a position to help out should do so.” While noting that these are “remarkable accomplishments,” Herzberg stresses that “these responses tend, quite naturally, to be personal, to report perceptions and emotions.” And these failures of service to provoke a more sophisticated and critical understanding of illiteracy and poverty in students are where his “deepest questions about service learning lie” (308). Herzberg is quite explicit about his desire for students “to transcend their own deeply-ingrained belief in individualism and meritocracy and their analysis of the reasons for the illiteracy they see” (312), as well as his frustration with their difficulty in doing so.

Herzberg quotes Campus Compact’s Susan Stroud to elucidate another problem with service learning that fails to engender a more sophisticated sense of social responsibility among students:

If our community service efforts are not structured to raise the issues that result in critical analysis of the issues, then we are not involved in education and social change—we are involved in charity. (quoted in Herzberg 309)

This statement illustrates Herzberg’s belief that charity is inherently paternalistic and serves to reinforce a sense of dependency in underprivileged community members, thus showing his firm attachment to the service continuum. It is simply understood that social change should be the outcome of service learning. Although students’ discovery of “real applications of their knowledge in the organizations they serve,” and the fact that “they can use their knowledge not only to get jobs for themselves but also to help others,” are significant outcomes, this “social conscience” is primarily personal in nature, which indicates for him a flaw in service’s supposed connection to social responsibility.

Herzberg has less to say about the academic benefits—namely the extent to which students’ writing improves—of service learning, but he is clear that in terms of moral development or the promotion of social awareness, he holds significant doubts about the capacity of students to develop such awareness from service. He asks, “But what are they learning about the nature of the problems that cause these organizations to come into existence? How do they understand the plight of the people who need these services” (308)? The danger is that if students:

...regard social problems as chiefly or only personal, then they will not search beyond the person for a systemic explanation. Why is homelessness a problem? Because, they answer, so many people are homeless. The economy is bad and these individuals lost their jobs. Why are so many people undereducated or illiterate? Because they didn’t study in school, just like so-and-so in my fifth grade class and he dropped out. (309)

The failures of students to understand systemic inequalities could have broad implications, because, as Herzberg’s colleague Robert Crooks points out, students’ personal understanding of poverty “not only ignores the causes of problems but lets off the hook those responsible for the problems” (quoted in Herzberg 309). The real outcomes of service learning that does not force students to understand the systemic causes of illiteracy could actually be the opposite of the practitioner’s goals, potentially furthering a mentality that blames victims for their various plights.

Herzberg offers an example of students’ difficulties grasping the structural aspects of their learners’ circumstances:

We went upstairs for our orientation, stepping over some sleeping men stretched out on gym mats in the dining hall. Upstairs, we met a number of men who had been working with volunteer tutors. The students later said that they were impressed by the effort that these men were making to try to improve their lives. They did not seem attentive, though, to the analysis offered by the shelter’s assistant director, who explained that

while the shelter provided critically needed services, it also undermined any sense of independence the residents might have. Their self-esteem seemed to be under constant attack by all the social institutions they came in contact with, including the shelter itself. When I brought it up in class, the students had little memory of this discussion. (311)

As portrayed here, the students are naïve about the social forces that have both led these residents to the shelter and prevented them from developing a sense of worth and independence, as well as having restricted their capacity to envision a successful future that the students themselves presumably take for granted. The shelter is understood as a place for people who have fallen on hard times to get back on their feet, rather than as a place that further contributes to their inability to become self-sufficient. At the shelter, the “students tended see [sic] their learners, quite naturally, as individuals with personal problems.... Very few of the students ever became indignant about what they saw” (311).⁵

This obliviousness at the shelter contrasts sharply with the students’ reactions to reading about these same social problems in the classroom, where they “do become indignant” (312). As Herzberg explains, “The students are indeed distressed by systemic discrimination against poorer people and disenfranchised groups.” This discomfort comes from reading about the systematic degradation of “culturally disadvantaged students” and the “structural inequities in the funding of public education” described by Rose and Kozol. However, the key problem for Herzberg is that they “do not seem to see this discrimination in the lives of their learners” (312). Herzberg’s dissatisfaction stems from the disparity between the social understanding of poverty and illiteracy exhibited by

⁵ Interestingly, the students’ failure to take offense at the real circumstances of their “service recipients” contrasts sharply with the outrage expressed in the student journal entry from Jim Ostrow’s article, which was discussed in the first chapter. Herzberg does not offer textual evidence of his students’ non-indignant reactions, making it difficult to know how accurate his own judgments of their internal responses are.

students on an abstract level in the classroom and the merely personal understanding they demonstrate when experiencing the same issues in the “real world.”

In spite of these challenges, Herzberg remains committed to transforming students into socially responsible citizens:

The effort to reach into the composition class with a curriculum aimed at democracy and social justice is an attempt to make schools function ... as radically democratic institutions, with the goal not only of making individual students more successful, but also of making better citizens, citizens in the strongest sense of those who take responsibility for communal welfare. (317)

These sentiments demonstrate Herzberg’s desire to do more than inculcate students with instrumental skills that will enable them to acquire high-paying jobs and comfortable lifestyles, even though these are the primary goals most of his students have for attending college. Herzberg points out that this individualistic mentality is particularly prevalent at Bentley College, which is a business school whose typical students “are not only majoring in business but often seem to have fallen into the narrowest view of what that means, adopting a gray and jaded image of the businessman” (308). It is this “culture of individualism” that provoked administrators at Bentley College to incorporate community service into the curriculum on a wide scale, hoping to introduce students to ““Capitalism with a human face”” (307). Herzberg recognizes that the students’ educational goals differ from those he wishes to instill but he essentially disparages these goals as evidence of domination by mainstream ideological discourses in America.

Instead, Herzberg wants them to understand how individual lives are shaped by social forces, specifically as these forces play out in the realms of language and literacy. He uses texts such as *Lives on the Boundary* to help his relatively privileged students understand how the ideology of the American Dream has led them to perceive their

success as earned entirely through their own hard work, i.e., to ignore the systemic factors that have benefited them enormously. He focuses in particular on Rose's statement that "American meritocracy is validated and sustained by the deep-rooted belief in equal opportunity" (quoted in Herzberg 313). Herzberg breaks down the various terms in this sentence for his students, pushing them to abandon their "deep-rooted beliefs" in how they got to Bentley College, and why the residents in the shelter where they serve have not. He pushes the students away from the instrumentalist literacy they bring with them into his course, and which masks the forces of social and cultural reproduction, toward a more critical exposition of how these forces function ideologically.

But beyond developing critical *awareness* of these social problems, Herzberg wants to empower students to become "better citizens" who intervene in the world on behalf of social justice. He is resolute about these goals and the social impact they can have, trusting "in the power of critique to transform society" and sharing "in the spirit of what Freire calls 'social dreaming'" (Deans 109). In an interview appearing in Thomas Deans's book *Writing Partnerships*, Herzberg remarks, "I really do take a progressive social position on this. I want to change the world.... I am committed to social justice and to actual change" (109). For these reasons, Herzberg believes that the "outreach experience must be incorporated into a larger project of sustained and critical reading, analysis, dialogue, and inquiry" (Deans 109).

Unfortunately, although Herzberg argues that his pedagogy of "critical teaching" is a way for students to become "better citizens," he never explicitly addresses an apparent contradiction in his work, that these middle-class, privileged students do not

seem to have a naturally vested interest in trying to break down a system that, as he shows through the course readings, benefits them so much. Instead, he assumes that becoming a better citizen *necessarily* means helping to change how the socioeconomic cards are dealt in spite of these students having drawn such strong hands. This avoidance of what I would call a “privilege conundrum” produces multiple ironies of service in Herzberg’s praxis, as I will address below. First of all, while he professes genuine passion for helping his own students become critically literate in the ideological and hegemonic forces that he believes keep the residents of the shelter caught in a cycle of oppression and victimization, he only shows interest in the shelter residents themselves developing basic literacy skills—i.e. skills that he himself associates with masking their oppression and victimization. Secondly, Herzberg portrays his students and the shelter residents in mutually contradictory ways, at once closely linked in terms of their misguided beliefs in meritocracy and individualism, while simultaneously distinct from one another in terms of the students’ privileges and the residents’ lack thereof. Thirdly, and perhaps most problematically, is that while Herzberg resolutely calls for social action, his course does not provide students with genuine opportunities to pursue such action in collaboration with community partners, instead projecting their “better citizenship” into some indefinite point in the future. These contradictions illustrate significant flaws in Herzberg’s use of service learning to promote social change, and thus must be examined in depth.

Truncating Possibilities for Collaboration: The Ironies of Herzberg’s Model of Service Learning

One key inconsistency between the students and shelter residents has to do with the learning goals Herzberg issues (or fails to issue) for them. Although quite upfront about his pedagogical goals for the *students*, Herzberg says relatively little about his intended outcomes, or whether they're achieved, for the *men and women* living in the shelter. He asserts that the “tutoring, as best we could determine, appeared to be productive for the learners at the shelter” (316). However, no attempt is made to unpack this learning. What constitutes “productive” learning for these “learners,” as they are consistently named throughout the article? Does it help them break the cycle of dependence observed by the assistant director of the shelter? At best, it seems, Herzberg aspires for the shelter residents to improve their reading and writing, but we don't learn any specifics about the progress the “learners” do or do not achieve in this quest.

Herzberg does speculate briefly about the *motives* of the “learners,” who come “to the literacy program at the end of what is typically a long series of personal and social failures, and though they expect—and often demand—a school-like experience again, the tutors are there to humanize it as much as they can” (316). But he does not attempt to explain why they demand the same old school experience that has presumably caused so much pain for them in the past. One gets the impression that the clients have developed a conflicted, anxiety-riddled relationship to formal education, and students strive to offer them positive, humane pedagogical encounters for counteracting, to whatever extent possible, the debilitating, dehumanizing effects of these educational histories. We are also left to assume that the “learners” want to develop competencies that will help them find decent employment at a livable wage so they can eventually find permanent housing. In other words, they wish to develop the kinds of individual, instrumental skills they

deem to be necessary for surviving in a capitalist society. In fact, their purposes for participating in this project ultimately match the primary reasons most students go to college (Smith; Bok), even if the two groups occupy very different stations in life.

However, because Herzberg believes this instrumentalist view of literacy masks the systemic factors leading to cultural and social reproduction, then by his own logic, the students seem to be doing more harm than good by tutoring at the shelter.⁶ Although Herzberg cites potential dangers of uncritical service or charity, as well as the disempowering structure of the shelter, he does not register awareness of the potential dangers the students' service practices themselves might have on the "service recipients" at the shelter. If one of Herzberg's primary goals for his students is to overcome the culture of individualism implied by a functionalist orientation toward literacy, why is he silent about the residents' similar motives?

In fact, rather than showing the students how their own services contribute to the cycle of dependency,⁷ Herzberg applauds them for their efforts, pointing out that despite their (at least initial) critical failings, many "developed excellent tutoring relationships and all learned how to draw on their own resources both psychologically and pedagogically" (311). But again, we learn little about what "excellent tutoring relationships" look like or mean, and the students can ultimately do little more than "come regularly and respond sensitively to the learners' concerns" (316). Herzberg essentially depicts the shelter residents as having reached the end of the educational road and offers little hope that this experience will provide truly significant learning for them.

⁶ Indeed, according to this logic, the course could only be determined to have achieved Herzberg's pedagogical goals if the students came to understand how they themselves were part of the institutional structure undermining "any sense of independence the residents might have."

⁷ Such a lesson might constitute a powerful epiphany of the order sought out by Herzberg for his students.

It is particularly regrettable and ironic that the goal of critical awareness Herzberg puts so much emphasis on in regard to his own students is never mentioned in relation to the “learners,” since *they* are the ones who have received the short end of the privileges stick, and consequently have the *most* to gain from the supposedly empowering effects of critical consciousness. Rather, by linking it so closely with critical teaching in the classroom, Herzberg makes this consciousness a fundamentally academic form of literacy, one that cannot be developed absent the guiding hand of the transformative critical teacher. By extension, people lacking access to academic literacy, like the shelter residents, are necessarily *incapable* of becoming empowered or of transforming their circumstances.

Moreover, though aware of the debilitating cycle of dependence that dominates the everyday experiences of the “learners,” Herzberg ironically seems to reinforce this dependence by describing them almost entirely in terms of their needs and deficiencies:

The learners’ needs are various: Some are almost completely illiterate, some are schizophrenic, a few need ESL teaching, some read well but need help with higher-order skills. Many of the learners come irregularly; many are easily distracted. One woman is pregnant, another is ridiculed by her boyfriend for needing help with phonics. One young woman is prevented by her mother (who also lives at the shelter) from taking tutoring because, the mother insists, she doesn’t need it. (311)

Herzberg accentuates what the residents lack rather than the resources they possess, further distancing the people who have, in theory, the most to gain from his pedagogy from any possibility of achieving it. Rather than attending, as do scholars such as Shirley Brice Heath and Ellen Cushman, to the specific, local complexities of their situations and literacy practices (as I will illustrate in chapter three), Herzberg essentializes the residents as a mass of unfortunates.

Strangely, in terms of their allegiance to the meritocratic ideology of the American Dream, and thus the tendency to view social problems through a personal lens, the students and “learners” are portrayed quite similarly. Herzberg argues that the shelter residents’ view of their own problems reinforces the students’ perspective, since “the learners themselves regard their situations as personal problems. They, too, have imbibed the lessons about individualism and equal opportunity. The traces have been covered over” (312). Herzberg does not offer specific evidence of the residents’ self-constructions, but according to the logic of his pedagogical message—that to seek merely functional literacy is to capitulate to the dominant ideological narrative—they *must* not be conscious of how this narrative of meritocracy shapes their perceptions.

This construction of the students and residents as ideologically blind may better reflect Herzberg’s ignorance of their internal complexities than their actual self-perceptions. Cushman, for example, reminds us of Freire’s point, “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society” (“Rhetorician” 25)? Following from Freire, I find it difficult to believe that the residents are completely unaware of how the socioeconomic deck has been stacked against them. It is quite possible that they possess a more conflicted, contradictory understanding of their own situations than Herzberg gives them credit for.⁸ It is understandable that they take responsibility, including much of the fault, for their circumstances. How else could they believe they have the agency to change these conditions? And whatever critical awareness they may possess has *not* empowered them in the manner desired by Herzberg. Nevertheless, with most of them having faced, adapted to, and survived the hardships and everyday difficulties of socioeconomic

⁸ Unfortunately, we are offered no way to know one way or the other.

disadvantage throughout their lives, it seems unfair at best to characterize them as being entirely “covered over” by the traces of ideology. They may not be able to articulate this understanding, at least not in conventional academic language, but that does not mean it is absent.

However, the key purpose for Herzberg regarding this perceived similarity between student and resident is not to challenge *both* parties’ naiveté, but to push the *students* to “read” the circumstances in a critically appropriate manner. He stresses the importance of the students becoming conscious of this ideological correspondence, arguing that they must see:

...that the people in the shelter believe the same things that they, the students, do—that there is equal opportunity to succeed or fail, to become literate or remain illiterate. They need to analyze the way that schools and other institutions, like the shelter itself, embody those beliefs. (312)

Understanding the ways in which both their own perspectives and those of the shelter residents have been discursively shaped by ideology is a crucial part of the students’ cognitive maturation process toward comprehending the ways in which the “learners” ultimately are “*not* like them” (315). Hence, the primary function of the residents here is to become a “text” that the students must read critically. Herzberg transforms the students into literacy voyeurs.

Both the students and the residents from the homeless shelter want to develop skills that will help them succeed in a capitalist society, both naïvely accept the ideology of the American Dream—at least according to Herzberg—yet one group is privileged over the other both in socioeconomic status and in exposure to a critical discourse that incites people to question the nature of that ideology. The students, then, are simultaneously spoiled and disenfranchised, oppressor and oppressed. And the residents,

to the extent that they resemble the students, do so not so that they too can be empowered, but to help the students understand their *own* privileged locations more clearly.

A striking passage in which Herzberg describes the students' struggles to overcome their "deeply-rooted beliefs" in meritocracy indicates more starkly the discomfiting way in which the students and shelter residents are at once connected and disconnected in the article—in ways Herzberg himself does not seem to recognize:

When Job, the righteous man, loses his property, his children, and his health, he angrily questions the belief that God is just and gives people what they deserve. He lashes out at his friends, the false comforters, who steadfastly maintain that the good are rewarded and the wicked punished (and thereby imply that Job is suffering for some sin). Yet Job is in a terrible dilemma. He is frustrated and angry, convinced that the comforters are wrong, yet unable to explain his situation—for he believes precisely the same things the comforters believe. When a belief is deeply-rooted, alternatives are inconceivable. (313-4)

This passage refers explicitly to the students, who, after reading Rose's and Kozol's strong condemnations of the American "Horatio Alger" ethos, are trying with great difficulty to formulate a new understanding of opportunity, poverty, and how the system works in their favor. However, the analogy of the students to Job at least partially fails. It is of course the "learners" who fit this image much more closely—in particular, Herzberg insists, because they share the same deeply-rooted beliefs about meritocracy as do the students. They suffer from the effects of unequal opportunity and systemic injustice, but are unable to understand their problem as anything but their own personal failings. The students, confused and frustrated like Job (and the residents of the shelter), nevertheless are starkly contrasted from Job in that they *maintain* their privileged status

throughout the period of doubt—if anything, they are both Job *and* the false comforters in this scenario.

Much more importantly, the students have access to what Herzberg deems to be the empowering effects of his critical teaching, and as concerned as he is about his students' initial tendency to cling to ideology, he notes that, "Time and work were on our side ... we had two semesters of composition, a sociology course, and the project itself" (315). Herzberg urges the students to make that crucial connection between the abstract social consciousness they develop in the classroom and the firsthand experience of it at the service site:

There was, apparently, nothing automatic or instantaneous about that experience that helped them understand Rose or Kozol. The community service experience doesn't bring an epiphany of critical consciousness—or even, necessarily, an epiphany of conscience. The effect was slow and indirect. (315)

This change in the students' thinking does not happen overnight, but it *does* start to happen. They begin to comprehend how they have benefited from the system and how the clients have not, so by the end of the semester, their final research papers "show a growing sophistication about the social forces at work in the creation of illiteracy" (317). In other words, at the end of the course sequence the students appear to have taken significant steps toward becoming the "better citizens" Herzberg wants them to become, although that singular moment of awakening never seems to occur for the majority. He agrees that the students' final papers show that beginning sense of "responsibility for social justice" he finds so "rare among Bentley students" because of their immersion in a culture of individualism and their convictions of "merit in a meritocracy." According to Herzberg, the students are now in a position to develop Kurt Spellmeyer's notion of a

“social imagination,” which “makes it possible not only to question and analyze the world, but also to imagine transforming it” (317). The article ends on a hopeful note, as Herzberg judges the students to be on a path toward effecting some meaningful change in the world. It goes without saying that this confidence applies only to the students; the “learners” have been left completely behind by the end of the article, a fate which tragically parallels their presumed lot in life.

Nevertheless, even the benefits of this “social imagination” must be called into question due to the significant divergence between the course’s pedagogical goals and the actual services the students perform. Herzberg acknowledges that the purpose of the course is not to pursue social change in the present but to instill in the students a social responsibility that will lead to change at some indefinite point in the future. Students in the course write for Herzberg himself, not the shelter residents or an agency committed to tackling head on the social underpinnings of illiteracy. The research papers Herzberg cites as the culminating feature of the students’ developing critical literacy comprise, as Thomas Deans notes, a *conceptual* rhetorical intervention into the public sphere. The danger here, Deans argues, is “that a focus on critique can shortchange active community intervention ... in the form of public rhetorical acts” (109). Students who come to understand the enormous scope of these structural problems without simultaneously engaging in real efforts to intervene in them, far from feeling empowered to “change the world,” might instead throw up their hands in despair.

C. Davis Lisman points out that many “justice advocates in the service-learning movement tend to believe that drawing students into justice issues in the name of service is sufficient to motivate students to work on behalf of the elimination of social injustice,”

and that in doing so these teachers “underestimate the hegemonic power of education” (77). Especially for affluent students, Lisman argues, there is a tendency “to distance themselves from this approach” upon recognition of how it “calls into question their own privileged positions.” This problem raised by Lisman is a sobering response to the “privilege conundrum” I raised earlier about the applicability of critical teaching to affluent students, thus displaying the full implications of Herzberg’s failure to address the privilege issue. Why are we to assume, as does Herzberg, that awareness leads to active intervention? Since students, as Herzberg makes clear, are acculturated into meritocracy throughout their lives, and will continue to be so after this service-learning experience, how reasonable is it to expect transformation from even a year-long course sequence, especially one that does not itself engage in social action?

The critical consciousness students purportedly develop through Herzberg’s praxis seems a strangely impotent one because it is unrelated to direct action for the kinds of social change Herzberg himself want to see happen. Ultimately, by promoting an essentialist perspective of literacy and by failing to pursue genuine action to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of community members, this model of service learning truncates the actual learning outcomes of both the university and community representatives, and also exemplifies the ironies of service discussed in the first chapter. These ironies include the detachment of those who have the most to gain from critical teaching from access to it; the utilization of service practices that reinforce the privileging of academic knowledge over nonacademic knowledge and that contribute to, rather than neutralizing, the cycles of dependence experienced by “service recipients;” *and* the

constriction of service's own capacity to empower the "service providers" by not engaging them actively in real work for social change.

This service learning paradigm, though its goals are associated with social change and an explicit denouncement of paternalistic "do-gooding," also ironically reinforces a power imbalance between university and community by failing to envision any form of agency for producing social change amongst the "service recipients." Social change, if it comes from anyone, will come from the students. And although students are to be actively discouraged from viewing themselves through the messianic prism of *noblesse oblige*, the paradigm itself may very well promote such thinking by reinforcing the distinction in the forms of literacy to which the university and community representatives have access. Indeed, it is quite possible that the epiphanic moments of critical awakening desired by Herzberg do not occur precisely because the structure of the course emphasizes to the tutors that they "merit" a higher order of knowledge and literacy, i.e. an academically critical literacy, than their "learners."

As I will illustrate in the following section, the flaws in Herzberg's model reveal his reliance on what has been called a "literacy continuum," which in many ways parallels the service continuum articulated by Keith Morton, and which is capped on its ends by two terms, "critical literacy" and "functional literacy." Critical literacy tends to be associated with an academic discourse of power, sophistication, and complexity, while functional literacy is linked with a nonacademic discourse of simplicity and false consciousness; this conceptualization demonstrates an undervaluing of the knowledge and discourses present in nonacademic communities. This continuum has been thoroughly rejected by recent scholarship that has come to be known as the New Literacy

Studies, and which will be my primary subject in the following chapter. Yet, as evidenced in Herzberg's work, the literacy continuum remains a powerful force in service-learning scholarship that can constrict possibilities for egalitarian, reciprocal collaboration. When critical literacy is reserved for the students, then the community partners who are ostensibly the ideal targets of critical education are barred from it by the terms of engagement. And within such an inequitable framework, it is hard to imagine reciprocally beneficial, collaborative work of any sort, let alone for the goals of promoting empowerment and social justice.

I do not mean to suggest that all practitioners of service learning who explicitly seek to promote social change follow Herzberg's model. Indeed, toward the end of this chapter I will examine a service-learning paradigm articulated by David Coogan, who expressly critiques Herzberg, and in later chapters I will explore the work of other scholars in rhetoric and composition who, while just as committed to promoting social change through community engagement, have nevertheless found more egalitarian, and more genuinely collaborative, ways of doing so. However, as I mentioned earlier, Herzberg's article is cited in almost all of the field's literature regarding the possibilities for social change through service learning, and usually in an admiring context. Judging from the popularity of this text, it is a reasonable inference that many service-learning practitioners have been influenced by his model of community engagement. Thus, I think it is important to bring to light the problematic assumptions about social change embedded in this prominent text as a way to emphasize the dangers of explicitly promoting social change while still adhering to a hierarchical perspective of literacy.

The Critical/Functional Literacy Continuum

Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon define “critical literacy” as an “understanding of the relationships between language and power together with a practical knowledge of how to use language for self-realization, social critique, and cultural transformation” (152). It is a mode of discourse set against the perpetual forces of linguistic domination and oppression that manifest themselves through ideology. The purpose of critical literacy, then, is to empower students to resist the forces of cultural reproduction, i.e., to help them perceive structural inequalities and see through hegemonic ideology in order to challenge these intrepid power structures. Scholars who advocate the cultivation of critical consciousness often juxtapose critical literacy against a more “functional” perspective of literacy, which, as Knoblauch and Brannon point out, evinces a “pragmatic emphasis on readying people for the necessities of daily life—writing checks and business letters; reading sets of instructions, street signs, and warning labels—as well as for the professional tasks of a complex technological society” (17). According to this point of view, functional literacy is preoccupied with “basic” skills and “efficient transmission of content from someone who possesses it to another who doesn’t.” It is also the “most familiar” and “most popular” perspective on literacy, the one powerfully ratified in classic literacy-crisis texts as *A Nation at Risk* and the call for “Back to Basics” instruction in reading and writing. Its ubiquity arises, in large part, from appearing “to promise socioeconomic benefit, a measure of personal freedom and success available from the mastery of marketable tools, to anyone who will strive to achieve the appropriate ‘minimal competency’” (18).

Increasingly, this pragmatic perspective of developing communication skills for socioeconomic benefit has become of paramount importance to college students. In fact, higher education is increasingly perceived by undergraduates as a place to enhance vocational skills for the sake of future affluence. Derek Bok, for example, notes that a substantial increase has occurred since 1970 “in the number of students who look upon making money and succeeding in one’s career as primary motivations for going to college” (26). Similarly Jeff Smith, working from a questionnaire he regularly gives to his first-year writing students, has found that virtually all of them “rate career-qualifying as at least half of their overall motive for attending college; two-thirds describe it as 70 to 100 percent of their motive” (303). And others have suggested that an ethos of “instrumental individualism” focusing on the private, practical benefits of college education came to dominate the academy following World War II (Sullivan 21).

Functional literacy, according to its critics, is fundamentally reactionary because it “sustains conformity to existing power arrangements, the status quo, with little regard for the literacy of critique and dissent” (Knoblauch and Brannon 80). By concentrating entirely on the utilitarian acquisition of basic and technical skills, functional literacy promises entry into “insiders’ clubs” without any questioning of the nature of those clubs or why one should want to be an insider in the first place, while in reality insuring that most outsiders will remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Hence functionalist “educational practice is an instrument of domination claiming to be an instrument of liberation, a means of distributing skills to outsiders according to terms set by insiders” (98). In other words, the promise of personal freedom through functional literacy is a myth (Stuckey; Graff). This deceptive assurance of a fulfilled American

Dream for hardworking contemporary Ragged Dicks strongly validates the corresponding myths of meritocracy and equal opportunity that critical teachers like Herzberg seek to lay bare for their students.

According to this dynamic, functional literacy and critical literacy form a continuum,⁹ and critical teaching should move students away from viewing literacy as a means of access to the elite realms of the capitalist system toward using literacy to critique and, ultimately, transform this system. However, scholars who promote “social transformation” and “social justice” often fail to define these terms explicitly. One assumes that they have to do with greater social equity and liberation from oppression, of “wresting from the haves more of the economic pie for the have nots” (Lisman 86), but what equity and liberation really mean in practice is also rarely clarified. In reference to their own misgivings about this pedagogy, Knoblauch and Brannon ask, “Who is to be liberated from what? Who gets to do the liberating? ... Where exactly is the inside? Is the goal to make the outsider an insider? Is it to transform one inside into another? Is it to abolish capitalism” (60)? Although scholars can agree that structural inequalities and injustices are pervasive, expressing their vision of a transformed world of equitable power relations is a much more complicated issue that does not lead to easy concurrence.

Ellen Cushman extends Knoblauch and Brannon’s point:

Many researchers believe that they can promote *social change* and *empower* students through critical literacy and emancipatory pedagogy. Yet we often hear the terms *social change* and *empowerment* used as though the nature of their outcomes is clearly established and agreed upon. This slippery discourse leads us to believe that we’re all after the same

⁹ These scholars make reference to other terms such as “cultural literacy,” which is generally associated with E.D. Hirsch’s project for developing a common cultural heritage for all young Americans. However, cultural literacy, with its privileging of the dominant cultural view of what every child should know, is considered as reactionary as functional literacy (Knoblauch and Brannon). In terms of the literacy continuum, only critical literacy is associated with the potential for resistance, dissent, and transformation.

ends, “enfranchising outsiders,” having “social impact,” creating a more “just society,” offering a “liberating ideology”.... In fact, some scholars make no distinctions between social *change* and *empowerment*, as though to empower is to liberate, and to liberate is to produce social change. (“Rhetorician” 22-3)

According to this logic of empowerment, no actual material or socioeconomic changes need be realized in order to declare that social change has been achieved. Furthermore, Cushman continues, “Underpinning this slippery discourse is an equally slick assumption—*social change* and *empowerment* lead to some kind of collective action or resistance involving the masses of people we teach” (23). This grand perspective of the ends of critical literacy fails to acknowledge the particular ways students can “take up their civic responsibilities once they leave our classrooms (23),” thus eliding the details of what transformation looks like, along with the steps for enacting these details.

Moreover, just as with the service continuum, there are a number of important limitations inherent in the literacy continuum, including the fact that it does not recognize any resistance or critique among people seeking functional literacy. As we saw in the case of Herzberg’s portrayal of both his own students and the residents of the shelter, those who believe literacy can help them make significant positive changes in their lives are, according to the logic of the continuum, *a priori* under the spell of the capitalist myth of literacy. The continuum does not make room for students who at least on some rudimentary level understand the existence of structural inequalities and social injustice, and may even be angry about it, yet choose (for their own reasons) to seek insider status without concomitant transformation.

Cushman, however, believes it is too easy for critical theorists who subscribe to the theory of “false consciousness” to “dismiss” and “diminish” students or, in the case of

community engagement, community partners, and she argues that the theorists probably have not gotten to know the subjects of their research well enough. Those scholars who do “immerse themselves into the daily living of people find ... hidden ideologies—belief systems that contain numerous, clever ways to identify and criticize onerous behavior” (“Rhetorician” 23). Hence the “label of false consciousness ... reveals more about the speaker’s limited access to students and communities than it reveals about the level of people’s critical abilities.” In other words, sweeping definitions of functional and critical literacy do not account for the complicated local, historical, and situational factors that linguists, ethnographers, and compositionists have been exploring through the New Literacy Studies, which will be of primary focus in chapter three. Consequently, the literacy continuum leads to essentialist depictions of people and, as Cushman notes, usually states more about the theorists than the people for whom the theorists speak (23).

The inconsistencies resulting from the essentialist logic of the literacy continuum become all the more apparent when one considers how often the students targeted for empowerment do not resemble the oppressed, marginalized “outsiders” at the core of critical pedagogy’s original mission, a reality which gives rise to the “privilege conundrum” I discussed earlier. As Knoblauch and Brannon argue, critical teaching historically “emerged in connection with literacy programs in countries, especially in Latin America and Africa, where conditions of profound illiteracy have helped to maintain a ruling elite to the evident detriment of other groups” (59). Certainly one of the most famous examples of such praxis is that of Paulo Freire¹⁰ working with rural

¹⁰ Another wonderful example of an empowering education geared toward traditionally marginalized groups is that of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, originally founded by Myles Horton and Don West in 1932 (Horton; Branch; Schneider; Carrick). I will address the work of Highlander more directly in the final chapter.

peasants in Brazil, and Freire's ideas were enthusiastically taken up by a small enclave of teachers in America who, according to Knoblauch and Brannon:

...appropriated the practices of critical pedagogy in the name of students perceived to be on the margins of school life, those in remedial programs, those from 'minority' groups traditionally excluded from fast academic tracks, those who have dropped out of school. (59)

The original focus of critical pedagogy, then, was to help empower and enfranchise people more clearly marked, particularly in racial and socioeconomic terms, as outsiders by mainstream culture. These American followers of Freire included people like Ira Shor and Jonathan Kozol, who respectively worked in urban community colleges and community-based literacy projects.

However, scholars like Herzberg, Knoblauch, and Brannon, who have pursued critical pedagogy in relatively prestigious university settings, generally teach to more privileged, middle-class students who *represent* the dominant culture rather than being excluded from it. This discrepancy has led Knoblauch and Brannon to ask:

Is critical teaching anything more than an intellectual game in such circumstances? ... Are these heirs to American wealth and power in fact the oppressor (re)incarnate, already too corrupted for Freirean dialogue since they have so much to gain from not listening? (60)

They go on to ask, "What do [these] students have to gain from a scrutiny of values and conditions that work to ensure their privilege" (64)? Other important questions follow from these: Do these students need to be empowered, or were they "born" empowered by their systemic privileges? Does the rarely unpacked term "empowerment" only bear meaning in relation to a movement for justice, or can one be empowered as a function of someone else's disempowerment? Since these students already are "insiders" to a large

extent, what incentives do they have to help “outsiders” join (and compete with) them, let alone to transform the system?

Knoblauch and Brannon can offer only a partial answer to this privilege conundrum, asserting that social transformation “entails a pervasive, ceaseless, public negotiation of power arrangements in the interest of social justice; it implies the necessary participation of,” in Henry Giroux’s words, “those members of the middle and upper classes who have withdrawn from public life into a world of sweeping privatization, pessimism, and greed” (65). They also point out that in spite of their desire for the “Good Life,” students also “learn and change.” The authors remind us that even a classroom of mostly privileged middle-class students is not monolithic, so that any “classroom is a site of conflicting beliefs, values, affiliations, desires, class and gender identities, the tapping of which can offer room for critical reflection.” These factors may not constitute a recipe for widespread social transformation, but they can lead to “tantalizing moments of classroom encounter” (66).

I commend these authors for attempting to answer these difficult questions related to the literacy continuum. In doing so, they seek to work out the discrepancies between the idealism of critical pedagogy and the socioeconomic contexts from which it emerged, and the realities in which proponents like Herzberg, and Knoblauch and Brannon themselves, are situated today. Unfortunately, as we saw in Herzberg’s case, critical pedagogues do not always address these complex questions.¹¹ Indeed, Herzberg’s praxis

¹¹ These incongruities only become more complicated when service learning is practiced in postsecondary institutions where the service-learning students consider themselves to be among the underprivileged, even though such groups might appear to fit the mold of critical pedagogy’s original target populations more closely than middle-class students. As Linda Adler-Kassner has pointed out, for example, these “underprepared” students have very good reasons to seek what she calls “pragmatic” uses of literacy, which in this context has to do with mastering the kinds of academic discourse they have been excluded from in the past. These students, Adler-Kassner argues, often enter postsecondary institutions already skeptical that

demonstrates clearly the problems that result from failing to address these incongruities—that is, his students are simultaneously portrayed as victimized subjects of ideological oppression (just like the shelter residents) *and* as relatively spoiled and self-congratulatory heirs of a system that has virtually foreordained their material success (and the failure of those they serve). These students are, then, both linked with the equally blind (according to Herzberg) community members they serve and distinguished by virtue of their privileged backgrounds. Most problematically, Herzberg only seeks to instill critical consciousness in his own students, not the underprivileged community members his students serve. These troubling ironies of service cut off possibilities for productive collaboration to fight the social injustices that give service learning its *raison d’etre*.

Rather than creating opportunities for egalitarian partnership, the literacy continuum ironically separates students from the communities in which they serve even while pursuing outreach with them. This literacy continuum necessarily produces the “thin” forms of service critiqued by Morton, in which a significant gap exists between the intentions of service and the actual services performed. Indeed, the literacy continuum complements the *service* continuum described by Morton, and in this parallel construction of continua, functional literacy is linked with charity, and critical literacy with social change. We have already seen Herzberg’s categorical denouncement of charity, but such perspectives appear often in the literature. For example, Laura Julier notes that service learning must be practiced with “thoughtful consideration about the

education will help them “gain a more equal footing in American society” (554). She advocates against making critical consciousness a primary focus for students in such courses, arguing instead that service learning should be used to enhance “developing students’ acumen with academic writing.” Unfortunately, the logic of the literacy continuum precludes students from arguing that functional literacy is in their own best interest, because such sentiments automatically signify ideological submission.

meaning, the mutuality, or the purposes of service” in order to prevent replicating “divisions between service provider and service recipient” (142). According to Julier, charitable service reflects thoughtless consideration of these factors:

The rhetoric of sending students “out” into “the” community may, in some settings and course designs, confirm for students an insider-outsider understanding of academic purposes, and replicate condescending models of charity and missionary work that do more to undermine than to advance the goals of multicultural education and social transformation. (142)

Here, charity is assumed to be condescending and to promote division between “service provider” and “service recipient.” Likewise, Julier assumes social transformation to be the ideal endpoint that students should come to embrace. Put in Morton’s terms, charity inevitably means “thin” service that lacks depth and integrity, so that by extension, service for social change corresponds with “thick” service.

The Literacy Continuum’s Conscripted Narrative of Social Change

As the archetypal example of service learning for social change within the field, Herzberg’s article unintentionally raises significant questions about using service learning to promote just causes. What kinds of social change can be achieved if only university representatives can access the discourses of critique and analysis that practitioners themselves believe are vitally necessary to produce such change? Why are community representatives barred from this literacy? Is it because they are considered incapable of understanding it (which would reinforce the deficit models these theorists ostensibly reject)? Or might it be because bringing them into the process of critique would lead to conflicts with those community members who, like the shelter residents, see their primary goals for these collaborations as increasing skills that will help them

engage in social mobility (or, more likely, to get food to feed their families)—in other words, the same kinds of goals that motivate most undergraduates to go to college? Herzberg unabashedly expresses disdain for this instrumentalist view of education as expressed by his own students. Does this disdain apply to community representatives as well? And if not, why not? It would seem that scholars interested in promoting critical consciousness must perceive both their own students and community representatives through the same pedagogical lens, i.e. must try to produce critical literacy in all collaborators, or acknowledge that it is okay to desire social mobility in the capitalist system (the same system these practitioners themselves benefit from). Alternatively, they must acknowledge that fundamental differences really do exist between university and community representatives, and that the more academically sophisticated “expertise” of critique should be limited to the university side. Such are the limited choices offered by a reliance on the literacy continuum.

I believe strongly that enacting more genuinely collaborative and mutual relationships between academic and community representatives requires abandoning the literacy continuum. It is necessary, then, to establish a locally situated conception of literacy that respects and validates the discursive practices of communities outside the academy. Such an egalitarian perspective makes it possible to imagine social change deemed substantive and meaningful to all participants in community engagement, and which can be pursued cooperatively by people representing multiple cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. On the contrary, the vision of social change represented by Herzberg’s work, in which critically awakened people work collaboratively to redress social injustice on a broad scale, ironically constricts possibilities for such collaborative

efforts. This vision requires prior agreement from all parties about the nature of structural inequality, the myths of American meritocracy and individualism, and a collective rejection of instrumentalist beliefs about the purpose of literacy. Yet, as a proponent of this pedagogy, Herzberg generally fails to extend its scope to community representatives, instead separating students and community members into critical and functional literacy groups. This vision does not make room for different articulations about the meaning of social change, either from students or community representatives. Moreover, the problems of social injustice dwarf the capacity of individual service-learning courses to rectify them, reinforcing a potential sense of failure among those who participate. As Paula Mathieu argues, and as I will discuss in chapter four, it is necessary to recognize the “radical insufficiency” of individual efforts to promote social change in unjust situations.

De-Emphasizing, but Not Rejecting, the Literacy Continuum: More Recent Incarnations of Service Learning for Social Change in Rhetoric and Composition

I have argued that Herzberg’s framing of service learning through the lens of critical pedagogy has strongly influenced the field’s attempts to promote social change in underserved communities. More recently, some articles have been published that do not explicitly emphasize critical teaching according to his model, yet articulate praxes that in many ways are similar to Herzberg’s. These newer articulations of service learning for social change, while not directly advancing a hierarchical literacy continuum, nevertheless fail to actively embrace an egalitarian perspective on literacy practices. Rather, they resort to a kind of default understanding of literacy that continues to project an academically-dominated framework onto the collaborative space.

Ann Green, for example, in an article published nearly a decade after Herzberg's "Community Service and Critical Teaching," writes about the necessity of using service learning to complicate students' understandings of race and class, especially since most "of the academy is still white and middle class" (277), whereas the communities in which students practice service learning are often working class with high minority populations. Green uses service learning to make her students recognize and engage the "difficult stories" that emerge when people from different races and classes work together. Drawing on bell hooks, Green argues that "telling stories of this kind," such as her own difficult experience volunteering as a white, working-class college student at a mostly black "welfare hotel" in New York City, "is an important pedagogical strategy that can work against racism and classism" (282). Like Herzberg, Green teaches at a college where most of the students come from privileged backgrounds, and she echoes Herzberg in stating that the difficult stories of service learning can be used to resist the "predominant ideology of American individualism *and* the implicit emphasis on 'helping' that brings students to the service-learning classroom" (282). She also wants her students to cultivate a critical consciousness about the socioeconomic forces that have led them to their privileged positions in college, and why the people they serve have traversed a different path. These difficult stories help her fight the students' own resistance to perceiving their built-in privileges. She also clearly adheres to the service continuum, linking students' desire to "help" with charity and assuming that such motivations ultimately reinforce the status quo.

Also similar to Herzberg, and what I find most problematic about her pedagogical goals, is that Green focuses her attention almost entirely on what students should procure

from the experiences of service learning. Although she claims to encourage “mutual and egalitarian” service relationships defined by “friendship,” she only seems to invest her own students with the power to create these relationships:

I can't undo the power relationships between those who serve and those who are served or require sharing and trust in a way that will lead to friendship, but I can make power relationships visible and encourage students to develop relationships with the learners at their site that are more mutual and egalitarian. And in class, I can create spaces for students to explore their different subject positions and relationships to service. By doing this, I acknowledge that (even for my visibly homogenous students) power, race, class, and whiteness are always more than one thing and never the same thing twice (Ellsworth, “Double Binds”). Friendship is one way that those in positions of either race or class privilege can share an investment in issues that are not “theirs.” These friendships can be built through the stories we tell each other and the way we listen to one another's stories. (296)

In this passage, “those who receive service” do not have the agency to work for more egalitarian relationships defined by friendship and mutualism. They can only receive the potential benefits of being placed with students who gradually come to understand power and privilege in more socially sophisticated ways, and who use this knowledge to subvert the typical hierarchies of the service relationship. She also gives no indication about what these more egalitarian relationships, if enacted, would produce. Because the students and community members are categorized according to those who serve and those who receive service, it is difficult to imagine what an egalitarian relationship would look like, and what collaborative work these groups would pursue together.

I would argue that Green's article progresses upon Herzberg's in some respects, in that she examines her own position among the students in her course and the community members she and they serve. She attempts, for example, to show her students how “race has affected and continues to affect, not just [her] scholarship or [her]

academic writing, but [her] life,” and that she also “is implicated in this history of white privilege” (294). Herzberg, by contrast, projects himself on a plain above his students, never complicating his own position within the thorny relationships that mark sites of service learning, and generally referring to himself only in regard to his goals as someone passionately committed to social change. Yet, Green’s goal of using difficult stories to “create space in service-learning classes for imagining a different and more hopeful world” (297) echoes Herzberg’s goal of promoting a “social imagination” in his students. Furthermore, she states that her ultimate goal, like Herzberg’s, is that “through service-learning courses, students in positions of privilege become committed to an idea of social justice that translates into lifelong work for social change.” Green never defines precisely what she means by social change, although the rhetoric of counteracting racism, classism, and privilege that pervades the article seems to align her conceptualization closely with Herzberg’s. But once again, if social change is to occur, it will only be at the hands of already privileged students, not spearheaded by the ostensible recipients of these structural changes. Thus, without using the terms explicitly, Green subtly reinforces a divide between the “critical” literacy that students would ideally learn in her course, and the world of “functional” literacy in which those who receive service live.

Still more recently, David Coogan published a piece about service learning dedicated to social change that explicitly critiques Herzberg’s failure to supplement students’ learning about critical consciousness with genuine activity to promote material changes in the lives of the underprivileged people they serve. Coogan writes:

Bruce Herzberg, for example, teaches students to analyze social problems such as homelessness. But he defers community-based, rhetorical production to the teaching of critical consciousness. Students who took his course and volunteered at a homeless shelter were not taught how to

advocate for changes in the way the homeless are treated in Boston but how to think about the social causes of homelessness. (668)

Coogan, on the contrary, is much more intent on producing substantive outcomes within the underserved communities where his students practice service learning. He advocates a “materialist rhetoric” in which students cultivate an in-depth understanding of the people they work with, including the history of the community and the challenges they have faced, using this knowledge to produce a “rhetorical analysis of how institutions exercise power” (667). He seeks to use rhetoric grounded in the material circumstances of the community to “make a difference in institutional practices, governmental policy, public opinion, or some other sector of the public sphere” (669). In other words, his praxis of service learning is very much outcome-oriented. Rather than merely pushing his own students to develop a sophisticated, critical understanding of ideology, he urges students to work with community partners to solve real community problems.

Coogan details the development of a service-learning relationship between students at the Illinois Institute of Technology and Urban Matters, a community-based organization in Chicago endeavoring to increase parent involvement in the local school council in the “South Side neighborhood of Bronzeville” (679). This partnership originally took the form of a two-semester project; in the first semester partners encouraged community residents to run for seats in the school council, and in the second term they drummed up support for a “parent’s union” that “would advocate for improvement in all seven schools” in the district (679). He narrates the story of the group’s efforts, arguing that they ultimately failed due to the lack of a “rhetorical analysis” preceding the “rhetorical production” of arguments in favor of local control of schools (687). Coogan’s interpretation of the effort’s disappointing outcome leads him to

articulate the importance of a “materialist rhetoric” that would make it possible to, in Aristotelian fashion, find the “most probable means of persuading parents to get more involved in their children’s education” (687) before producing such arguments. He then discusses a third semester of the project, in which he shifted the “rhetorical work away from ‘local control’ of the schools toward the ‘local responsibility’ of parents, teachers, and administrators to create programs to address student achievement” (688-9). This new approach, reflecting a more rhetorically nuanced understanding of the community’s circumstances, produced some positive results, including collaborative research that “culminated in a set of recommendations for” two target schools. These “formal, group-written reports ... were reviewed by [the] community sponsor and the two schools, revised, and approved” (689).

Coogan’s praxis begins to move beyond the distinguishing categories of “critical” and “functional” literacy. He does not emphasize distinctions between the two groups, and genuinely wants his students to work in cooperation with the community, arguing that they “‘did rhetoric’ alongside their community partners” (680). Yet, whereas Herzberg focuses almost entirely on what happened in his class, and the development (or lack thereof) of his students, Coogan focuses almost entirely on the outcomes (or lack thereof) in the community, spending very little time examining what happened within his own classroom. Indeed, although stating his desire in the article’s final pages to “elaborate [his] pedagogical framework of discovery, analysis, production, and assessment,” and to “show how it can be used to identify reasonable measures of change” (689), he never really follows through with an explanation of what a pedagogy of materialist rhetoric would look like. Rather, he uses most of the space to analyze further

the results of community organizing in Bronzeville and to remind us once again that the emphasis should always remain on outcomes. Thus, one does not develop a strong conception of how to build on Coogan's work to transfer his outcomes-oriented service learning into other pedagogical contexts.¹²

There are also strange moments in the article in which Coogan seems to assert direct control over the goals of the project, making it seem as though he single-handedly decided that the lack of a prior rhetorical analysis produced the disappointing outcomes in the second semester, and that his change in approach would solve these problems in the third semester. He states that *he* shifted the rhetorical work away from "local control" toward "local responsibility." While I do not mean to question the correctness of his decision, I find it odd that he takes sole credit for this change in approach. Coogan also states that the "students did not know they were taking a materialist approach to rhetorical analysis, but they were" (690). He is not clear about why he does not explain to students what materialist rhetoric is in the process of having them perform it, and more importantly, whether the community partners knew that they were practicing materialist rhetoric either, and whether there was general agreement that this shift was the best course of action. We do not learn the extent to which the community organization, Urban Matters, participated in this decision-making process, and this absence creates questions about just how genuinely collaborative the project was.

The service-learning courses described by Coogan emerge out of the Illinois Institute of Technology's "Interprofessional Research Program," which seeks to involve students in "semester-long undergraduate projects based on real-world topics" (680). In

¹² I think there is much to esteem in Coogan's work, and would be interested to see the results of other scholars' attempts to pursue materialist rhetoric elsewhere.

other words, the relationship is very much determined by an academically-dominated structure that follows the timeframes and logistical framework of academic life. Paula Mathieu argues that this *strategic* approach to community engagement, in placing academic ownership over a collaborative site in which academic timeframes do not necessarily apply, creates problems for the achievement of an egalitarian, reciprocal relationship, even when academic partners genuinely wish to produce such outcomes. Moreover, Coogan's approach is problem-oriented, seeking to solve a daunting problem in the community related to local control of schools. Mathieu argues that this orientation toward engagement places unreasonably high expectations on the collaboration, in turn potentially casting a pall of failure and disappointment on the whole endeavor when the overriding problems are not solved, even when more modest but still important projects may have been completed. In fact, such an outcome seems to have occurred in the second semester of the project. At this time, students set out "to organize seven schools around substantive issues related to parental involvement," and "it was disappointing both to the students and the staff of Urban Matters that only one issue emerged at the very last minute after all of that work" (687). I will examine Mathieu's argument in depth in chapter four.

Ultimately, Coogan's materialist rhetoric is clearly more action-oriented than Herzberg's praxis, and much more concerned with collaborative endeavors to promote change, yet in some important ways, it still reinforces a sense of academic distinction over the underserved community partners. I believe that, in order to travel further down the path toward egalitarianism and reciprocity, it is necessary to abandon the literacy continuum more comprehensively. Only an egalitarian perspective of literacy practices

from different social contexts will enable a re-articulation of social change that is more directly relevant to the lives of community members. In the following chapter, I will examine more recent developments in the field regarding literacy, focusing in particular on the interdisciplinary work of the New Literacy Studies, which in recent decades has forcefully argued against literacy hierarchies such as “critical” vs. “functional.” Instead, these scholars emphasize the social contexts in which different forms of literacy exist, and advocate a concept of *multiple* literacy practices. These theoretical developments create possibilities for more egalitarian community engagement, and begin to pave the way for my conceptualization of community action.

Chapter Three

The New Literacy Studies: Laying the Theoretical Foundation for Egalitarian Literacy-Based Collaborations between Academic and Nonacademic Communities

I begin chapter three with an extended passage from Ellen Cushman's *The Struggle and the Tools*, one of the landmark texts in rhetoric and composition's development of a more sophisticated understanding of nonacademic forms of literacy, because it both highlights the key issues of this chapter and provides a useful way to link the concerns of the previous chapter with these issues. Here Cushman discusses what I would call a form of "research illiteracy" on the part of scholars who superficially engage nonacademic community members in the process of researching them, and therefore prove unable to understand sufficiently or represent either accurately or responsibly these subjects' literacy practices. This failure to observe the sophistication and critical thinking of members of these nonacademic communities, both Cushman and I would agree, is a primary cause of the kinds of non-egalitarian, non-reciprocal engagement represented in chapter two by Herzberg's model of service learning for social change. Cushman writes:

If we are to appreciate and understand the literacies that take place outside of the classroom, we must have an invitation into the daily lives of people outside of the academy—no easy feat, given the social distance between most universities and their communities, particularly inner city communities.

I have two concerns about this lack of access to extracurricular literacies. First, I think that when we do begin to explore reading and writing in the community, we too easily accept limited, and limiting, depictions of the level of literacy of people. I'm thinking of Bruce

Herzberg's important work.... In this article, he describes an adult literacy program that bridges students from his composition classroom with learners in a homeless shelter.... I believe this work is necessary, important even. But I believe he settles with a description of these homeless people that undercuts the integrity of his goal—he terms these learners in the shelter “illiterate”; in fact, he uses the word eight times in the span of ten pages. Here is someone with laudable access to a site where extracurricular literacies, I'll wager, take place in stolen moments of privacy in the daily lives of the people, but here is also an assumption of deficit from the outset. This assumption is problematic because it blinds us to people's potential and limits our investigation of possible literate practices.

My second concern about this lack of access to extracurricular literacies is that we too easily settle into our own value system of what counts as reading and writing. In other words, because we don't often know what types of nonacademic literacy are valued outside of the classroom, we slip into believing that our values are their values, that school literacy is esteemed by everyone. The sociolinguist Brian Street argues that instead of academics speaking of a literacy, we should be examining “literacies—the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” as they take place in multiple cultural contexts (1993, 1). He finds, “the rich cultural variation in these practices ... leads us to rethink what we mean by [literacy] and to be wary of assuming a single literacy where we may simply be imposing assumptions derived from our own cultural practice onto other peoples literacies” (1). Without adequate access to institutional and community literacies, then, we risk superimposing what we value as good reading and writing onto other types of literacy taking place outside of the classroom. (232-3)

This passage is crucial for several reasons. First, it reminds us of one of the key absences from Herzberg's work, namely, attention to the literacy *practices* (a term I shall examine in greater detail below) already operating among the residents of the shelter—an attention made impossible by the implicit assumptions of the literacy continuum. As I argued in chapter two, the literacy continuum operates with its own hierarchical logic (stated implicitly or explicitly) that isolates two forms of literacy: one an “empowering” and academically-based critical literacy that service-learning pedagogues like Herzberg seek to teach their students, and one a “disempowering” functional literacy that ultimately

reproduces the dominant order (and thus oppresses further the underprivileged who seek it).¹³

Cushman also emphasizes how the physical distance between academic and nonacademic communities tends to be reinforced by *social* distances that have to do with the different discursive practices and socioeconomic conditions existing in these locations. Overcoming this distance requires immersion into nonacademic community members' daily lives, including in-depth engagement with their own literacy practices. Misrecognizing these practices as absent of critical capacity leads to oversimplifying them, and thus subsuming them within the logic of the literacy continuum. This misrecognition, then, reinforces conceptions of nonacademic literacies as deficient, as somehow lacking the sophisticated critical features, both linguistic and cognitive, of academic discourse. This perspective also disables the scholar from recognizing that literate practices are likely taking place, but are hidden away in "stolen moments of privacy" unrevealed to an outside presence who has not earned sufficient trust to be made party to such disclosures. Here the scholar's "research illiteracy" can be very damaging, because it reinforces cultural misconceptions about the supposed literacy defects of the oppressed. Indeed, as in the case of Herzberg, it can lead one to portray nonacademic community representatives as lacking literacy all together, i.e. as being "illiterate."

Cushman argues not that critical literacy is illusory, but that it is not an exclusively academic literacy. In other words, the shelter residents most likely possess

¹³ It should be noted that Herzberg does not actually use the phrase "functional literacy" to describe the residents of the shelter. In fact, as Cushman informs us here, he describes them as "illiterate," which would seem to place them even further down the literacy continuum, and thus in an even more disempowered position, than would be understood if he were to have described them as functionally literate, or at least pursuing functional literacy. Again, as I argued in chapter two, the manner in which Herzberg depicts the shelter residents throughout the article offers no reason to hope that they will rise above their current socioeconomic circumstances. He portrays them as thoroughly disempowered.

important critical insights regarding their socioeconomic circumstances, but display them in private moments unseen by Herzberg. Unfortunately, because of the residents' strange status in his article as exhibits of poverty that need to be understood properly by his students, Herzberg has little reason to portray them as critically astute, i.e. as more than illiterates unwittingly betrayed by a system that has set them up to fail in life. They do not function in his article as potential partners in the fight for social change; they function as museum pieces. The logic of his practice virtually requires him to miss any evidence of critical awareness on the part of the residents.

On the flip side of this dismissal, whether willful or unintentional, of nonacademic literate practices, is the overestimation by academics of the status of school-based literacy in the eyes of these nonacademic community members—that is, the glorification of the “critical,” academic end of the literacy continuum, and the assumption that everyone shares these values (whether they can access such literacy or not). Cushman, channeling the argument of Brian Street, emphasizes instead that people outside the academy both *possess* different literacy practices than academics and *value* literacy practices differently. And, both within and across various communities, different literacy practices will be valued differently by people (even the same person) at different times. Hence the very idea of “literacy” should be dropped in favor of the term “literacies,” which recognizes that cultural variations exist in how different communities value and apply different literacy practices, and strongly supports the concept that literacies exist within multiple social contexts. Scholars such as Cushman and Street reject the notion that a universal, homogenous form of literacy exists independent of the contexts in which it is used. But in order to draw out the complexities of these multiple

practices, scholars must immerse themselves within the cultures and peoples using them, rather than maintaining an objective, detached (i.e. typically academic) stance toward them.

This passage emphasizes what is lost when scholars seeking to engage communities outside the academy do so without attending to or respecting the different discursive and literate practices of those communities. The result, as we have seen with Herzberg's model of service learning for social change, can be a hierarchy positioning academic literacy at the endpoint that denotes greatest complexity, usefulness, and value, and the forms of literacy used by nonacademic community representatives at the bottom. Fortunately, the passage also highlights a radically different perspective of literacy, one that puts the scope of literacy research outside classroom walls, that values literacies from all quarters, and that recognizes the sophistication and complexity, as well as critical perspicacity, of these traditionally overlooked nonacademic literacies. Indeed, Cushman's book, as we shall see, offers an exemplary instance of the developments that have occurred within literacy studies in recent decades, developments that have crossed various disciplines including psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and rhetoric and composition. This interdisciplinary work, based on the idea that literacies are inevitably grounded in social contexts, has come to be known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS).

In chapter two, I argued that service-learning courses for social change that adhere to the literacy continuum ultimately reproduce social hierarchies by failing to respect the resources and literacy practices of nonacademic community members. In doing so, and in spite of their explicit promotion of outreach that enhances the public good, these courses ironically lead to non-egalitarian relationships that fail to enact

reciprocal outcomes or ethical engagement. In this chapter I turn to the research of the NLS to illustrate the potential that a different conception of literacy, namely, as a social practice fundamentally linked to the contexts in which it manifests itself, holds for relationships between academic and nonacademic communities. This scholarly movement's impact on the field of rhetoric and composition, I will argue, makes the discipline ideal for enacting greater reciprocity and egalitarianism, as well as ethicality, in these relationships.

Such relationships would build upon the field's penchant for engagement with nonacademic communities through service-learning courses, but rather than reinforcing socioeconomic distinctions by validating certain forms of literacy over others, they would enact "hybrid literacies" accessible to all parties in the collaboration. The notion of hybrid literacies constitutes one of the cornerstones of my conceptualization of community action, and I will analyze this concept and its potential for promoting egalitarian community engagement in chapter four. In doing so, I will examine the service-learning practices of Ellen Cushman and Linda Flower, who are the primary theoreticians and practitioners of hybrid literacies within the field. As will become clear in that chapter, I perceive their paradigms of service learning as coming a long way from Herzberg's model in their emphasis on the importance of collaboration and respect for different forms of literacy. Indeed, they serve as key transitional modes between Herzberg's model of service learning for social change and my articulation of community action.

In exploring the New Literacy Studies, I plan to illustrate the meaning and significance of their radical re-conception of traditional attitudes and beliefs about

literacy. I will show how their ethnographic immersion in nonacademic sites of literacy, by illustrating the complexity and sophistication of traditionally undervalued literacies from sites such as the workplace and home, led them to challenge conventionally hierarchical judgments about different forms of literacy. Their efforts demonstrate that mainstream, highly-schooled, middle-class groups do not possess universal or natural means for evaluating literacy practices; but they do possess different sets of *values* than non-mainstream groups, and due to unequal power relations, mainstream literacies tend to dominate over other literacy practices.

Following this exposition I will discuss the impact of the New Literacy Studies on literacy theory in the field of rhetoric and composition, focusing especially on Cushman's ethnography of a poor, minority community in upstate New York in *The Struggle and the Tools*. Cushman delineates a protocol for ethical and reciprocal research of nonacademic communities that she calls "activist research." This protocol forms the basis of her community work and allows her to immerse herself in the literacy practices of her research subjects, as well as to demonstrate their critical awareness and pursue reciprocal benefits for these community members. In doing so, she offers a relatively more egalitarian, reciprocal model for engaging nonacademic community members than we saw in chapter two. Activist research also becomes the basis of her service-learning praxis, as I will address in chapter four.

Nevertheless, some significant limitations exist in the capacity of activist research to produce egalitarianism and reciprocity. Indeed, the ethnographic methodology at the heart of her research *modus operandi* seems to come with built-in constrictions regarding these values of engagement. Although activist research allows her successfully to

redefine critical literacy and social change away from broad-scale, collective action against social inequities toward micro-level resistance seen in day-to-day interactions between underserved people and institutional gatekeepers, she ultimately lowers the bar for what constitutes social change so dramatically that it essentially becomes little more than *potential* for positive change with little practical hope for realizing this potential. She also is hard-pressed to show that the outcomes of her research are truly reciprocal.

Yet, in spite of my criticisms of activist research, I argue that it represents significant positive steps on the way toward a re-imagining of academic/nonacademic community engagement that centers on egalitarianism and truly mutual benefits. I greatly admire Cushman's efforts to drive the field of rhetoric and composition toward more ethically responsible community engagement, and she helps pave the way for my conceptualization of community action. In turning now to the literacy scholarship that has helped these theoretical developments come into existence, I will first delineate the traditional conceptions of literacy that this scholarship has defined itself against.

Traditional Narratives of Literacy and the Counter-Narrative of the New Literacy Studies

To a large extent, the developments in literacy studies that have occurred in recent years have grown out of an increasing "unease" among some scholars toward what David Barton and Mary Hamilton refer to as "more traditional characterisations of literacy, both academically and in public and educational debate" (20). Two key features of these traditional conceptions of literacy are the ideas that literacy is an autonomous, individual skill, and that literacy leads to momentous transformations in individuals' cognitive abilities. Regarding the first aspect, Barton and Hamilton understand such traditional

conceptions to mean “purely psychological characterisations of reading and writing as autonomous skills,” which comprises the “ideas of literacy as something solely located in people’s heads as cognition.” Susan L. Lytle argues that this:

...concept of literacy as a neutral or objective set of **skills**, independent of any specific social context or ideology, can be traced to developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries related to group testing and to the call, at that time, for scientific and objective measures of individual reading achievement. (380, bold in original)

Thus the autonomous view of literacy emerged in conjunction with the rise of the modern research university and the corresponding placement of scientific knowledge at the top of the research agenda.

For traditionalists, James Gee asserts:

...interpretation is a matter of what goes on in the mind, that is, largely a psychological matter. If readers know the language, can decode writing, and have the requisite background ‘facts’ to draw the inevitable inferences any writing requires, they can construct the ‘right’ interpretation in their heads. And this ‘right’ interpretation is (roughly) the same for all competent readers” (*Social Linguistics* 39).

This view of literacy essentializes all readers, who, if their cognitive faculties are properly developed, should all be able to interpret texts in the proper manner. According to the logic of this conception of literacy, those readers who do not produce the “right” interpretation must be cognitively deficient in some way. The problem for such a reader is assumed to be with the reader herself, not the text or the contexts in which she reads or interprets the text.

Equally wrapped up with the autonomous conception of literacy is the idea that the historical transition within cultures from oral to literate led to profound shifts in human cognitive capacity, making possible great leaps forward in the development of civilization. This common sentiment about literacy includes the notions that literate

people are, as James Gee recalls the narrative, “more intelligent, more modern, more moral,” and that countries “with high literacy rates are better developed, more modern, better behaved.” According to this “Great Divide” theory, best represented in the works of scholars such as Walter Ong and Jack Goody, the rise of literacy “freed some of humanity from a primitive state, from an earlier stage of human development. If language is what makes us human, literacy, it seems, is what makes us civilized” (*Social Linguistics* 26). Included among the reputed “powers of literacy” are an enhanced capacity for “logical, analytical, critical, and rational thinking, general and abstract uses of language, skeptical and questioning attitudes, a distinction between myth and history, a recognition of the importance of time and space, etc.” This traditional perspective, Gee asserts, attributes almost “omnipotent” power to literacy.

The idea of the Great Divide thus assumes that the terms “oral” and “literate” can be used to designate different cultures’ overall cognitive advancement, and that they exist on a continuum with oral linked to more primitive cultures and literate associated with more advanced ones. This literacy continuum inevitably leads to a hierarchy of the value and significance of these forms of literacy, and presumes that the value system used to judge these different systems is natural and universal (*Social Linguistics* 57). Both the autonomous model and the Great Divide Theory ultimately portray literacy as a question of haves and have-nots, with school-based literacy as *the* standard against which all other linguistic practices are judged to be relatively *il*-literate. This dominant narrative about literacy, which scholars such as Barton and Hamilton insist on labeling a narrative because it is just one possible way of perceiving literacy (21), has had profound effects on how people who have not mastered the mainstream standard are judged by those who

have, and bears much responsibility for the almost continuously renewed jeremiads about a “literacy crisis” pervading American schooling. And these consistent lamentations about a literacy crisis ultimately reflect another example of the harmful effects of the literacy continuum on non-mainstream groups, as will be discussed further below.¹⁴

However, research among scholars of literacy in recent decades has called into significant question the veracity of these traditional claims about literacy’s cognitive effects. Indeed, these scholars have come to label the claims a “literacy myth,” arguing that there is “precious little evidence” for them, and that even where “such evidence does exist, the role of literacy is always much more complex and contradictory, more deeply intertwined with other factors, than the literacy myth allows” (26). In fact, the literacy myth is so pervasive in the Western world as to constitute “one of the master myths of our society.”¹⁵ Beginning in the 1970s these scholars, in particular psychologists, linguists, and anthropologists, looked through the myth and the concomitant assumptions about its influence on higher-order cognitive faculties and asked fundamental questions such as, “What is literacy?”, “What are the capacities of literacy?” and “What is it good for?” In asking these questions, they “started a new interdisciplinary field of study” that has come to be known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (39).

Debunking the Master Literacy Myths

¹⁴ Herzberg’s repeated characterizations of the shelter residents as “illiterate,” a classification he juxtaposes against the critical literacy he desires for his students to cultivate, constitutes an almost paradigmatic example of this literacy hierarchy. Moreover, he essentially portrays the development of critical literacy as making possible a great leap forward for his students (but not the shelter residents, who are not given access to critical literacy), from ideologically blind believers in the dogma of American meritocracy, to budding cultural warriors versed in the ways of hegemony and social reproduction.

¹⁵ Another aspect of this literacy myth, as we saw in chapter two regarding functional literacy, is the belief that literacy necessarily produces personal freedom and makes social mobility possible (Stuckey, Graff).

At the heart of the development of the NLS was the displacement of schools and academia as the sole or even primary sites in which to research practices of literacy. These scholars burst out of classrooms to do ethnographic research in a variety of settings, including workplaces, homes, and many international locations, especially within cultures in developing nations. Concomitant with this expanded scope for literacy research was a reevaluation of traditional, academically-based literacy values. As Brian Street, one of the pioneers of the NLS, argues:

Literacy ... need not be associated with schooling or pedagogy.... Research needs, instead, to begin from a more comparative, more ethnographically based conception of literacy as the *social* practices of reading and writing and to eschew value judgments about the relative superiority of school literacy and other literacies. (*Social Literacies* 11)

Bound up with the rise of ethnographic literacy studies outside the classroom, then, was a shedding of school-based values traditionally used to rank different forms of literacy.

Among the most notable of the studies performed as this field emerged was the work of Scribner and Cole amidst the Vai cultures of Liberia in the 1970s (Scribner and Cole; Scribner), where these psychologists determined that “literacy and schooling do not always go together” (Gee, *Social Linguistics* 33). In the case of the Vai, there are three sorts of literacy, with:

...some people having none, one, two, or all three: English literacy acquired in formal school settings; an indigenous Vai script (syllabic, not alphabetic) transmitted outside an institutional setting (i.e. among peers and family) and with no connection with Western-style schooling; and a form of literacy in Arabic. (33)

From their immersion in the Vai cultures, Scribner and Cole found that “neither syllabic Vai literacy, nor Arabic alphabetic literacy is associated with what have been considered

higher-order intellectual skills *as they are tested by our typical school-based texts.*”

Thus:

Neither of these types of literacy enhanced the use of taxonomic skills, nor did either contribute to a shift toward syllogistic reasoning. In contrast, literacy in English, the only form associated with formal schooling of the Western sort, was associated with some types of decontextualization and abstract reasoning. (33)

Crucially, however:

...after English literates had been out of school a few years, they did better than non-literates only on verbal explanation tasks ('talking-about' tasks). They did no better on actual problem solving, for example on categorization and abstract reasoning tasks.... In the Scribner and Cole study, literacy in and of itself led to no grandiose cognitive abilities, and formal schooling ultimately led to rather specific abilities that are rather useless without institutions which reward 'expository talk in contrived situations' (such as schools, courses, and bureaucracies). (33-4)

The key conclusions of Scribner and Cole's landmark work, as well as other research occurring in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, are that literacy (at least in and of itself) does not produce the cognitive transformations implied by the literacy myths (Street 1984; Street 1995; Barton and Hamilton). Hence these studies in literacy raised serious doubts about both aspects of this myth, the Great Divide theory and the autonomous model of literacy. Among scholars of the NLS, a very different perspective about different forms of literacy has emerged. In describing the implications of this work regarding the question "What is literacy?", Scribner writes:

First, it promotes skepticism of the 'one best answer' approach to the improvement of literacy in our society. Second, it urges the need for understanding the great variety of beliefs and aspirations that various people have developed toward literacy in their particular historical and current life circumstances. (24)

These scholars demonstrate that the one-size-fits-all approach ignores other social contexts for literacy, benefiting those who are comfortable in those contexts for which the one chosen size actually does fit, and harming everyone else.

Similarly, drawing from the work of Brian Street, James Gee illustrates how these scholars reject “the claim that literacy (or schooling for that matter) has cognitive effects apart from the context in which it exists and the uses to which it is put in a given culture” (*Social Linguistics* 57). In place of this “autonomous model” of literacy, the NLS scholars offer an “ideological model,” and according to this framework:

Claims for literacy, in particular for essay-text literacy values, whether in speech or writing, are ... ideological. They are part of ‘an armoury of concepts, conventions, and practices’ that privilege one social formation as if it were natural, universal, or, at the least, the end point of a normal developmental progression (achieved only by some cultures, thanks either to their intelligence or their technology).

In other words, the school-based values that portray themselves as the natural or correct values for judging oral or literate acts are instead manifestations of mainstream ideology dominating other values and ideologies.

In stark contrast to the autonomous model, the ideological model “attempts to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded. Literacy—of whatever type—only has consequences as it acts together with a large number of other social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure, and local ideologies” (*Social Linguistics* 58). Thus one cannot isolate literacy from its social contexts and the various other factors that make its existence meaningful in order to study or comprehend it. As Gee, Hull and Lankshear argue:

Texts are part of *lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden* practices carried out in specific places and at specific times. Think of legal texts, comic books, recipes, Dick-and-Jane readers, basal readers, graffiti, traffic tickets, lab notebooks, journal articles, notes to family members, manuals, and so forth. You feel your mind run through quite different practices, quite different configurations of people, actions, and settings, quite different ‘ways of being in the world’ at a time and place.

Now it turns out ... that in these social practices we can never extract just the bits concerned with reading (or ‘literacy’ in any other sense) and ignore all the bits concerned with talk, action, interaction, attitudes, values, objects, tools, and spaces. *All the bits*—the print bits and the non-print bits—constitute an integral whole. Apart from the social practices in which they are acquired and in which they are always embedded, the ‘literacy bits’ do not exist, or at least they do not mean anything (in several senses of the word ‘mean’). Once extracted from the practices they are not the ‘same thing’ that existed in the living social practice. (3)

Associated with each textual expression are various social practices that inform the meaning and reception of the text, and to try and disconnect the text from these practices would be to disconnect it from possessing meaning in the real world of “time and place.” Literacy is not detachable from the circumstances of its application, and thus acontextual assessments of literacy as an individual skill, and in particular perspectives that only validate school-based forms of literacy, don’t conform to the real, material conditions in which these skills are actually utilized.

Among the implications of the ideological model is the theoretical shift away from conceptions of literacy continua, whether ranging between literate and oral, school and nonschool, or critical and functional. Glynda Hull and Katherine Schultz argue that by examining literacy ethnographically “as it is distributed across a community rather than a single focus on the classroom,” these scholars came to “imagine a variety of configurations or a plurality of literacies” rather than “a single continuum or level of literacy” (14). In other words, by promoting the idea of different literacies operating in

multiple, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting social contexts in place of the traditional view, the New Literacy scholars have established a framework for engaging literacy in which hierarchical conceptions of literacy no longer apply. Rather than better and worse forms of literacy, there are merely *different* literacies that are all valid within the contexts of their use and incomprehensible outside those contexts. Gee, for example, contends that in studying language and literacy practices, linguists “do not talk about languages being better and worse, since all speakers, given their biological and cognitive equipment, acquire an amazingly consistent and complicated variety of a language (a dialect) as children” (*Social Linguistics* 11). These scholars recognize that, as a function of the incredibly advanced linguistic capabilities of humans in all cultures, *all* languages are highly sophisticated.

Practices and Events

The shift away from traditional narratives of literacy toward the New Literacy Studies’ counter-narrative placed two key terms, “literacy practice” and “literacy event,” at the heart of the research. Regarding the first term, Hull and Schultz maintain, “Central to a plurality of literacies is the notion of practice, with its emphasis on purpose within context and the patterned interplay of particular skills, knowledge, and technologies” (20). Or, as David Barton and Mary Hamilton illustrate:

Our interest is in social practices in which literacy plays a role; hence, the basic unit of a social theory of literacy is that of literacy practices. Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships (see Street 1993:12). This includes people’s awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of

literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy. These are processes internal to the individual; at the same time, practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities. Practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them. They straddle the distinction between individual and social worlds, and literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals. (6)

This concept of literacy practices complicates traditional perspectives of literacy by abolishing the individual, or more accurately, the cognitive processes operating in the individual's brain when contemplating some text, as a discrete unit of analysis. In fact, as Barton and Hamilton argue, literacy practices cannot be analyzed directly because they are comprised of social factors that defy easy quantification or qualification.

Consequently, the authors distinguish literacy practices from the more concrete, directly analyzable concept of the "literacy event," which they describe as activities where literacy plays some role, including situations where a written text is physically present as well as situations where it is physically absent but discussed:

Usually there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that always exists in a social context. Many literacy events are regular, repeated activities, and these can often be a useful starting-point for research into literacy. Some events are linked into routine sequences and these may be part of the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions like work-places, schools and welfare agencies.... Texts are a crucial part of literacy events, and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used. (7-8)

Thus it is through the lens of the literacy event that one finds literacy practices operating. Each literacy event is situated within a social context, and through revelation and analysis of the multiple layers of social meaning that lie behind the event's manifestation,

comprehension of literacy practices in all their complexity can begin to take shape. Literacy events, then, become the framework for analyzing literacy practices in the various local contexts sought out by these scholars. This research process has made it possible to show the significance and complexity of literacy practices that do not conform to traditional, mainstream criteria of literacy. It has also helped these scholars argue against the notion that a literacy crisis exists in the American educational system, a notion that has served to reinforce deficit-based theories of underprivileged people.

The Ever-Present “Literacy Crisis”: Another Myth Demystified

As Shirley Brice Heath points out:

Since the initiation of the public school system in the United States, national leaders have periodically issued statements of a ‘literacy crisis’ and have launched reform programs designed to eliminate illiteracy and to insure that the schools produce functional literates” (“Functions and Uses” 45).

After World War II, for example, “[s]cientists and industrialists indicted American schools for failing to keep pace with the Russians in the production of technical expertise” (de Castell and Luke 70). Yet, although those who proclaim the presence of a literacy crisis have consistently presumed an autonomous definition of literacy, the actual details of what constitutes sufficient literacy attainment have never remained constant. This problem is particularly relevant when measuring inter-generational levels of literacy attainment. For example:

The time-limited nature of what constitutes minimal skills is illustrated in the ‘sliding-scale’ used by the U.S. Bureau of Census to determine literacy. During World War I, a fourth-grade education was considered sufficient to render one literate; in 1947, a U.S. Census sample survey raised that figure to five years; and by 1952 six years of school was considered the minimal literacy threshold. (Scribner 17)

Even in one historical moment, as Heath explains, different people will offer different perspectives about the functions and uses of literacy, even if these definitions are “implicit.” Hence:

Public schools (and the widespread minimum competency movement) see literacy as an individual accomplishment measured by psychometric scales of reading ability. A survey conducted by the National Reading Council defined literacy as ‘the ability to respond to practical tasks of daily life’ (Harris). A compilation of surveys of employer attitudes toward the preparation of youth for work defined literacy as integration of mathematical and linguistic skills necessary for filling out a job application... (“Functions and Uses” 45)

The literacy-doomsayers seem to assume a definition of literacy that everyone has already agreed upon, when in fact different constituencies possess different viewpoints about what exactly should be measured to determine whether an individual has attained literacy or not.¹⁶

However, in spite of the theoretical and statistical inconsistencies evidenced among the various researchers who have argued that literacy levels in America are dangerously low, the political impact of such cries has nevertheless remained consistently significant, as evidenced by the “Back-to-Basics” Movement of the 1980s and the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 (Knoblauch and Brannon; Kozol 2005). Thus, one of the purposes of the counter-narrative of literacy offered by the NLS is to undermine the conceptual basis of all the literacy crises—the idea that there is a cognitive deficiency that must be rectified in the person who has been judged “illiterate.”

¹⁶ Following one consistent measure of literacy attainment, that offered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the idea that there has been a dramatic and consistent decline in literacy levels over time seems overblown at best. Jeff McQuillan shows that the average reading proficiency of children at various ages, as measured by the NAEP, remained virtually constant from 1971-1996, the same period in which much of the howling about a literacy crisis occurred (2-3).

As stated above, the traditional conception of literacy finds fault with the child for “failing” to acquire English, and it diagnoses the problem as a cognitive deficiency most likely related to linguistic poverty in the child’s home life.¹⁷ On the contrary, according to the NLS, a child:

...cannot be said to have failed to have acquired English *because* she came from an impoverished home, since she *has*, in fact, acquired English.... It may, however, be that the child has failed to learn another dialect of English, namely, some dialect closer to Standard English, *because* she comes from a home or community that is given very poor access to speakers of Standard English (perhaps she sees few of them on an extended or friendly basis) and attends a school that fails to foster Standard English in any very intelligent way. (Gee, *Social Linguistics* 11)

The fact that the child does not register sufficient acquisition of Standard English according to the school’s criteria for evaluating acquisition does not mean that the child has not acquired English. What this judgment really illustrates, Gee maintains, is an assumption on the part of those judging the child that Standard English, rather than being one of many equally sophisticated and valid (within their social contexts) English dialects, exists at the apex of a literacy continuum, i.e. is pure, authentic English. By extension of this logic, all other manifestations of the language must be inherently inferior, i.e. are debased, impure, and inauthentic.

The perception of failure in the child, then, says much less about the child’s actual linguistic or cognitive development and much more about the values of the people making the judgment. What the child possesses, Gee argues, is not an “illiteracy problem” but a “schooling problem” (*Social Linguistics* 23). For in fact:

¹⁷ Although the studies that I am looking at here focus on students whose primary language backgrounds are non-mainstream dialects of English, something similar happens when non-native speakers of English, who may be proficient readers in their native language, are nevertheless deemed “illiterate” by virtue of their inability to prove themselves literate according to the school criteria of Standard English (Hudelson; McCarty and Watahomige).

...contrary to the literacy myth, *nothing* follows from literacy or schooling. Much follows, however, from what comes *with* literacy and schooling, what literacy and schooling come wrapped up in, namely the attitudes, values, norms, and beliefs (at once social, cultural, and political) that always accompany literacy and schooling. (38-9)

The child from the non-mainstream, underprivileged background is deemed deficient according to mainstream literacy standards, because the attitudes, values, norms, and beliefs of her home community conflict with those of the school.

These overly simplistic, traditional conceptions of literacy, which continue to dominate in the media, have produced severely deleterious consequences on underprivileged members of society, who often do not produce the interpretations deemed “correct” in mainstream school settings. Regarding these underserved populations, for example, the autonomous model tends to focus:

...largely on methods of teaching and learning and attributing blame.... There are many recurrent themes within this narrative. There are debates about declining standards, fuelled by surveys of problems and failures, where correlations are turned into casualties. There is an obsession with teaching methods, polarised as phonics versus real books, and with the blaming of teachers; and endemic in much media discussion of family literacy is the blaming of parents. (Barton and Hamilton 21)

This narrative of literacy centers on what learners *cannot* do rather than what they *can* do, and begins with assumptions of failure, declining literacy levels, and concomitant, widely ranging attributions of blame for the delinquent parties responsible for the ever-present literacy “crisis.” In other words, these “crises” tend to focus on the supposed “failures” of children from underserved backgrounds to display sufficient competence with the literate practices validated in school.

As we saw in chapter two, these deficit-based attitudes regarding the literacy practices of non-mainstream groups pervade Herzberg’s article. The “illiterate” shelter

residents are portrayed as having come “to the literacy program at the end of what is typically a long series of personal and social failures” (316), and Herzberg offers no indication or hope that these people will overcome their poor socioeconomic circumstances. Herzberg’s reliance on a literacy continuum placing critical literacy at the high end and everything else below it prevents any possibility for creating conditions in which his students and the residents of the shelter could collaborate to promote social change. Moreover, his practice reaffirms to students that the literacy practices they acquire in college are the most sophisticated and valuable ones, which further separates them from the shelter residents. Herzberg’s model of service learning for social change, then, only exacerbates the “schooling problems” described by Gee.

Shirley Brice Heath and the “Schooling Problem” Made Visible

No scholar has illustrated more clearly the differences between an “illiteracy problem” and a “schooling problem,” and the detrimental consequences of conflating the two, than linguist and anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath. Her seminal book *Ways with Words* presents an exhaustive account of her ethnographic work in the 1970s on the language and literacy practices of two small communities in the Appalachian Piedmont Carolinas—one (Roadville) a white working-class community and one (Trackton) a black working-class community—as well as one more mainstream, middle-class town in which the public schools reside. A primary goal of her work is to understand why the children of Roadville and Trackton tend to do much more poorly in school, and later find much more restricted employment opportunities, than the townspeople’s children, despite all three groups of children being surrounded by various literacy practices in their home

communities. Her central research question is, “For each of these groups, what were the effects of the preschool home and community environment on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings” (4)?

Using literacy events as her basic unit of research, she details the social and literate practices in the various communities, particularly how these practices influence children’s development as language users. She determines that the primary discourses and literacy practices in Roadville and Trackton correspond poorly with those of the school, which instead validates and reinforces the more mainstream literacies of the townspeople in which the school resides. As she points out, “The patterns of language use of the children of Roadville and Trackton before they go to school stand in sharp contrast to each other and to those of the youngsters from townspeople families” (343). Ultimately, the consequences of this disconnect on the educational and occupational futures of the children are enormous:

The significance of these different patterns of language socialization for success in school soon becomes clear. After initial years of success, Roadville children fall behind, and by junior high, most are simply waiting out school’s end or their sixteenth birthday, the legal age for leaving school.... Trackton students fall quickly into a pattern of failure, yet all about them they hear that they can never get ahead without a high school diploma.... Trackton students often drift through the school, hoping to escape with the valued piece of paper which they know will add much to their parents’ and grandparents’ pride, although little to their paychecks. (349)

The disparities in literacy practices lead to failure in school for the majority of kids in both Roadville and Trackton, continuing cycles of inequity, and the ascendance of the interests of the mainstream, middle-class townspeople. And even the diplomas that some Trackton students do ultimately receive provide more symbolic value for their families

than real economic advancement, as their job futures are generally confined to working-class positions in the local mills.

As for the townspeople's children (and in stark contrast to Roadville and Trackton):

Their eventual positions of power in the school and the workplace are foredestined in the conceptual structures which they have learned at home and which are reinforced in school and numerous other associations. Long before school, their language and culture at home has structured for them the meanings which will give shape to their experiences in classrooms and beyond. (368)

The pre-school entry into literate practices for the children of the townspeople prepares them for success in school. Their home and community lives position them from early on into "seeing their current activities as relating to their future achievements," and they take advantage of these relatively privileged circumstances—in comparison to the children of the two working-class communities—by translating academic success into more economically rewarding positions in the workplace.

Crucially, in describing the literacy practices of Roadville and Trackton, Heath exhaustively illustrates their complexity and sophistication, particularly in the ways they transcend the traditional dichotomy of oral and literate. Thus she argues forcefully against the prevailing view that these non-mainstream literacies suffer from qualitative deficits in comparison to the townspeople's and, like scholars such as Scribner and Cole, she thoroughly rejects the idea that "sharp distinctions" exist "between oral and literate cultures" (Cushman, *The Struggle*, 233). This research led Heath to summon scholars "away from current tendencies to classify communities as beginning at one or another point along a hypothetical continuum which has no social reality" (quoted in Cushman 234). As Cushman explains, "Heath's crucial move here was to link oral and written

language uses, showing the ways in which both activities reinforce each other.” The problems faced by children from Roadville and Trackton emerge not because of illusory cognitive deficiencies related to their culture, but because the values embedded in the literacy practices of the town and school do not mesh well enough with those of the children’s home communities. Since most school teachers fail to understand these differences in discursive practices, they do not try to accommodate the non-mainstream children, but rather work against them.

Power, Discourse, and Identity in the New Literacy Studies

Heath makes salient the manner in which mainstream literacies tend to dominate over non-mainstream literacies, and how this domination in turn promotes the reproduction of social, cultural, and political inequalities between such groups. And since educational institutions are generally tied to the dominant literacies, these institutions themselves reinforce inequalities rather than reduce them. As Barton and Hamilton argue:

Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices. These dominant practices can be seen as part of whole discourse formations, institutionalised configurations of power and knowledge which are embodied in social relationships. Other vernacular literacies which exist in people’s everyday lives are less visible and less supported. This means that literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others. (10-11)

In the case of Heath’s ethnography, the dominant literacy practices of the school essentially invalidate the literacy practices of the Roadville and Trackton childrens’ home communities, and as such, work to reproduce a set of power relationships in which the townspeople occupy the leading position. Ideologically, the school is portrayed as the

means to socioeconomic advancement, and the children from Trackton seem especially to buy into this portrayal. However, the discontinuity between the school and home literacy practices—what Gee refers to as the “schooling problem,” but which is perceived by the teachers as an “illiteracy problem,” prevents the non-mainstream children from obtaining the better paychecks that should theoretically accompany their high school diplomas.

Hence, although the NLS emphasizes the fact that different literacies are not qualitatively “better” than others, in practice some certainly *dominate* over others. Power relations play an overriding role in determining how institutions authorize some practices over others while making these value judgments seem natural and innocent. As Gee explains, “The traditional meaning of the word ‘literacy’—the ability to read and write—appears innocent and obvious.... As such it obscures the multiple ways in which literacy interrelates with the workings of power” (22). Interestingly, this argument about power recalls the arguments made by theorists of critical literacy from the previous chapter. Indeed, scholars of the NLS are also interested in the role of power, ideology, and domination regarding discursive practices. They contend that all literacy practices reflect their social contexts, including these scholars’ own particular value systems, attitudes, and beliefs. However, the New Literacy scholars do not interrogate power in a way that privileges their own perspectives on literacy as somehow “innocent” of ideology.

As with the strong connection between literacy practices and power relationships, Heath’s work also shows the extent to which literacy practices are linked with identity, and how being exposed to unfamiliar literacy practices (as in the case of the kids from Roadville and Trackton) can lead to identity conflicts. This concept can be better understood through Gee’s notion of “Discourse,” which he describes as:

...ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific *groups of people*, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort, business people of a certain sort, church members of a certain sort, African-Americans of a certain sort, women or men of a certain sort, and so on through a very long list. Discourses are ways of being 'people like us.' They are 'ways of being in the world'; they are 'forms of life.' They are, thus, always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories. (*Social Linguistics* viii)

A person's identity is very much wrapped up in the Discourses she has acquired, but in the course of a lifetime every person acquires multiple Discourses. Thus:

Each of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our ever-multiple identities. These Discourses need not, and often do not, represent consistent and compatible values. There are conflicts among them, and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various Discourses. (ix)

These conflicts can have serious consequences on a person whose very identity is challenged by Discursive disharmony, as is often the case when an underprivileged child goes to school.

This outcome is patently evident in Heath's case study, for the children from Roadville and Trackton confront school Discourses that essentially reject the identities linked to their home Discourses. As we have seen, the patterns of language acquired by these children before entering school stand in sharp contrast to those of the townspeople's children. The Trackton children (and their families), for example, identify with the Discourse of schooling in the sense that it theoretically represents an opportunity for social mobility, yet they also continue to identify strongly with the primary Discourse of their home community, which remains invalid in the setting of the school. The inability of schoolteachers to help students resolve this significant Discursive clash, i.e. to learn to acquire the mainstream Discourse of the school without simultaneously rejecting their

primary source of identity, leads to the outcome described above: students hoping to “escape” with the chief symbol of mainstream success, the diploma, while understanding that it will not in fact produce substantive advancement toward any career aspirations extending beyond the mills.

How the Literacy Continuum Inhibits the Development of Egalitarian, Reciprocal Community Engagement

The concept of Discourses helps to explain why Herzberg’s emphasis on an academic critical literacy to promote broad social change in underserved nonacademic communities produces ironies of service. Gee argues that language “is but a ‘piece of the action,’ and social action is constituted as a social practice with value and meaning only in and through the Discourse of which it is a part—just as an assortment of cards constitutes a hand only in and through the card game of which it is a part” (149). Social action has no meaning outside of the Discourses in which it occurs. Herzberg, in wishing to promote social change, defines this term according to his own Discourses, but his definitions do not necessarily apply to the Discourses of either his students or the community representatives who are, presumably, to benefit from these changes. And if the definitions do not correspond to one another, those other parties are not likely to perceive social change resulting from the collaboration.

Gee argues that in a card game, “we usually know exactly what game we are playing. But when we play a piece of language within a specific social practice, what Discourse we are in is often a matter of negotiation, contestation, and hybridity” (149). By “hybridity” Gee means “an integration or mixture ... of several historically different Discourses.” But the literacy continuum negates this process of negotiation, contestation,

and hybridity by already assuming the superiority of critical literacy. Hybridity demands an interaction and dialogue between Discourses that an adherence to the literacy continuum makes difficult to enact. To be valuable to all parties, the purpose of the collaboration *must* be negotiated among academic and nonacademic community collaborators, and the literacy practices of all participants must be respected. But in service-learning courses that define social change through the lens of critical literacy, the purpose has already been decided by the scholar before the relationship even begins.

Central to the Discursive identity of scholars like Herzberg is the perspective that people must develop the capacity to read their world critically, to see through the ways in which ideology blankets the pernicious effects of social inequity and injustice. Moreover, the means for achieving this critical capacity are cultivated through instruction in academic environments (*not* at the site of community engagement, as Herzberg stresses in his article). By extension, those who cannot read their world critically are ideologically blind. In other words, this hierarchical view of different literacy practices, in which the scholar's own practice occupies the top position, comprises the core of the Discourse. The assumption that other Discourses are inferior because they promote hegemonic thinking makes it very hard to imagine the kinds of productive outcomes from Discursive conflict envisioned above by Gee. There can be no hybridity where there is no room for negotiation and compromise. Consequently, it becomes equally difficult to imagine egalitarian, reciprocal relationships developing from this form of community engagement.

Fortunately, in recent years the field of rhetoric and composition has increasingly benefited from the scholarly advancement in perspectives on literacy represented by the

NLS. These theoretical changes have helped prime the field for a corollary evolution in its practices of community engagement, particularly around issues of promoting social change in underserved communities. Indeed, these changes have included the slow development of a more flexible attitude about what social change actually means. In the remainder of chapter three, I will explain how the NLS has impacted theoretical developments in the field, and in chapter four I will show how these theoretical changes have in turn promoted the development of more egalitarian practices of service learning for social change.

However, although these theoretical advancements have informed the field in positive ways, I will ultimately argue that the ethnographic approach to research brings with it some important limitations on the amount of reciprocity and egalitarianism that can result from research relationships. In analyzing Ellen Cushman's work, I will show that although she procures clear, concrete, and substantive benefits from her relationship with residents of a working-class community in New York, namely a completed dissertation and doctoral degree, a book, and numerous journal publications—benefits that significantly aid her progress toward a tenure-track professorship—the benefits obtained by her research subjects are much more ambiguous. Cushman seeks to emphasize the reciprocity of the relationship, calling her work “activist research,” but the extent to which such reciprocity actually exists is questionable.

The weight of these limitations, as will become clear in chapter four, become particularly significant in the arena of service learning. I will argue, then, that the models of service learning for social change that have emerged in rhetoric and composition from the influence of the NLS are more ethically responsible and less hierarchical than

Herzberg's praxis. Yet, they do not go as far down the path of reciprocity and egalitarianism as they could, and thus serve as a transition between Herzberg's model of service learning for social change and my conceptualization of community action.

Ellen Cushman and the New Literacy Studies' Impact on Rhetoric and Composition

The NLS argument that different literacy practices should not be viewed as better or worse, and that all literacy practices are functions of their social contexts, has had important implications for literacy research in the field of rhetoric and composition as it has taken its "social turn." A cadre of compositionists, including Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, Anne Ruggles Gere, Linda Adler-Kassner, and Susanmarie Harrington have researched non-academically mainstream literacy practices, both contemporary and historical, and complicated the idea that essayist literacy is the only relevant literacy practice of academic discourse. They have conducted in-depth examinations of literacy practices in a variety of social contexts, greatly expanding the purview of rhetoric and composition beyond autonomous conceptions of literacy.

Among these new, multifaceted directions of scholarship, one scholar whose work very explicitly addresses the question of the researcher's responsibility to her subjects is Ellen Cushman, who is also invested in egalitarian, reciprocal service learning. For these reasons, I will concentrate the remainder of this chapter on her exhaustive ethnographic study of an inner-city community in *The Struggle and the Tools* to explicate the details and implications of her perspective of nonacademic literacy practices—in particular how they force us to reject the continuum between functional and critical literacy. This

exploration and criticism will establish a framework for my analysis of her service-learning praxis in chapter four.

Cushman's ethnographic work in *The Struggle and the Tools* focuses on several residents of an "inner city community in Quayville, a medium-sized town in the Northeast," where she spent three and a half years "observing and participating in community members' family and social networks" (2). Over this period she "studied the oral and literate skills these individuals need in order to negotiate the many institutional influences that enter into their lives." Hence her work centers on the methods used by these residents to negotiate daily encounters with institutional gatekeepers who have much control over the residents' ability to provide for themselves and their families. Cushman's ethnographic immersion in the literacy practices of this non-mainstream community; her analysis of concrete literacy events as a framework for delving into the values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships that comprise these practices; as well as her strong intellectual emphasis on their complexity and sophistication, all demonstrate her alliance with the theoretical developments of the NLS.

In setting forth her project for the book, she states her desire "to elucidate a critical theory that moves beyond the dismissive assumptions of false consciousness and the facile discussions of reproduced power structures" (4). Her

...intention is to honor what individuals in the community call the 'struggle' and the 'tools.' During face-to-face interactions with institutional agents, their struggle is both material and ideological. The tools are linguistic strategies these individuals use to navigate institutions in wider society and negotiate the struggles.

Cushman makes clear from the beginning of the book that, from immersing herself in these peoples' daily lives, she found much sophistication, complexity, and linguistic

subtlety informed by “hidden ideologies” that resist subordination or simple accommodation in interactions with figures of power. She discerns that the residents of Quayville “have agency—they’re savvy negotiators of highly nuanced, everyday interactions with wider society’s institutional representatives” (2). And she emphasizes how these community members possess “critical consciousness that manifests itself in various linguistic events and artifacts that scholars often overlook, or simply dismiss as rudimentary.”

Cushman purposefully uses the term “critical consciousness,” which generally denotes the capacity to resist hegemony and pierce through ideological obfuscations regarding social inequality. As we have seen, the term is usually linked to collective movements to promote wide-scale social change, and adherents to this perspective can, as in the case of Herzberg, overlook evidence of critical consciousness among underprivileged people. However, one of her primary goals in this book is to broaden the term’s meaning to include nonacademic community members who display critical linguistic skills in facing daily encounters with institutional gatekeepers. Indeed, their “resistance and agency in the face of asymmetrical power relations rests in the very places one would least expect to find such agency and political awareness” (3). But only through focused attention to the particularities and private moments of these residents can this agency, resistance, and political awareness become manifest to researchers.

Thus her project is not to present a fantastical, idealized portrayal of the residents of Quayville nimbly overcoming all institutional obstacles placed before them on the way to justice, empowerment, and social equity. The “struggle” exists in yin-like fashion to the yang of the “tools.” But in focusing her attention on both the struggles faced by the

residents *and* their critical tools for handling these conditions, she frames her perspective away from the notion that critical consciousness exists solely in the domain of the academy. She also rejects entirely both the continuum between functional and critical literacy and the implications that derive from it. Cushman argues:

We need to study both the struggle and the tools in tandem if we hope to move away from a critical theory that demeans the ones it attempts to uplift, if we hope to characterize the multifaceted ways language carries with it both dissent and compliance in everyday practices. (4)

Critical Literacy among the Underprivileged: The Example of Lucy Cadens and the Social Worker

Cushman illustrates a paradigmatic example of the struggle and the tools in a specific literacy event she observes between one of her subjects, Lucy Cadens, and a caseworker in the Department of Social Services. In this encounter, Lucy wishes to procure social assistance for her daughter. After examining a stack of application papers that Lucy has handed to her, the social worker asks Lucy if she has her daughter's birth certificate, and Lucy, after putting "her hand on her cheek" and leaning "against the partition," states that she has left it on the table at home (1). The social worker "smirks," to which Lucy responds by pointing out that there is a copy of the certificate in Lucy's own file, switching abruptly to Black English as she says, "I been having her on my case though." Nevertheless, the social worker insists that this "bigger" file is "on the other side of the building." Lucy pauses, then looks at Cushman and says quietly, "Get me every time" (1). She agrees to return at a later time with another copy of the certificate, gets up to leave, and then vents her frustration to Cushman outside the door.

In analyzing this encounter, Cushman emphasizes that:

...we see what looks to be yet another example of domination and quiescence—the caseworker sends Lucy back home to get a document that already exists on file; and even though Lucy knows the caseworker is asking for too much, Lucy agrees with the caseworker’s unnecessary demand and leaves. (2)

According to Cushman, many cultural theorists “would point to this exchange as convincing evidence of systematic oppression in inner cities, and would paint Lucy in the dull colors of someone who blindly reproduces the social structures that may not be in her best interest.” And here their arguments “would leave off—without asking what happened before or after this public interaction, without seeking the hidden ideologies informing Lucy’s statements,” and “without acknowledging the subtle ways in which Lucy bends her language to be both accommodating and challenging,” so that Lucy would be characterized as a “disempowered” and “unreflective” accommodator in the face of power. She would, in other words, be evaluated in the same way that Herzberg evaluates the shelter residents.

Cushman, on the contrary, focuses on the significance of Lucy’s challenge to the social worker regarding the certificate, stating:

If we want to measure the ground gained by a challenge like Lucy’s, we need to do so from her point of view saturated in her own community-based hidden ideology. From Lucy’s perspective, when the representative smirks, her expression revealed a disrespectful assumption. Lucy read this paralinguistic gesture as a sign of the caseworker’s apathy to the difficulties of Lucy’s life. Lucy made an overt challenge to the woman by pointing out that the document could be found in her main file. Then she signified to me. Taken together, these all mitigate to some extent the indignity of the caseworker’s indifference.... She lessens the disparagement of the caseworker’s disrespect by maintaining her own self-respect and my respect for her. (17-8)

Although this challenge does not lead to a direct redress of the problem by averting the necessity of another visit to the Department, the “face saving” gesture is important to

Lucy and signals that she has not simply acquiesced to the institution's dominating ideology (18). During the encounter, her "signification" to Cushman refers to the moment after the social worker's refusal to obtain the other file, when Lucy turns to Cushman and says quietly, "Get me every time." In evaluating this element of the discourse, Cushman argues that Lucy's words possess dual meaning. On the one hand, in relationship to the caseworker, she seems to accept "responsibility for the missing document" and thus "consent to an assertion of power" (15). But by looking at Cushman as she makes the statement, she signifies simultaneously her critical awareness that "she was in the process of yet another gatekeeper's rigid application of a social structure."

Furthermore, once at home, Lucy and her 16 year-old niece review and evaluate the encounter, as well as weighing various "linguistic strategies" to determine the extent to which each "might actually, on the one hand, motivate the caseworker to act more as a facilitator and less as a bureaucrat, and, on the other hand, obviate the possible negative stereotypes the caseworkers may hold" (18). This post-encounter debriefing is, in many respects, as important as the encounter itself, and will inform how Lucy (and her niece) may handle such situations in the future to achieve more immediate positive results. Through this reflective process, the encounter becomes a useful learning experience, if a frustrating one.¹⁸

Cushman shows clearly how critical literacy practices exist in non-mainstream, traditionally underprivileged communities in ways that the functional/critical continuum does not recognize. Building on Heath's work, she emphasizes how both the oral/literate and the functional/critical dichotomies simply do not register in the social realities of

¹⁸ Although Lucy does not compose a journal entry about the experience, the period of reflection recalls the reflective component emphasized by service-learning instructors as crucial for making service experiences truly educative for students.

these peoples' lived experiences. She underscores the fact that not "only were orality and literacy mutually informing, but they revealed individuals' critical understandings of how institutional politics work, and how to shape their language uses accordingly" (234). In fact, their "critical literacy practices exemplify the very types of reading, writing, and analytical abilities for which critical literacy theorists call." Furthermore, "these critical literacy competencies emerge with texts that many believe require only functional literate skills," because in terms of the various encounters between institutional gatekeepers and these community members:

...the process of completing and critiquing applications and other forms required analytical abilities beyond those necessary to merely fill in the blank. Residents uncovered the implicit assumptions present in such texts, and, in so doing, contributed to the development of antihegemonic cultural logic. In essence, their literate practices collapse literacy scholars' dichotomies between instrumental and critical literacies. (234-5)

The distinctions of oral vs. literate and critical vs. functional and the hierarchical judgments that procure from them fail before the revelations issuing forth from the scholar's immersion in non-mainstream communities.

The Dubious Consequences of Critical Literacy among the Underprivileged

As we have seen, Cushman demonstrates that it is possible to develop critical awareness outside of academic forums, i.e. that critical literacy is not merely the province of critical teachers and their students. Just as important for Cushman, however, is to argue that critical consciousness is important and valid even when it does not produce broad, collective action to redress social injustice, or even, as in the case of Lucy Cadens and most of the other subjects of her research in Quayville, more modest gains in individual socioeconomic circumstances. She argues:

Quayville's inner city residents' critical awareness and strategic linguistic activities ... seldom got them full-employment, educational, and housing possibilities, or, for that matter, better treatment from public servants. In the end, being aware of one's oppression does not necessarily remove it, or even remove the burden of at least appearing to comply with it. This point alone undermines the best intentions of critical theorists. Supposedly, individuals can throw off the burdens of hegemonic forces—can, once and for all, mobilize together in a concerted effort to withdraw their consent—if only we could teach them to be more attentive to their own complicity in cultural reproduction. Yet, as we've seen, even though politically astute, inner city residents must make do with their limited and hard-won resources and opportunities. (235)

This passage reinforces Gee's point that the definition of social action "is constituted as a social practice with value and meaning only in and through the Discourse of which it is a part." In Quayville, the process of bringing about social change does not involve massive collective feats performed on a wide scale with easily measured outcomes. Cushman wants to redefine social change in these communities away from necessarily signifying collective action or "sweeping social upheavals" ("Rhetorician" 12).

She contends instead that the process of defining change must build in the input of nonacademic community members, insisting that "we need to take into our accounts of social change the ways in which people use language and literacy to challenge and alter the circumstances of daily life" (12). Social change can occur "in daily interactions when the regular flow of events is objectified, reflected upon, and altered," as is the case with Lucy, whose efforts can lead to "change on micro-levels of interaction" (13). Change in this context occurs through individual encounters and negotiations, incremental steps forward and backward, small victories and losses, and continuous reflection on how to handle future encounters. This definition of change is not the grand social movement envisioned by Herzberg, but it does result from real-world encounters between what

adherents to the literacy continuum would label the oppressed and the forces of institutional domination.

Moreover, building on the work of James Scott, Cushman argues that the kinds of micro-resistance evidenced in daily encounters with institutional gatekeepers, like the one performed by Lucy in her meeting with the case worker, do build the foundation for larger political struggles. She notes his argument that “‘petty’ acts of resistance have dramatic economical and political effects” when they are amassed over time in the hundreds and thousands (quoted in Cushman, *The Struggle* 19). These kinds of interactions get “recounted in kitchens, living rooms, and on front stoops,” as people share experiences, as well as learning from and supporting one another in developing more effective “vernacular methods of striving used with gatekeepers” (19). These “minute political struggles taking place daily in the language between these individuals and institutional workers, as well as the discussions they generate ‘in the hood,’” become the “building blocks” for “elaborate institutionalized political action that could not exist without [them]” (quoted in Cushman 19). Thus, Cushman maintains, “We must remind ourselves that grand-scale political struggles take root in these hidden language strategies” (19).

Nevertheless, the idea that the Quayville residents must “make do with their limited and hard-won resources and opportunities” calls into question the extent to which critical awareness is even all that useful. Through her analysis of the critical capacity of her research subjects, Cushman emphasizes the *potential* for social change, a potential that in the vast majority of cases is never realized. And when one considers all of the benefits that Cushman obtains from this relationship, as I will address below, the lack of

material benefits from Lucy's demonstration of critical literacy seems all the more problematic. One is left to wonder, precisely *why* should these people have to make do with these limited and hard-won resources and opportunities, especially when Cushman herself receives so much? This is a question Cushman never asks here.

Another question that ultimately remains unanswered is whether Lucy, or the other subjects of Cushman's research, actively perceive themselves as using their critical awareness to produce the building blocks of a large-scale political struggle. In her analysis of the dual meaning of Lucy's use of the phrase "get me every time," Cushman argues that Lucy expresses critical consciousness of the "institution's dominating ideology," simultaneously consenting to and resisting the case worker's imposition of authority over her. Yet, lacking authentic access to Lucy's own voice—a consequence of the ethnographic methodology employed in this study—it is difficult for the reader to tell whether Lucy sees her resistance as limited to an individual moment, or as one cog in a long process leading toward a more substantial movement.

Even if Lucy is critically *self*-conscious, we are left to wonder whether her critical awareness is predicated upon her relationship with Cushman, i.e. from having access to an academician's language of critical discourse. Was this knowledge imparted through her interaction with Cushman and academic conceptions of resistance, and if so, would this reliance on academic knowledge subtly reinforce Cushman's power over her? Without Lucy's definitive voice on the matter, how can we know? We do learn, however, that when debriefing the encounter later with her niece, she decides "that all that effort wasn't worth the trouble, that her daughter would have to bring in her own birth certificate" (18). That Lucy does not obtain concrete material benefits from the

encounter with the social worker and perceives the encounter as having not been worth the effort would seem to undermine the notion that Lucy actively perceives her critical awareness as a micro-step toward a larger movement.

To review, one of Cushman's key contributions in this work is her argument that critical literacy is *not* an exclusively academic literacy. It can exist anywhere among any population, whether oppressed or oppressor. "Every day, the language of domination is turned in upon itself by active agents who defy its categorizations, who subvert its influence, and who seek opportunity in its inconsistencies" (238). By immersing herself in this culture, Cushman develops a radically different understanding of the literacy practices of her subjects than does Herzberg of the shelter residents. More importantly, she shows that the dichotomy between critical and functional literacies, just like that between oral and literate, is a false one. Literacies do not exist in an abstract realm. They exist in people's locally situated practices and daily experiences. Critically literate practices can go hand in hand with hegemonic ideological forces. In fact, as she has shown, sometimes they must go hand in hand in order for people to negotiate encounters with institutional gatekeepers. To resist too much, to fail to play the institutionally bureaucratic games, would mean to risk being cut off from vital resources they need for themselves and their families to survive. Critical theory only has value within the everyday practices in which one finds its expression.

However, her argument that critical literacy does not tend to produce any substantive changes in the lives of the underserved who express it raises questions about its ultimate utility. In rejecting the standard for social change as having to connote broad-scale, collective efforts for social justice, and replacing it with a micro-level definition of

social change, one wonders whether she leaves the term bereft of political significance. Given the central importance for Cushman of demonstrating the presence of critical literacy in the Quayville residents, what does it mean that critical literacy does not seem to lead to positive outcomes for them—especially when she herself obtains very positive outcomes from this study? These questions about social change and reciprocity, which I will further address in the remaining sections of this chapter, are particularly important for Cushman, because she strives for egalitarianism in her relationships with underserved nonacademic community members, a process she calls “activist research.”

Activist Research and Reciprocity

Cushman depicts “activist research” as ethically responsible engagement with nonacademic communities, one key aspect of which is the formulation of socially-relevant research goals.¹⁹ In the case of her research in Quayville, this social relevance is demonstrated by her efforts to wrest the concept of critical literacy out of the exclusive hands of academic discourse and illustrate how it can be just as prevalent among the underprivileged. Social relevance is also demonstrated by her emphasis on reciprocity. She believes that academic research must produce reciprocal benefits that accrue to the research subjects as well as the scholar. At the core of this manner of research is the belief that “participants have the critical reflexivity necessary in order to openly and

¹⁹ A similar methodology called “action research” or, in some cases, “participatory action research,” has been advocated by a variety of scholars who perform research in nonacademic communities (McTaggart; Bleich; Porter and Sullivan; Greenwood and Levin; Grabill; Cruz and Giles). Scholars who seek to apply their research for positive social ends have used all three terms to describe research that pursues direct social relevance and reciprocal benefits for researchers and their subjects.

carefully negotiate the terms of the ethnographic relation” (23). Hence, activist research emerges from a focus on community members’ assets, rather than deficits. She argues:

If we approach research with a set of questions and theoretical presumptions that are based on notions of deficit, or for that matter, false consciousness, we will be hard pressed to adequately represent participants in honoring and respectful ways. As a rule of thumb, activist research demands we show how people can and do act instead of how they cannot and do not act. (23)

This passage reflects an ethical dimension to activist research, for deficit-based thinking can produce interpretations that misrepresent the research subjects, thus dishonoring them. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Cushman criticizes Herzberg for his failure to immerse himself in the literacy practices of the shelter residents. Instead, his reliance on a pre-NLS, deficit-based literacy framework produces rather harsh judgments of the residents as steeped in false consciousness and almost devoid of literacy. Such outcomes tend to result from what Cheri Williams refers to as “studying down,” or “conducting research *on* participants,” as opposed to *with* them, in a manner that perpetuates research hierarchies (52).

But corresponding with the ethics of research, deficit-based thinking can also lead to scholarly misrecognition of the complexity of the research subject’s literacy patterns. In other words, it can reduce the research’s intellectual value. In Cushman’s case, the Quayville residents participated in her composition process by offering comments on her dissertation, allowing her to deepen the shades of meaning in her interpretations. “Most often,” she attests, “they extended my analysis, provided caveats, or confirmed my observations.... In the end, their collaboration in this piece presents itself in nuances of the interpretation” (22). By respecting the intelligence of those she researched and incorporating them into the process of revision, she created a more intellectually-textured

final product. These are the kinds of nuances missed by Herzberg in his representation of the shelter residents.

The ethos of activist research becomes particularly important in relationship to the relief of oppression and the advancement of social justice, and this concern helps justify the necessity of taking an active role in the lives of those being researched. As Susan Lytle writes:

Without more authentic relationships in which differences—in culture, styles of learning, gender, race, and community—are made visible and exposed self-consciously in the inquiry process, it seems unlikely that sense can be made of issues of equity and social justice, which are deeply embedded in literacy work. When studying the literacy attainment of adults who have become increasingly marginalized and alienated from the educational systems of mainstream culture, ignoring these complexities does not seem a prudent or viable option. (401)

Lytle's passage illustrates how the failure to engage non-mainstream literacy practices respectfully and "authentically," even in the critical pursuit of social justice, subverts the potential for positive outcomes of those pursuits. Consequently, the relationship can become exploitive of those being researched. A different, more reciprocal model of research is necessary in order for the subjects of that research to benefit directly from its results. Cushman tries to develop this sort of reciprocal engagement in Quayville, which requires interrogating her outsider status in the community.

As an ethnographer in Quayville, Cushman is extremely self-conscious of her position as an academic outsider. She concurs with Lytle's critique that merely observing community residents objectively "has the potential to reproduce an oppressive relationship between the research and those studied" (28). In immersing herself in the daily lives and literacy practices of her research subjects, Cushman found that the stance of objectivity that characterizes "strict anthropological" participant observation would not

have permitted the creation of a “reciprocal relationship with individuals in this neighborhood” (26). Maintaining this stance would have prevented her from intervening in their strategic approaches to negotiating encounters with institutional gatekeepers, and would have created an exploitative situation in which she directly benefited from the research while the Quayville residents received virtually nothing for their time and energy.

This quest to develop a reciprocally rewarding and ethically responsible relationship with her subjects leads Cushman to a dialogic method of inquiry and data collection. She quotes Michel de Certeau’s critique of how Claude Levi-Strauss used his ethnographic account of the Bororos of Brazil to take “his seat in the French Academy,” while the Bororos sank “slowly into their collective death.” This famous case study exemplifies the typical scenario where “the intellectuals are still borne on the backs of the common people” (quoted in Cushman 21). Her methodology in large part seeks actively to avoid repeating this dilemma of exploitation. She writes:

Rather than trying to write myself out of the unavoidable hierarchy of discourse in any ethnography, I strove to compose a piece that community residents authorized through our dialogue and reciprocity. If the subaltern cannot speak, it is only because the scholar cannot listen and hear. The methodology ... exemplifies possible ways for de Certeau’s intellectuals and common people to share the burden of representation, with the hope that the ethnographic exercise is one that fulfills our civic duties. The representation before you arrives from a dialogic flow of meaning exchanged through mutually beneficial relations where participants and I listened to and heard each other speak. (21-2)

Through dialogue and reciprocity, Cushman seeks to minimize the exploitative aspects of the relationship between academic researchers and nonacademic subjects. She understands that in writing this book and portraying her subjects through her analytic lens, she cannot subvert the hierarchy embedded in ethnographic discourse or present to

the reader a truly egalitarian relationship. Nevertheless, throughout the research process she strives to ensure that “the goals and analysis of this research would center around social issues salient to their daily struggles,” and also to include her subjects in the process of representing themselves as much as possible (26).

Cushman details various facets of her efforts to represent her subjects ethically:

Any authority I may have to represent residents in Quayville’s inner city has been sanctioned in large part by those who appear in this work. I copied and discussed all my conference papers and early publications with the individuals who appeared in each piece. When it came time to write the dissertation (on which the present book is based), I called community members, read them passages, and asked if I had it right by them. I copied and distributed the dissertation and asked for comments. With comments in hand, I revised accordingly. (22)

As we have seen above, this collaborative process, aside from helping to beat down the walls between researcher and researched, produced a more intellectually-nuanced analysis of the linguistic patterns of those she researched. According to Cushman, the active “sanctioning” of her interpretations by the Quayville residents certifies the ethicality of her representations.

Corresponding with this concerted attempt at ethical representation are the pains Cushman takes to ensure the reciprocity of the relationship. As she explains, “In return for the letters, applications, notes, diaries, books, handouts, and so on, and valuable critiques these men and women offered me, I contributed my time, resources, and knowledge to their linguistic strivings, when—and only when—they asked” (29). In return for the material that helped Cushman finish her dissertation and publish this book, as well as aid in her finding career stability, Cushman made herself available to helping these people negotiate encounters with institutional gatekeepers. The resources and knowledge Cushman was able to share included, for example, a situation in which she

role-played a “mock conversation” between one of her subjects and a landlord, a process that helped the subject ultimately find an apartment. Furthermore, Cushman stresses that the processes of dialogue and reciprocity continued after the research was done, as she agreed to share 60% of the book’s royalties with her subjects.

The Limitations of Activist Research for Producing Reciprocity and Ethical Representation

Cushman’s attempts to engage in activist research, which include establishing socially relevant research goals, ethical representation of research subjects, and reciprocal outcomes, seek to minimize the asymmetrical power relations inherent in the relationship between those researching and those researched; these “crises of representation” “silence” those researched in various ways (Brueggemann). Without question, Cushman takes significant care to level these hierarchies and curtail exploitation of her subjects. And, as we have seen, her immersion in the literacy practices of these residents makes it possible for her to detail their daily resistance in the face of overbearing institutional oppression—resistance that is lost in superficial representations of oppressed people as accommodating in the face of oppression.

Yet, we must not forget that Cushman’s considerable and laudable efforts occur entirely because of *her* decision to make them. The nature of ethnographic work as it currently exists in the academy creates no obligation, beyond institutionally-regulated measures such as protecting the confidentiality and safety of her subjects, for her to do so. The royalty sharing agreement, for example, resulted from Cushman’s attention to the ethics of engagement and her willingness to fulfill the logic implicit in her conception of collaborative representation. Although she notes that several of her subjects requested

a full or partial stake in the royalties, it was entirely her choice whether or not to comply, a fact that reinforces the extent to which this research methodology is stacked against reciprocity.

Indeed, even her insistence that she only offered help to her subjects when they explicitly asked for it raises questions. We are left to wonder what this arrangement actually looked like in practice. Did she let them know that they could ask for her help? Such a scenario, in which the right to ask for help had to be explicitly communicated, and thus proffered, by Cushman herself, would seem to reinforce her power in the relationship. Or did the Quayville residents assume this benefit? Cushman does not indicate one way or the other. Moreover, were there bounds on the kinds of help for which they could ask, and were there occasions when they asked for help that she chose not to give, either because she felt it was infeasible, unethical, or simply too taxing? Again, Cushman does not explain the intricacies of what reciprocity in these relationships meant in practice.

Part of the lack of clarity regarding the precise nature of reciprocity in these relationships, I would argue, stems from the discrepancy in the amount of precision and consistency in the kinds of goals each side possessed for participating in this relationship. In Cushman's case, her individual goals were finishing her dissertation and publishing articles and a book from her research (and ultimately acquiring a tenure-track academic professorship). Contrarily, the kinds of benefits sought by her research subjects were always much more fluid and ambiguous, ranging at times from aid in negotiating encounters with social workers, landlords, and college admissions officers, to help understanding college catalogs. But as we have seen, these encounters rarely produced

concrete material gains for her research subjects, and when they did, it remains unclear the extent to which Cushman's involvement actually helped produce the outcomes. Thus, measuring the effectiveness of the relationship for producing positive outcomes for the Quayville residents is much more difficult, if not impossible.

Similarly, the fact that the Quayville residents appear anonymously in the book further works against reciprocity or even full acknowledgment of their efforts. For example, in spite of Cushman's assurance that they have, to some extent, co-authored the text with her, the Quayville residents receive no official authorial or editorial credit for their contributions. And, even in the Acknowledgements they appear indirectly through pseudonyms, whereas the colleagues, friends and family members who aided Cushman along the way are individually recognized and saluted (xxiii). Nor do the Quayville residents appear in the book's Index, unlike the various scholars' works that are cited throughout the text (including Cushman's own).²⁰ Williams cites this problem as one of the key "ethical dilemmas" of ethnographic research, because it "prevents participants from receiving recognition" for their valuable contributions to a study's success (41).

These questions about the limits of reciprocity and ethical representation actually became the subject of a somewhat rhetorically heated exchange between Cushman and Laurie Alkidas in an issue of *College Composition and Communication* from February 1997. Responding to Cushman's article "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change," in which Cushman discusses activist research in relation to the Quayville

²⁰ I do not mean to suggest that all aspects of these limitations regarding representation are Cushman's fault—in acquiring academic permission to engage in this work, she had to negotiate her own set of encounters with institutional gatekeepers, most notably the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although we do not know the specific details of her IRB approval, they clearly included the provision of anonymity for her research subjects. Nevertheless, in chapter five I will address the necessity of finding publication outlets that allow for joint authorship between academic and nonacademic community partners for promoting ethical representation and reciprocal benefits. Indeed, more opportunities for joint publications seem slowly to be emerging in the field of rhetoric and composition.

residents (an article she published while finishing work on *The Struggle and the Tools*), Alkidas writes that although she agrees with Cushman that empowering “community members, creating ‘networks of reciprocity, and establishing solidarity are all worthy goals,” she does not see sufficient reciprocity in Cushman’s relationship with the Quayville residents:

Ellen Cushman gets data to achieve the PhD, what do Raejone and Lucy get out of the ‘literacy events’ to transform their positions as objects? Practical advice on eviction notices, passing the driver’s examination, and negotiating the bureaucracy of housing bureaus are not enough. Although Cushman’s stance as an activist educator is based on ‘reciprocity networks,’ I was left with the impression the exchanges were linear, subsuming the voices of oppressed people in her community. Even in the name of empowerment, it seems interference rather than interaction to ‘lend our power status’ (14) rather than create it together. (105-6)

Alkidas calls Cushman’s account of “social activism” a “dominatory” one rather than “emancipatory” (105). For Alkidas, if one were to put the benefits acquired by the academic and nonacademic parties on a scale, the academic tray would plunge downward.

Perhaps equally important for Alkidas are the power issues inherent in ethnographic representation. She argues that Cushman as ethnographer remains firmly entrenched in a hierarchical position over her subjects in spite of her protestations to the contrary, including Cushman’s detailing of the methods she used to insure that she had represented the subjects in a manner approved by them. In other words, she is still “studying down,” in Williams’s terms. Alkidas writes:

If the voice of the oppressed is used rather than expressed by the process of empowerment, an oppressive construct has taken place. The question remains, despite consent forms, if these students are served well by this account created of, about, but not by them. The Lucy Cadens of this study may think that rehearsing mock conversations will make them ‘sound white,’ but Cushman by repeating this confidence and coaching prestige

language variants does not ensure “heteroglossia”; she merely reaffirms existing power structures. (106)

For Alkidas, Cushman’s efforts at accurate portrayal do not change the basic structure of the relationship, which is that she maintains full authority to represent Lucy and the other subjects. We only encounter Lucy’s words filtered through Cushman’s interpretation of their import and meaning. Cushman remains the final arbiter of how she presents Lucy, which Alkidas deems to be at least a potential violation of Lucy’s privacy, in spite of her having signed a consent form for the research.

In her counter-response to Alkidas, Cushman addresses both the issues of reciprocity and representation. In regard to the first, she reminds us that the benefits obtained by the Quayville residents must be understood within their discursive environments, and that Alkidas assumes social change to mean something more akin to the critical pedagogue’s broad movement. Essentially, Cushman positions Alkidas in the Herzberg camp:

The model of social change Alkidas tacitly subscribes to overlooks community members’ day-to-day living conditions, dismisses their own critical perspectives on what needs to change, and finally, places intellectuals at the center of the social change universe. Because scholars often think we know what literacy leads to social change, we underestimate the importance of other types of literacy. Let’s take the driver’s license test for example. Imagine yourself living in a neighborhood like Lucy Cadens’, where only a handful of people had a driver’s license, and even fewer of them had cars. How would you ever learn to drive? What would you give your neighbors to compensate them for taking you out over a couple of months and teaching you how to drive? A driver’s license is a luxury for many inner city residents and takes considerable time, effort, and material resources to obtain. To say this ‘isn’t enough’ is to dismiss the perspective and value systems of community members in favor of an academic brand of social change. (108)

Within the material circumstances of this neighborhood, obtaining a driver's license constitutes a truly significant expansion of opportunities, the importance of which can only be dismissed according to constricted academic values about the nature of social change. Thus, Cushman positions Alkidas as perceiving the term "social change" through a scholarly, leftist political lens, and assuming that such a view is shared by nonacademic community representatives. For Cushman, this view of change ignores their material realities.

In response to this debate, I would argue that Alkidas's and Cushman's positions constitute a sort of scholarly "She said, she said." According to Alkidas, the relationship does not constitute true reciprocity because subjects such as Lucy Cadens do not acquire sufficient benefits. It is simply "not enough." According to Cushman, the benefits *are* enough. Cushman is certainly right that Alkidas makes an assumption about what "enough" is. How can we determine that Alkidas's values are more correct than Cushman's or Lucy's?²¹ On the other hand, how are we to know that the values Cushman claims to be Lucy's are in fact Lucy's, or that Lucy did indeed perceive this relationship to be authentically reciprocal? We're missing a crucial voice in this debate, that of Lucy herself. As a result, there is no way for Cushman to "prove" Lucy's approval, and by the same token, there is no way for Alkidas to "disprove" it. Lucy's disembodied representation by these two scholars, which prevents her from weighing in on the matter, hangs over this debate about reciprocity.

²¹ Incidentally, Cushman usually refers to Lucy as "Lucy," rather than as "Cadens" or "Lucy Cadens." Does the use of Lucy's given name constitute an expression of familiarity between the two—as presumably the two used each other's first names in their interactions—or is it a reaffirmation of Cushman's power over Lucy, or some combination of both? Of course Cushman and Alkidas refer to each other by their last names, as is the scholarly convention.

Regarding the issue of ethical representation, Cushman emphasizes that it is “too easy to argue that an ethnographer, to use Alkidas’ words, ‘co-opts,’ ‘appropriates,’ and ‘subsumes’ the voices of individual studies” (108). Because of the extensive “praxis and applied research” done in the field of ethnography in recent years (best exemplified by the scholars of the NLS), Cushman believes that one should no longer level the cooptation charge at ethnographers. And, I agree with Cushman that Alkidas seems to lump all ethnography together rather dismissively and unfairly, failing to register the significant labors undertaken by scholars to try and insure accurate and respectful representation of the research subjects. Cushman follows this point by emphasizing the extent of these efforts, which I discussed earlier. She then adds, “In fundamental ways, then, this work was created *with* them.” Yet, in spite of Cushman’s claim that to a large extent she has written the texts *with* the Quayville residents, her argument is rather significantly undermined by the fact that they receive no official credit as authors, either in Cushman’s article or her book; thus, she cannot entirely refute Alkidas’s position.²²

Both authors raise important points regarding the difficult questions of reciprocity and representation in relationships between academic and nonacademic community members. Cushman’s contention that activist research breaks down the traditional power imbalance in such relationships also becomes the basis of her service-learning practices, as I will show in the following chapter. Nevertheless, Alkidas raises valid objections that Cushman cannot easily rebut. As we shall see, although Cushman’s model of service learning comes a long way from Herzberg’s, her insistence on making the model fit

²² Again, the anonymous stature of the Quayville residents is not Cushman’s fault—she is working within the academic structure in which she finds herself. Yet, it cannot be denied that the structure itself reaffirms a power imbalance between Cushman and her subjects.

within higher education's standards for institutionalization ultimately does not nullify the problems regarding reciprocity and egalitarianism raised by Alkidas.

Evaluating Activist Research and its Concomitant Vision of Social Change

Cushman reframes the concept of social change on a micro-level, most notably in terms of the critically literate practices underserved people use to negotiate encounters with institutional gatekeepers. She also advocates a form of activist research that seeks greater reciprocity in relationships with research subjects, as well as ethical representation of these subjects. However, she is quite cognizant of the fact that the Quayville residents' interactions with gatekeepers, such as social workers and landlords, rarely produce significant material benefits for them in spite of their deployment of critical literacy. Consequently, she is left in a precarious position, for she wishes to emphasize both that her research subjects possess critical literacy that does not significantly improve their lives, while still *needing* to justify the ethicality of her work (according to the parameters of activist research) by proving that her research is sufficiently reciprocal.

Ultimately, Cushman is much more interested in demonstrating the existence of critical literacy than in demonstrating concrete outcomes from interactions with institutional gatekeepers. As she states, "Perhaps the analyses and language skills residents deploy in gatekeeping encounters are small arms fired. But unless we make these exchanges stand up and be counted, we risk dismissing individuals' critical awareness" (167). This insistence on awareness over benefits would not be problematic,

I believe, if Cushman did not simultaneously emphasize so strongly that her activist research produces reciprocal outcomes.

Unfortunately, when comparing the benefits *she herself* receives from these partnerships with those obtained by her research subjects, one sees that she is hard-pressed to prove reciprocity. An example that, like the dubious benefits obtained by Lucy from her meeting with the social worker, reinforces this apparent benefits discrepancy is the case of Raejone. Cushman discusses Raejone's aspirations of attending college, and at one point accompanies her to a meeting with a college admissions officer at a local, relatively prestigious university referred to as "State."²³ Cushman goes on to offer counsel and support as Raejone researches the university, makes decisions about what degree she will pursue, and composes her personal statement. Cushman emphasizes throughout this process how Raejone uses critical literacy to "demystify the university" in ways similar to other examples discussed throughout the book (185).

But, at the end of this story we learn that:

...Raejone never did get into college—her application was lost in the mail, and she was evicted shortly after she sent it. She remained homeless for a year and a half, shuffling from relatives' homes to shelters, farming her kids out to other friends and relatives as she tried to find housing. (185)

Eventually she does find a small apartment and work as a nurse's aid, referring to herself as a "professional ass-wiper." In comparison, the time Cushman spends with Raejone is used productively to help her obtain data for her dissertation, and moves her up the academic social ladder. In looking at these outcomes, it is very difficult for an outsider to

²³ Incidentally, this encounter proves to be one of the more successful ones, as Cushman emphasizes that the officer, Mr. Villups, endeavors to be much more accommodating and helpful than other gatekeepers, such as the case worker with whom Lucy had a more negative experience. Nevertheless, the outcomes ultimately end up being the same for Raejone.

view this relationship as reciprocal.²⁴ Yet, this is exactly the argument Cushman must make in order to satisfy the logic of activist research.

Moreover, Cushman ultimately acknowledges that, regardless of their expression of critical literacy, the Quayville residents essentially remain at the mercy of gatekeepers' decisions to change their *own* literacy practices in order for substantive progress to occur. Toward the end of the book, in discussing her understanding that critical awareness on the part of underserved community residents does not generally "throw off the burdens of hegemonic forces," she argues that the "onus to be critically aware of and to change oppressive behaviors ... rests, in no small measure, on society's public institutional representatives" (235). She then points out various ways in which gatekeepers can "consider their language use in day-to-day interactions, using means similar to those residents employ." In making this argument, Cushman concedes that regardless of whether or not underserved residents possess or develop critical awareness, the great majority will never have the power to change their material circumstances unless the gatekeepers who determine these circumstances choose to change their own attitudes and behaviors and begin to practice "civically minded gatekeeping activities" (237).

Yet, in spite of these brief words encouraging gatekeepers to be more "civically minded," supplemented by a handful of examples of linguistic patterns used in the few positive encounters with gatekeepers detailed in the book, Cushman does not offer reason to believe that the majority of gatekeepers will make such changes. Nor does she offer

²⁴ Indeed, one is forced to wonder whether Raejone herself, if given the choice between being labeled merely "functionally literate," but living in a decent, secure home and pursuing a college degree (just like the students from Herzberg's service-learning course), versus being labeled "critically literate," but living homeless, unemployed, and not attending college, would be likely to choose the latter option. The logic of Cushman's analysis and her promotion of critical awareness without substantive socioeconomic changes almost forces her to argue that Raejone would in fact choose the latter option.

evidence that the residents' use of critical literacy tends to produce reciprocal development of more respectful, critically aware language patterns on the part of gatekeepers. Hence, the vision of social change that accompanies activist research, in spite of repositioning change on a micro-level, still leaves gatekeepers as the final arbiters of whether the attainment of better conditions will occur. The critical awareness Cushman recognizes in the Quayville residents, an awareness almost completely misrecognized by Herzberg in regard to the shelter residents, still leaves them almost as powerless to re-shape their futures as the latter group.

In arguing that it does not have to produce substantive socioeconomic benefits for underprivileged people, Cushman takes too much of the bite out of critical literacy. Indeed, such an argument could lead scholars less conscientious than she to create relationships with underserved populations under the banner of activist research, but without feeling any obligation to insure that significant benefits accrue to their research subjects. If such a scholar can feel content with using ethnographic discourse analysis to demonstrate the presence of critical literacy, they may not feel responsible for the fact that the harsh material conditions of their partners do not change as a result of their relationship, whereas the scholars themselves move further up the academic career ladder. Activist research, then, could be dangerous if researchers end up applauding themselves for work that has not really helped their partners.

As I transition into chapter four, I want to make clear that this critique is not meant to single out Cushman. These tensions regarding reciprocity and egalitarianism in community engagement are faced by all who try to pursue this work in an ethical manner. But I believe strongly that having the opportunity to make such critiques is a positive

development for community engagement. By emphasizing the importance of egalitarianism, ethicality, and reciprocity, which are issues that Herzberg scarcely even mentions, scholars like Cushman establish a higher standard for *themselves* to be judged by. In other words, my criticisms of Cushman emerge from my genuine respect and admiration for her and the work she has done to move away from exploitation and hierarchy toward egalitarianism and mutual benefits.

To reframe this point, I want to make clear my belief regarding those of us interested in truly reciprocal and egalitarian relationships with nonacademic communities that, to some extent, *we all fail*. When I turn in the following chapters to models of community engagement that I believe move farther down the path to true reciprocity and egalitarianism, I will make clear that *none* of them go all the way down this path. In chapter five in particular, where I delineate my conceptualization of community action, I explain that this model is an ideal of community engagement that scholars interested in empowering underserved communities should strive toward. But I understand that, in practice, achieving this ideal is a challenging and complicated process that will require long-term institutional change. However, I will also show that some relationships between academic and nonacademic communities are pushing us ever closer to this ideal.

Chapter Four

Hybrid Literacies and the Shift from Strategic to Tactical Service Learning

In the previous chapter I explained how the scholarly work of the New Literacy Studies offers a radically different conception of literacy practices than the autonomous, skill-driven perspectives traditionally espoused in the media. The NLS scholars have called into question various literacy hierarchies that place academic literacies above nonacademic, oral above literate, and critical above functional. In particular, within the field of rhetoric and composition, an increasing number of scholars have immersed themselves in nonacademic cultures and literacy practices to illustrate a sophistication and critical acuity that have traditionally been overlooked or ignored. Nevertheless, the ethnographic research methodologies they have used, while making possible the cultural immersion necessary to elucidate the private moments in which critical consciousness tends to be displayed by marginalized peoples, have in important ways reinforced the typical power imbalances of community-based research. Ellen Cushman, for example, has endeavored to level traditional hierarchies through “activist research,” but her methodology itself has constrained such efforts. As we shall see in this chapter, these constraints have significant consequences for service-learning collaborations between academic and nonacademic community representatives for the purpose of bringing about social change.

I will argue that these newer models of ethnographic-based service-learning, which are best exemplified in the work of Cushman and Linda Flower, display significantly greater respect for nonacademic associates and their literacy practices than the models of service learning for social change I analyzed in chapter two. Flower and Cushman both emphasize the development of mutually accessible *hybrid literacies* as a way to break down traditional hierarchies and to progress toward reciprocal literate action. They seek to create spaces in which both academic and nonacademic representatives feel that their knowledge and literacy practices are respected and validated, and these spaces make this hybridity of discourses and literacy practices possible. At the same time, both scholars emphasize the importance of institutionalizing their service-learning models within the traditional structure of higher education. I will argue that although their commitment to sustainability can be an important way to maintain community relationships, their attempts to conform these programs within academic timeframes and parameters regarding what constitutes valid research leads to top-down, strategic programs that ultimately place the needs and expectations of academic constituents above those of their nonacademic partners. In short, although their models come a long way from Herzberg's, their continued privileging of academic interests ultimately limits their capacity to enact truly reciprocal, egalitarian relationships with nonacademic community members.

The central figure making hybrid literacies possible, in Cushman's terms, is the *public intellectual*, who promotes Cushman's concept of "activist research" by combining the three academic missions of research, teaching, and service at the site of engagement. Being on site allows the public intellectual, whom Cushman characterizes

as a bridge between academic and nonacademic representatives, the capacity for more direct troubleshooting and feedback regarding challenges that emerge within the parameters of the established program. The public intellectual also becomes the key for leveraging institutional support, and thus program sustainability, from the academy. However, the fact that the public intellectual comes exclusively from the academy, and answers primarily to academic institutional demands, also leads to an under-emphasis on the interests and needs of nonacademic collaborators.

Thus, the concepts of the public intellectual and hybrid literacy form the basis of these scholars' efforts to promote reciprocity and egalitarianism. In particular, the use of hybrid literacies, as the key feature distinguishing these service-learning practices from the Herzberg model, constitute important progress toward the "thick" forms of community engagement described by Morton in the first chapter. However, I will argue that hybrid literacies must develop in a context that does not prioritize top-down university standards of institutionalization above the relationship. This argument will lead to my conceptualization in chapter five of *community action*, a form of engagement that does not emphasize the role of any individual participant, but rather focuses on the progress of the relationship itself. Whereas the public intellectual comes exclusively from the academic side and answers primarily to academic institutional demands, community action seeks to attend equally to the demands and expectations of both sides.

In order to make this argument, I will rely on Paula Mathieu's distinction between strategic and tactical orientations toward working with nonacademic communities. Mathieu finds problematic the inflexibly *strategic* approaches to engagement that are clearly evident in the work of Cushman and Flower. Strategic approaches tend to

prioritize the academic institutionalization of service-learning programs and to promote opportunities for scholarly research over the cultivation of a relationship that can respond to the often variable contingencies of nonacademic community work. Mathieu advocates instead for a *tactical* orientation to engagement, in which concrete and flexible projects develop organically from the give and take and mutual-trust building between academic and nonacademic representatives. Tactical approaches operate with a greater willingness to accommodate the shifting logistical realities of community work beyond the campus, thus increasing the capacity for reciprocity, rhetorical timeliness, and egalitarianism.

Building on Mathieu's work, I will theorize the relocation of hybrid literacies away from the relatively inflexible context of strategic programs and toward the more adaptive, situational context of tactical projects. This repositioning will complete the theoretical foundation for community action that I began to establish in the previous chapter with my analysis of the NLS. To initiate this process, I start chapter four with an examination of service-learning models that are founded on the production of literate action through hybrid literacies, and which are best characterized by the work of Linda Flower and Ellen Cushman.

Hybrid Literacies

Scholars in the field whose praxis builds on the theoretical developments of the NLS use the term "hybrid literacies" in association with another term that has become increasingly important in recent years: "community literacy." In fact, the term "community literacy" has been used by a number of scholars, including NLS proponents such as Brian Street, David Barton, and Mary Hamilton. It often refers to forms of

literacy operating outside academic contexts (Barton and Hamilton), or to “community literacy programs” such as Adult Basic Education sites (Grabill) or the Community Literacy Center (CLC) headed by Linda Flower in Pittsburgh. Within the field of rhetoric and composition, the term has gained the most purchase from an article entitled “Community Literacy” from the May 1995 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, which was written by Wayne Campbell Peck, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins. In this article, the authors tease out the definition and implications of the term through an examination of how community literacy operates at the CLC, a program begun in the early 1990s that “seeks to reinvent the tradition of community and university interaction” of the early twentieth-century settlement house movement (201). In particular, the CLC harkens back to the settlement house’s “vision of social change through inquiry and politically self-conscious cultural interaction.” Typically at the CLC

...mentors (college students) and writers (teenagers) work to tell the story-behind-the-story of an urban issue (from schools and respect to risk and gangs). The CLC project moves from inquiry to action, culminating in a ten-to-fifteen-page published document and a public Community Conversation led by teens. (Flower, “Intercultural Inquiry” 189)

Variations of this theme have included collaborations with local residents, such as one project where collaborators developed a “readable, practical” handbook dealing with housing issues in a way that represented the “viewpoints of all stakeholders at the table ... a mediator, community organizer, landlord, and tenant” (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 219).

In this article, Peck, Flower, and Higgins define “community literacy” as “action and reflection—as literate acts that could yoke community action with intercultural education, strategic thinking and problem solving, and with observation-based research

and theory building” (200). And, crucially, it is *writing*—“the collaborative work of creating public, transactional texts”—that makes this “new set of connections and conversations possible” (200). According to this paradigm, community literacy constitutes a “goal-directed process dedicated to social change—a form of action in both the community and the lives of the writers” (208). Community literacy, then, constitutes the collaborative production of some piece of writing, what they refer to as “literate action,” that may enact some social change in the community.

Because community literacy emerges from interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds and discourses, the process entails what the authors refer to as “interculturalism” or “intercultural inquiry.” It is a messy process of negotiation, harking back to James Gee’s point from the previous chapter about the “hybridity” necessary in order to make possible “an integration or mixture ... of several historically different Discourses” (*Social Linguistics* 149). As Peck, Flower, and Higgins explain:

Both mentors and writers have to move beyond a static model of multicultural discourse that sees fixed boundaries between their discourse communities and literate practices as the possession of ‘in groups.’ *Interculturalism* better describes literate interactions of people engaging in these boundary-crossing encounters that go beyond mere conversation to the delicate exploration of difference and conflict and toward the construction of a negotiated meaning. (209-210)

This process of inquiry consists of people from different discursive backgrounds coming together not only to share their perspectives in some surface-level contact zone, but to engage each other’s perspectives seriously and in depth as a way to develop meaning together. This hybridity of discursive practices, then, is at the heart of the intercultural communication.

It perhaps goes without saying that such a process can only occur within an “atmosphere of respect, a commitment to equity, and an acknowledgment of the multiple forms of expertise at the table” (210). The authors consider it imperative that participants put themselves in each other’s shoes, trying to understand rival perspectives on the issue at hand. It also requires a productive engagement with inevitable conflict. Such inquiry, after all, is a melding of “multiple, often conflicting goals, values, ideas, and discourses,” and conflict ensues from substantive engagements between people who identify with these various facets of a literacy practice (213). The process of meaning making “becomes an act of construction and negotiation in the face of conflict.”

Indeed, having participants deal with difference productively and on an equal footing plays a key role in the creation of knowledge. As Linda Flower argues:

Difference exists not just in simple distinctions such as town/gown, rich/poor, black/white, but in the alternative discourses, literate practices, goals, and values brought to an inquiry. When the people doing this hypothesis making, testing, and judging live much of their lives in different worlds, talking different languages, they may indeed struggle to be understood at times. But when they come to the table as collaborative equals (where everyone’s discourse, practices, and goals are recognized), those differences can produce an explosion of knowledge. (“Partners in Inquiry” 102-3)

Conflict is not merely an obstacle that must be overcome in order to succeed; it is an integral part of the process that, when dealt with sincerely and conscientiously, creatively advances the project of meaning making. This process of negotiation, productive engagement with conflict, and collaborative meaning making leads to “hybrid discourses” or “hybrid texts” that draw upon the shared expertise within the group, such as the housing handbook mentioned above, which linked “the experiential knowledge of

city residents with the technical language and legal processes that surround housing” (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 210).

Ellen Cushman also picks up on the idea of hybridity in her service-learning practices, using the corollary term “hybrid literacies” to describe ethical, mutually respectful engagement between academic and nonacademic community members. The authors of “Community Literacy” as well as Cushman would agree that service learning for ethical community engagement requires the use of these “hybrid literacies,” which are accessible by all participants in the collaboration. Hence they transcend the divide between academic and nonacademic, marking a considerable distinction between these approaches and the Herzberg model in which service-learning students are designated to learn academic “critical literacy” while community members acquire “functional literacy.” In other words, community literacy progresses upon the NLS’ rejection of the various literacy dichotomies, including oral vs. literate and functional vs. critical, to develop service-learning practices very different from those enacted by Herzberg. In fact, validating out-of-school literacies leads logically—nay, inevitably—to the concept of hybrid literacies, for to enfranchise purely academic literacy in such contexts in spite of the call for validation of non-mainstream literacies would be insincere and lack integrity. To do so would constitute hypocritical engagement and repeat the typical ironies of service learning that adheres to the literacy continuum.

How hybrid literacies are actually formulated in practice depends, to a large extent, on contextual factors related to the relationship, as a natural corollary of the fact that the concept of hybrid literacies is founded in the idea that all literacy practices are contextually based. As we have seen in the case of the Community Literacy Center,

collaborators seek to produce hybrid texts that invoke multiple forms of literacy, such as the housing handbook that captured multiple viewpoints and was written in a variety of styles. In this case, the literate action constituted a textual fusion of different literacies. In other cases at the CLC, textual fusions engender a quasi-academic, quasi-nonacademic literate product. But in the case of the Richmond Community Literacy Project founded by Ellen Cushman, which I will examine below, hybrid literacies were generated early on in the form of dialogic journaling as a way to initiate contact and help people from different discursive backgrounds understand each other. The hybrid literacies in this case represented an interpretive bridging of literacies that furthered the ultimate goal of producing a more traditionally school-based text. In all of the above examples of hybrid literacies, the collaboration and production of texts emerge from a mutual validation of the ways in which people from both sides use language.

Ideally, however, hybridity must be understood according to the notion that literacy is comprehensively intertwined with a variety of contextual factors, including all the “bits” concerned with “talk, action, interaction, attitudes, values, objects, tools, and spaces” (Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 3). Hybridity should extend beyond an amalgamation or fusion of multiple forms of oral and written discourse (with a small “d”) to intercultural engagement among the multiple Discourses (with a large “D”) that connote “our ever-multiple identities” (Gee, *Social Linguistics* ix). To clarify, in chapter three I examined a key concept of the NLS, that a “person’s identity is very much wrapped up in the Discourses she has acquired, but in the course of a lifetime every person acquires multiple Discourses” (ix). An individual’s personal narrative, then, is tied to the narratives of the multiple communities in which she claims membership, as well as the

literacy practices used within these communities. To enact a true hybridity of literacy practices, one must look to all the various “bits” that comprise these practices, in particular various individuals’ and communities’ purposes for participating in a collaborative. Hybridity that is limited to engagement of multiple forms of language can travel only partially down the path toward reciprocity and egalitarianism.

Unfortunately, in the sites of intercultural inquiry discussed by Cushman and Flower, the hybridization is limited by the strict, academically-based institutional parameters operating at these sites. At the CLC, for example, academic ownership of the collaborative space means that the process of intercultural inquiry must produce literate action in well-regulated periods of time, usually seven weeks. Clearly, the kinds of community problems addressed in these inquiries cannot be redressed in such fixed, discrete units of time. These collaborative processes often produce interesting and valuable forms of literate action (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 1995; Flower, Long, and Higgins 2000; Flower 2002; Higgins, Long, and Flower 2006), but the program’s dependence on an academically-defined institutional framework seems to truncate the practical effectiveness of the actions. In other words, the hybridity operating at the CLC extends only to those literate actions that can be accomplished within the program’s structural parameters, and I will ultimately argue that in both Flower’s and Cushman’s models of service learning, the scholars’ continued reliance on a university-based structure for community engagement constrains the hybridization process. Hybrid literacies cannot reach their full potential within a context dominated by a strategic academic framework.

In order to show both the potential of hybrid literacies to produce greater reciprocity and egalitarianism than in Herzberg's model of service learning, as well as the limitations imposed by academic dominance of the collaborative space, I will focus on a specific model developed by Ellen Cushman while she was a lecturer at the University of Berkeley. I attend primarily to Cushman's work rather than Flower's for several reasons. First, although Flower's CLC model bears much similarity to Cushman's and has been written about extensively by a number of other service-learning scholars (see Grabill; Deans), Cushman's service-learning practice suits my purposes better because of her keen attention to the institutionalization of community partnerships. Flower's long-standing program has been significantly institutionalized at Carnegie Mellon, but she does not spend much time discussing this process.

Additionally, Flower and her academic partners do not address the concept and implications of social change nearly as explicitly as Cushman, and thus their definition of social change seems to float between something resembling the macro-level vision advocated by Herzberg and the micro-level perspective offered by Cushman. For example, the authors of "Community Literacy" find fault with the "literacy of social and cultural critique" associated with critical pedagogy, not for its articulation of social change, but because of its failure to be practical about cultivating such change. The "discourse of critique," they argue, "offers few strategies for change beyond resisting dominant discourse practices with the promise that the victors of revolution will somehow be more just than their predecessors" (205). In addition, they argue that "community literacy supports *social change*" (205, italics in original), offering examples such as collaborators "scribbling notes for arguments they may later present to city

council, circulating petitions,” and “documenting disputes to show evidence of a ‘problem property’ on the corner.” But it is unclear whether these examples represent a more practical version of critical pedagogy’s literacy of social and cultural critique, or something more along the lines of Cushman’s vision of social change. In either case, as we shall see below, Flower does not attend sufficiently to the outcomes obtained by nonacademic collaborators, thus making it difficult to ascertain whether social change is occurring regardless of how she defines it.

Finally, Cushman addresses concerns about reciprocity more methodically than does Flower. In particular, she spends considerable time articulating her conceptualization of the “public intellectual,” who is an academic figure capable of transcending the academic/nonacademic divide in order to serve “an underserved public” (“Beyond Specialization” 180).²⁵ The public intellectual is crucial for her formulation of ethical, mutually reciprocal service learning, and will figure prominently in my analysis of her praxis. Focusing on Cushman also permits me to show how her model of service learning extends her research on literacy practices from *The Struggle and the Tools* to the sphere of service-learning relationships, including both the merits and the limitations of this approach. For these reasons, although I will refer at times to Flower’s model of service learning, I will focus the bulk of my attention on Cushman. I begin this analysis with an explanation of the primary figure in her model, the public intellectual.

The Public Intellectual

²⁵ Although Flower does not refer to the term “public intellectual” in the manner Cushman does, the CLC functions as a convergence of research, teaching, and service that is spearheaded by scholars in much the same way as Cushman’s public intellectual.

In using the term “public intellectual,” which she defines over a series of publications, Cushman actively seeks to recuperate the term from more typical connotations related to “middle and upper class policy makers, administrators, and professionals” who neglect “an important site for uniting knowledge-making and political action: the local community” (“Public Intellectual” 328). According to Cushman, intellectuals face a “growing pressure ... to make knowledge that speaks directly to political issues outside of academe’s safety zones,” but this pressure demands engagement with a too narrow “public” that omits “under-served neighborhoods” (329). Instead, these intellectuals generally engage the public sphere to defend the sanctity of academic autonomy. Scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu argue that “political action” for intellectuals should focus on working “collectively in defense of their specific interests and of the means necessary for protecting their own autonomy” (quoted in Cushman 329). Similarly, Michael Bérubé contends that scholars should engage the public to protect “scholarly autonomy through popularizing intellectual work.” In Bérubé’s words, this public turn refers to the necessity of making academic work “intelligible to nonacademics—who then, we hope, will be able to recognize far-right rant about academe for what it is” (quoted in Cushman 329). In this case, public intellectualism defends academic freedom against the castigations of conservative thinkers (who, according to this definition, appear not to qualify as intellectuals).

These versions of “going public” might, Cushman argues, help “preserve autonomy, may even get intellectuals a moment or two in the media spotlight,” but in neither of these cases does the work of public intellectuals “help individuals who have no home, not enough food, or no access to good education” (329). This conception of going

public works “more to bolster our own positions in academe than it does to widen the scope of our civic duties as intellectuals” (330). Intellectuals such as Bourdieu and Bérubé:²⁶

...all share an implied goal of affecting policy and decision-making, and they reach this goal by using their positions of prestige as well as multiple layers of media (newspapers, radio, and television) in order to influence a public beyond the academy, though this public will usually be limited to the educated upper echelons of society.

And in doing so, they “typically remain scholars and teachers, offering their superior knowledge to the unenlightened” (330). These public intellectuals engage the mass media without stepping down from their perches in the Ivory Tower.

On the contrary, Cushman desires that public intellectuals “address social issues important to community members in under-served neighborhoods,” which demands an understanding of “public” in the “broadest sense of the word.” This includes people who often live in neighborhoods “located close by universities, just beyond the walls and gates, or down the hill, or over the bridge, or past the tracks” (329). Just as importantly, she wants intellectuals to do more than “reach outside the university” by “actually *interacting* with the public beyond its walls.” This interaction should take the form of “creating knowledge with those whom the knowledge serves” (330). In this way, public intellectuals can indeed “contribute to a more just social order.”

Public intellectuals, in Cushman’s conceptualization of the term, also emphasize the practical component of social action that progresses beyond the discourse of critique:

Public intellectuals engage others in metadiscursive, experiential learning, because they seek to understand and, if possible, improve very real social tensions.... For a public intellectual, it is not enough to critique

²⁶ Cushman also adds “currently prominent figures” such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Stanley Fish to their ranks (330).

hegemonic discourses and representations, or to celebrate diversity—
action must result from such critique. (“Beyond Specialization” 183-4)

Cushman distinguishes the public intellectual from scholars who engage in the discourse of cultural critique but do little to bring about the changes they desire to see in society. This appeal echoes the call for “literate action” expressed by Peck, Flower, and Higgins in “Community Literacy,” a process they believe is crucial for progressing beyond classroom-bound critique.

For Cushman, engaging this broader public means having scholars combine “the traditionally separate duties of research, teaching, and service” in order to use “the privilege of their positions to forward the goals of both students and local community members” (“Public Intellectual” 330). Thus public intellectualism represents activist research, with its emphasis on socially-relevant research goals and mutual benefits, placed into the realm of service learning. The public intellectual also embodies the NLS’s entreaty to validate nonacademic literacies and knowledge, thus mitigating the potential for scholars to “posture as saviors for the disadvantaged.” Instead, they become “more inclined to see what others can teach them” (“Beyond Specialization” 182).

Nevertheless, although Cushman expands the scope of the public intellectual to engagement with a broader scale of the “public,” her public intellectual is still very much an academic figure; she is a *scholar* who manages to integrate the three primary missions of academic work: research, teaching, and service, to serve the traditionally underserved. The public intellectual, in Cushman’s view, *cannot* come from the nonacademic community, as her paradigm fails to create spaces for nonacademic representatives to initiate relationships or to conceptualize and design such programs jointly from their inception. At best, they can join the design process at some point after the public

intellectual has already established her own main objectives. Consequently, Cushman's public intellectualism tends to reinforce higher education's sense of distinction from the nonacademic community, thus ironically contradicting efforts to level the traditional hierarchies and power imbalances seen in these relationships.

For example, in continuing her argument about endorsing all forms of knowledge as a way to prevent scholars from assuming the mantle of liberal savior, Cushman writes:

One way to overcome noblesse oblige is to make knowledge with the community, because this kind of collaboration helps to mitigate against a top-down application of knowledge from experts to laypeople. While just as necessary to the real-life, problem-solving situations as other knowledges, expert knowledge does not have the final say in outreach courses. ("Beyond Specialization" 183)

Here Cushman reinscribes the dichotomy of "expert" vs. "lay" even as she criticizes the traditional devaluing of "lay" knowledge. In this characterization, the "lay" nonacademics do not get to be "experts," even for the knowledge they do possess. Expert knowledge is just that—*expert*—something distinct from *lay* knowledge. The terms themselves imply a qualitative difference that positions the academic representatives over their nonacademic counterparts. The distinction Cushman tries to make between activist research and the traditional "top-down" transactions of knowledge from expert academic to lay nonacademic is that in activist research, the lay side should participate in determining the outcomes of service-learning projects. However, when one form of knowledge is deemed "expert" and another "lay," it is difficult to imagine that participants from both the academic and nonacademic side *genuinely* have equal say in determining a project's direction, especially when attention to academic timeframes such as the semester system continue to demarcate the boundaries of program organization.

In spite of Cushman's efforts to build egalitarian, mutually beneficial service-learning relationships, the academic side retains a hierarchical position over the nonacademic side, in part by virtue of the fact that *the* key figure in these relationships comes exclusively from the academic community. Moreover, as was the case regarding activist research in chapter two, the public intellectual seems to *benefit* most from these relationships. The integration of research, teaching, and service at the heart of Cushman's public intellectualism and activist research leads to publications of scholarly work that produce substantial, concrete material rewards for the scholars, whereas the benefits accruing to the service-learning students and the nonacademic community remain somewhat ambiguous. With this understanding of the public intellectual in mind, I will analyze both the merits and constraints of how Cushman's model works in practice.

The Practice of Service Learning as Constituted by Hybrid Literacies

In an essay entitled "Contact Zones Made Real," Cushman and co-author Chalon Emmons illustrate how a productive engagement with conflict in the form of intercultural dialogue surpasses Mary Louise Pratt's renowned pedagogical concept of the "contact zone," which constitutes "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (quoted in Cushman and Emmons 204). In Pratt's contact zone, intercultural interactions focus primarily on learning about texts that represent different cultures, a practice which Cushman and Emmons argue leads to "facile, often invalid claims, claims based on second- and third-hand information" (204). They also invoke Joseph Harris's critique of the contact zone for the superficiality of interactions it promotes. Even the term "contact," Harris points

out, implies that the encounters occur only on the surface. Hence, Cushman and Emmons maintain that the contact zone creates conditions where “students have little stake in expanding their conceptions of others or in negotiating interpretations with those who are represented” (205). Beyond the mere articulation of differences, people must learn to put these differences into genuine dialogue and negotiation with one another.

To illustrate how to make the contact zones “real,” the authors narrate and analyze a team-taught service-learning course in which students from UC-Berkeley worked with children at a YMCA in a poor residential community in Richmond, California. In so doing, the authors reveal how this process of collaboration produced hybrid literacies that combined “elements of oral and written discourse” and included “facets of storytelling, dialogue, letter-writing, and personal journals,” as well as uniting “print and illustration.” Unlike the typical value systems “children encounter in school,” these hybrid literacies were “officially sanctioned by institutional representatives who, in the context of the study at least, value[d] all meaning-making activities” (205). The spaces of these social interactions were strongly distinguished from school-based discourses that require students (either from the university or the school, if in different contexts) to learn to “navigate the boundaries between competing value systems about what counts as a legitimate medium and activity for meaning-making” (206). In this site of intercultural collaboration, the practitioners rejected qualitative judgments about different literacy practices, which made the emergence of a mutually accessible hybrid literacies possible.

The “service-learning context creates an environment where those involved value all texts equally and therefore promote children’s blurring of boundaries between official and unofficial texts in order to create meaning” (206). The authors maintain that hybrid

literacies “emerge from mutually rewarding interaction between adults and children, where both adults and children learn from each other in dialogic relations,” and this process deconstructs the asymmetrical power relations accruing from socioeconomic, institutional, and age differences. This course produced multiple benefits, including the undergraduates developing a new understanding of language and “learning by observing and interacting with children,” and the children learning “to make meaning that was significant to them, their parents, and the YMCA staff” (206). In particular, hybrid literacies challenged “undergraduates’ notions of what counts as schooled literacy, asking students to question their preconceived notions of the goals and purposes of reading and writing.” They also provided a space for engaging literacy distinct from what the children were used to in school. The authors explain that before the semester’s activities had even begun Steva, the YMCA’s supervisor, “warned [them] that if [they] created a school-like atmosphere at the YMCA, [they] would drive the members away.... Steva quite consciously wanted to make this learning environment something different from the one she perceives school to be” (222). Steva’s exhortation reinforced the importance of developing hybrid literacies distinct from the educational environments the children were used to, and in relation to which many possessed negative associations.

The authors detail a set of literacy events between one undergraduate, Sally, and one YMCA member, a fifth-grader named Tanisha, who collaboratively wrote stories and developed a dialogic journal in their initial interactions to come to know, trust, and respect each other. The journal dialogue, for example:

...collapses the spoken and written together in a form that includes aspects of the personal journal, letter writing, and conversation. The turn-taking movement between addresser and addressee in these letters echoes

conversation, especially since they handed the journal back and forth to each other; yet the conversation is written. (219)

The dialogic journal thus created a safe space for these participants from different Discursive backgrounds to establish familiarity, overcome their initial awkwardness, and build a Discourse each could understand and access. In this respect, "... hybrid literacies become a complex forum for initiating communication between individuals from different ethnic, class, and educational backgrounds."

Hybrid literacies bear meaning specifically within the context in which they are produced. As the authors explain:

We find that hybrid literacies are produced in meeting places where social interaction not only prompts and sustains the language activity, but also becomes the final reason for the activity—these literacies are created *by*, *from*, and *for* social interaction.... In their form and content, hybrid literacies should be viewed in terms of the categories they straddle as opposed to the single categories they occupy. They are inviting literacies, inviting in two senses of the word: First, this reading and writing invites the audience to appreciate various aspects of the authors' worlds; second, this reading and writing invite (*sic*) the authors to represent their lived experiences to others inside and outside their community. Finally, hybrid literacies often provide individuals ways to redefine and affirm their notions of themselves and their capabilities. In all, hybrid literacies are invitations to represent one's self or culture to an appreciative audience, and invitations to interact with different people in an atmosphere of mutuality and respect. (217)

In terms of creating a space for acquaintance, mutual trust, and respect, hybrid literacies represent both the means and the ends of the collaborative process. They constitute an amalgamation of various participants' personal and institutional experiences with language and literacy. Occurring within an atmosphere and value system that validates the language practices each participant brings to the table, hybrid literacies enact an institutional bridging between the university and the community, between academic and nonacademic literacies. Thus, in this case, hybrid literacies do not produce a fusion of

literacy practices into something new, but rather represent a process of interaction and mutual appreciation that creates a new intercultural network of affiliations. As the authors show, these literacies cannot be evaluated through individual, neatly compartmentalized genres of form and content. Because they straddle different Discursive spaces, they defy simple evaluative methods. In fact, they encourage participants to expand their value systems for making such judgments. Hybrid literacies both create a new form of literacy and an audience capable and ready to appreciate it. In this respect, they are justified by their value to the participants who use them.

Nevertheless, the forging of hybrid literacies that draw their meaning from the collaborative process raises questions about how people *outside* the context of the collaboration will perceive them. In the case of this service-learning course, for example, the undergraduates wrestled heavily with these questions:

Yet the nature and purposes of these literacies prompted students to question which types of reading and writing they should be doing with community members. With the UCB undergraduates, readers may be tempted to question the rhetorical utility of hybrid literacies because, at first blush, these literacies beg the questions: Whose ends do hybrid literacies really serve? What's their purpose? Literacy practices such as [Sally and Tanisha's] were critiqued in class for their shortcomings in coherence, audience awareness, ill-defined purpose, and improvised grammar. Such critiques use as baselines for judgment both schooled literacies and progressive discussions about the need for skills and process writing (Delpit, 1995). (219)

The undergraduates worried that the hybrid literacies they had produced in collaboration with the YMCA youths would not be relevant or useful within contexts such as the children's schools. The value and purpose of the hybrid literacies were called into question by the necessity of producing literate action.

Sally in particular struggled with this concern, fearing that she was doing little to help the children become more successful writers—that is, in the context of the literacies validated by their schools. As the authors explain:

Sally became concerned that she was doing a disservice to the YMCA members in general, and Tanisha in particular, because she was only engaging them in literacies for socializing. She wanted to move away from emphasizing just the social process of hybrid literacies without an equal emphasis on the story as a product and revision for an audience. (222)

Sally's anxiety centered on her belief in the importance of composing a finished product that would be judged highly by an audience composed of Tanisha's school teachers, parents, and the YMCA staff. Hence, "By initially concentrating solely on literacies for social involvement, without revising or correcting grammar, Sally believed that she failed in her duties as an educator and member of the class who had an obligation to the service goal of the course" (227). Sally's preconceptions about school-based literacies informed her interactions with the YMCA children and her reflections on the efficacy of these literacy events. Fortunately, the positive experiences she and Tanisha had previously shared through their socializing activities ultimately made more conventionally school-based literate products possible.

As the authors explain, toward "the middle of the semester, Steva also wanted us to reach beyond" the goals of trust building and socialization:

In a mid-term meeting at the YMCA, she said that since we had obviously established solid working relations with the children, we needed to begin correcting their grammar more systematically, to get them writing and reading even more. She also asked us to work on small projects that would lead us to some final products that we could show to parents and other YMCA administrators. (222)

The rhetorical necessity of addressing an external audience helped Sally resolve the conflicting tensions between her desire to continue using the hybrid literacies she had forged with Tanisha and the feeling of obligation to help her develop literacy skills more relevant to the school-based context. She went on to create what she termed a “unification pedagogy” that built on the trust they had mutually garnered for one another through hybrid literacies and added a more conventional emphasis on trying to produce “Standard English”—as was deemed necessary to generate the hoped for rhetorical effect on the end-of-semester audience.

The two participants worked on a story about sheep, and with “this specific audience in mind,” Tanisha felt comfortable with Sally’s efforts to help her produce a more “polished” composition (228). Thus, “In doing this project, the pair gained experience with prewriting, drafting, and revising,” all highly valued activities in school-based contexts. And, the authors argue:

Just as the initial hybrid literacies Sally and Tanisha created together in their early interactions worked to establish a relationship of mutual trust, so this final writing project helped fulfill the promise of that mutual trust, as each partner honored her obligations to the other. (228)

This outcome shows that a significant element of intercultural dialogue involves both sides explaining their needs, articulating the kinds of literacy that are valid to whichever audiences they are trying to reach, and mutually agreeing upon what kind of literacy will work for which audience.

In the case of the interaction between Tanisha and Sally, the development of hybrid literacies helped build a relationship between collaborators that led ultimately to more conventional forms of literacy for a specific external audience. The hybrid texts represented by the dialogic journal were not judged high-quality according to traditional

school-based, essayist conceptions of literacy and the purpose of writing. But put in the context of building a relationship, they successfully produced greater capacity for texts that *did* satisfy these other rhetorical demands, and in turn satisfied Sally's ethical obligation to help Tanisha improve her school-based literacy skills. Thus we see that, beyond the hybridization of oral and written language practices, there occurred here some hybridity of the other "bits" of literacy, including the goals and expectations for participants in the collaborative.

From this narrative of a specific example of service learning, the authors draw these conclusions:

Service learning seems to provide one way for out-of-school and school-based literacy events to emerge between adults and youths. When service-learning programs are sustained, we believe these hybrid literacy events will become literacy practices between adults and youths.... Service learning seems to provide one way for out-of-school and school-based literacy to intermingle in productive tension. (221)

This passage indicates how hybrid literacies can emerge from the negotiation, dialogue, and productive handling of conflict that comprise intercultural, inter-discursive collaborations. The authors envision that, if given more time, the hybrid literacy *events* manifested in this relationship would eventually have formed a hybrid literacy *practice* whose existence and meaning would have taken shape within the context of the relationship. Ideally, such hybrid practices would have coalesced around the relationship, becoming unique to the particular collaborative using them. Unfortunately, the rigid academic timeframe meant that these newly formed relations ended before a more comprehensive hybridity could emerge.

Overall, the service-learning model depicted in "Contact Zones Made Real" displays significant differences from the models analyzed in chapter two. Cushman, by

integrating her research on interactions with underserved communities into her teaching and service, successfully articulates a more nuanced and respectful position toward the capacities of both her own students and their nonacademic community partners. Thus we see how hybrid literacies extend her conception of activist research into the service-learning space. Similarly, the integration of research, service, and teaching allows her to insure that all benefit from the collaboration. And certainly, as a proponent of activist research and public intellectualism, reciprocity is a core concern for Cushman.

In a separate article discussing this model, she remarks that the YMCA benefited from having a non-school like atmosphere promote reading and writing for children who often feel disaffected from schools. The personal journals produced by the children during this collaboration were both academically useful and fun, leading a YMCA supervisor to remark that the children “don’t even realize that all the art, math, and writing they’re doing in these journals will help them with their schoolwork” (“Public Intellectual” 334). And Cushman’s own students came to see “the tight integration of literacy theory and practice,” writing essays that “revealed careful attention to the scholarship and some rigor in challenging the limitations of these readings against their own observations” (333). These benefits, as described by Cushman, are commendable.

Nevertheless, the benefits obtained by Emmons and Cushman seem to heavily outweigh those of the other participants. In still another article in which Cushman describes the effectiveness of this service-learning model, she notes that Emmons “collected enough data to compose her dissertation and complete her PhD,” and also engaged in “impressively thorough research that may well help her obtain a tenure-track job” (“Sustainable Service Learning” 57). Cushman herself “published two articles since

completing this work,” which helped her acquire a tenured position at Michigan State University. I applaud Cushman’s consistent candor about her *own* benefits from service learning; yet, as in my previous analysis of her ethnographic study in *The Struggle and the Tools*, I wonder about the true extent of reciprocity and egalitarianism in these relationships. Whereas the benefits obtained by Cushman and Emmons become catalysts for significant career advancement, we learn nothing about what benefits may have ensued, particularly for the long-term, for the service-learning students, the YMCA children, or the YMCA staff following the end of the semester. In any case, it seems clear that the relationship does not produce an equivalent social mobility for these other constituents.²⁷

Moreover, Cushman herself (in collaboration with Emmons regarding “Contact Zones Made Real”) retains full authorial credit for the scholarly publications, including full license to represent the service-learning students and YMCA children and staff. The research subjects’ voices are filtered through those of the scholars, meaning egalitarianism does not extend to the capacity to represent one’s own voice before audiences in such rhetorical contexts as academic journals or monographs. In general, much more attention is paid throughout these articles to meeting the standards (for allowing the scholar to retain her institutional position), as well as the timeframes, of the academic institution than those of the community partners. By using ethnography to research the subjects, the public intellectual (even if unintentionally) reinforces traditional power imbalances between academic and community representatives.

²⁷ Although Cushman does not discuss long-term benefits for the nonacademic community partners, this does not mean there weren’t any. My point is that their long-term benefits are not her primacy concern, so she does not address the issue directly.

In a response to “Contact Zones Made Real” appearing in the same volume, Sarah Jewett argues that although she is “excited by the ‘hybrid literacies’ that are at the heart of this community program” (236), she remains concerned that:

...these ‘collaborative efforts’ are still designed with *university* life situated in the foreground. The university chooses the communities in which to initiate these kinds of literacy programs—this particular one portrayed as the ‘forgotten inner city’ overshadowed by the infamous Oakland. Its efforts are always linked to widely publicized and broad-based initiatives, such as the “Berkeley Pledge,” which highlights the university’s commitment to its surrounding communities. The schedules of such programs, too, are invariably linked to university timetables. (237)

In other words, the engagement that develops from this Berkeley course is designed primarily around Berkeley’s needs. The collaboration did not develop organically out of a pre-existing relationship between the university and the YMCA. And the hybrid literacies themselves were, to a large extent, artificially manufactured out of the needs of the course, specifically the teachers’ desire to complicate both their students’ understanding of literacy practices and the role these practices play in institutional contexts. The hybridization of literacy practices, then, was constrained by the dominant role of the public intellectual and her commitment to an academic institutional framework. To put it another way, this course constituted a Berkeley project (seeking to become an institutionalized program) already in place and in search of some relationship with a nonacademic community in which to implement the project (which ended up being the YMCA), rather than a joint Berkeley-YMCA *relationship* collaboratively conceiving of and developing a *project*. This distinction, I believe, is significant.

In order to illustrate the implications of this difference, I want now to delineate Paula Mathieu’s dual concepts of “strategic” and “tactical” approaches to service

learning. I will begin by explicating Mathieu's definition of "strategies" and show how Cushman's and Flower's models of service learning represent this approach; I will then argue that such approaches cannot produce the reciprocity and egalitarianism both Cushman and Flower seek. Following this discussion, I will turn to Mathieu's conception of "tactical" to begin imagining how hybrid literacies can reach their full potential for ethical, responsible, and mutually beneficial community engagement.

Strategic Service Learning

Paula Mathieu uses Michel de Certeau's concepts of "strategies" and "tactics" to distinguish between the typically "calculated" institutional processes of higher education and the more situational, unwieldy, and flexible realities of community-based work.

Strategies are:

...calculated actions that emanate from and depend upon 'proper' (as in property) spaces, like corporations, state agencies, and educational institutions, and relate to others via this proper space.... The goal of a strategy is to create a stable, spatial nexus that allows for the definition of practices and knowledge that minimize temporal uncertainty. Strategic thinking accounts for and relies on measurability and rationality. (16)

Strategic engagement seeks to create and nurture stable, sustainable practices and bodies of knowledge within institutional spaces such as universities. Higher education, for example, is "organized by strategies: academic calendars, disciplinary rules and methods of assessment, and organization along strategic units, such as colleges, departments, and institutes" (16). When engaging communities beyond academic walls, universities typically use their established strategic modus operandi for such tasks as developing criteria for assessment and seeking academic institutionalization. Unfortunately, these strategic methods often fail to mesh with the material realities of community work:

When extending university work into the community, existing academic measures are often applied ... even though the space of the interaction is no longer defined or controlled by the university. For example, evaluation of service learning relies mostly on student performance and satisfaction, standard measures of academic work. To apply strategic rules calls upon a potentially colonizing logic that seeks to control the space of the interaction through stability and long-term planning. My argument is that when moving from the classroom into the streets,²⁸ scholars, teachers, and writers must devise new time- and space-appropriate methods for how we plan and evaluate our work. Thinking strategically, then, is not an option, because the dynamic spaces where we work should not be considered strategic extensions of academic institutions. (16-7)

Strategic academic operations generally do not apply to collaborations with community partners because the values, needs, expectations, and standards of evaluation commonly used in academic institutional spaces, such as measuring outcomes of student learning and publishing research in academic journals (for which the scholars alone receive authorial credit), are not relevant to community associates. Nevertheless, most service-learning programs do not factor these differing operational contexts into the design and evaluation of their programs. For example, although Cushman's model of service learning is more attentive to community concerns than Herzberg's model, the characteristic academic standards for evaluating student outcomes and scholarly research continue to exist as the central component of her program design. Seeking to extend the strategic operational model of the university to the nonacademic space means

²⁸ Mathieu "somewhat reluctantly" uses the term "streets" as a "spatial metaphor for the destination of academic outreach and service learning" (xiii). "Street," after all, "carries connotations of homelessness, gangs, and poverty. Wealthy people tend not to spend much time in the streets, and when they do it's often within regulated and semiprivatized spaces, such as gated communities or sidewalks in gentrified neighborhoods" (xiii). Nevertheless, service-learning projects most often operate in places characterized as part of the street, such as "homeless shelters and learning centers in poor neighborhoods." She points out that with the "increasing interest in public initiatives," writing instruction has become "deeply implicated in complications of race and class and institutional power, and the ethical problems are complex." Hence, in "choosing the term *street*," she does not "solve these problems but rather seek[s] to continually remind [her]self and others that taking our teaching and learning to the streets has serious implications" (xiv).

overlooking the realities, contingencies, and complexities of these other spaces, thus reinforcing traditional hierarchies.²⁹

Mathieu does not seek to condemn strategic approaches out of hand. She recognizes that they can ease access to certain university resources. For example, “seeking and creating strategic power has certain benefits: Actions can be calculated, continuity can be assured, and broader spaces can be claimed or controlled” (96). These are the kinds of benefits detailed by Cushman. In fact, Mathieu recognizes and appreciates the value of the service-learning models promoted by Cushman and Flower, pointing out that:

Clearly, predictability, continuity, and funded positions and spaces can benefit service-learning programs a great deal. Scholars like Linda Flower (2003) and Ellen Cushman (2002b, 2002a) make compelling cases for the advantages that institutionalized and long-term service learning projects can yield. (96)

Her concern, however, is “that we must also consider the disadvantages of institutionalized models,” the opportunity costs of which, Mathieu believes, tend to fall more heavily on the nonacademic side.

One instance of this opportunity cost has to do with making academic institutionalization a primary goal of the collaboration. Mathieu does not argue that institutionalization is inherently and inevitably bad for the integrity of the relationship. When it develops “from the bottom up, not the top down,” it might be beneficial on a

²⁹ Although Mathieu focuses primarily on institutions within academic contexts, certainly the nonacademic partners may represent institutions as well, though their institutional structure may look quite different than that of the university's. There will be different expectations, goals, bureaucratic demands, timeframes, and criteria for evaluation. In fact, community partners may range from relatively grassroots efforts to more established, systematic institutional frameworks (such as the YMCA with which Cushman worked). The details of nonacademic institutionalization will depend on specific contextual factors of individual relationships. But in any case, Mathieu's point that universities tend to enter communities and *control* the collaborative space, regardless of how institutionalized the community partners are, remains valid.

project-by-project basis (106). However, when institutionalization becomes the *raison d'être* of the relationship, its negative side becomes manifest:

...institutionalized service learning does allow for *certain* kinds of stability, continuity, and financial support. But at the same time, institutionalized service learning can't solve some problems, and even creates others; those in the communities we purport to serve are the ones who frequently experience those problems. My desire is to complicate the way we assess sending students into the streets by foregrounding the needs and responses of those in the communities served. (89-90)

In supporting this claim, Mathieu narrates a series of what she terms “academic horror stories,” in which strategic service-learning models lead to community representatives either receiving minimal to no benefits or actually “being burned” by their academic partners. One example is the experience of the vendor of a street newspaper (in which people who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless are the vendors and oftentimes the writers of articles) who is often visited by service-learning students. He states that the students pump him with questions for essays they are writing for their class; then, as “soon as they’ve got what they need, they’re gone” (105).

Mathieu acknowledges that these stories constitute extreme examples of “campus community work gone wrong” from scholars failing to “keep up with the current scholarship” (105-6). However, she also reminds us that it “takes just one experience of ‘being burned’ for a community group to sour on the idea of working with our students” (106). Even in cases “where partnerships run more smoothly,” questions remain about how much the projects actually benefit community partners. “How good,” Mathieu asks, “are we at asking and finding out?” She focuses on the seven-week programs at Flower’s CLC and the concept of collaborative intercultural inquiry as an example of this under-emphasis on community benefits.

The idea of intercultural dialogue, Mathieu points out, invites Carnegie Mellon students to inquire into various urban issues, but the benefits for the inner-city youths with whom they discuss these issues remain unclear:

For example, Flower writes that CMU student Scott formed an inquiry into what has helped black male youths ‘form their own notion of work ethic’ (189). He then invited teen students and other members of the community to develop a range of ‘rivaling’ hypotheses and ideas about this issue. While this approach does put the ideas and wisdom of the community squarely into the project, the starting point for the inquiries remains the individual student and his assumptions. It’s unclear to what extent the participating teens want to discuss issues of work ethics with a college student or if the inquiry benefited them in any way. (94)

Although it is possible that the teens benefited from this process of inquiry, the point is that their benefits are not Flower’s primary concern and thus she does not discuss their presence or absence.

To this example I would add the case of the “readable, practical handbook” mentioned by Peck, Flower, and Higgins in regard to a CLC dialogue between housing stakeholders. We are told in an aside that the book was “adopted by other housing groups” (219), but we learn nothing about what the consequences of adopting this handbook were. In what ways have disadvantaged tenants in fact benefited from the handbook? How has it changed the dynamic between tenants and landlords in these communities for the better? Since the hybridity of literacy practices did not fully extend to the goals and needs of the housing constituents, the implications and significance of the outcomes of these manifestations of literate action are marginal to Flower’s and her colleagues’ many publications examining the praxis of the CLC.

In a more recent article co-authored with Lorraine Higgins and Elenore Long, Flower returns to the intercultural inquiry that led to the *Landlord Tenant Handbook*. In

this case, the authors offer a glimpse into the inescapable reality that the seven-week process leading to literate action in the form of a hybrid text and a culminating community conversation will not actually solve the community problems that form the basis of CLC discourse:

Stepping back, we would say that the work of inquiry and deliberation rarely leads to ... a direct and satisfying change, nevermind to a revolutionary change on the scale of transforming flawed national policies or eradicating tenacious structural problems like racism.... *The Landlord Tenant Handbook* will not eliminate the need for mediators and magistrates, even in one small community. The texts and practices produced in these projects are not ends in themselves but only beginnings, and they work, as publics do, through multiple paths, circulating and re-circulating, evolving and changing—even if incrementally—the way we live and work together as a community. (“Rhetorical Model” 34)

This passage evokes a sober pragmatism about the limitations of these abbreviated processes to redress the underlying structural causes of the inequities that form the basis of intercultural inquiry. Indeed, it reflects an understanding of community engagement very similar to Paula Mathieu’s concept of “radical insufficiency,” which I will analyze below. Yet whereas Mathieu’s concept is integral to her conception of egalitarian, reciprocal engagement, *this* recognition of insufficiency, positioned at the very end of the article, seems to signify more of an addendum than a stimulus for reevaluating the strategic nature and purpose of the CLC’s praxis. Moreover, throughout most of the prodigious number of publications that have flowed out of the CLC, including most of this article, the forms of literate action are portrayed in a manner highlighting their progress toward real social transformation, although the specifics of how such transformation actually makes a difference in the lives of nonacademic representatives are rarely made explicit (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 1995; Flower, Long, and Higgins 2000; Flower 2002; Higgins, Long, and Flower 2006).

According to Mathieu, the developments in service learning that have occurred in recent years by practitioners such as Ellen Cushman and Linda Flower, although showing gains in “complexity and sophistication” over the more prevalent Herzberg model, nevertheless continue to “prioritize student and institutional needs over community needs” because they emphasize the program over the relationship (90). Thus, “While the scholarship on service has gotten more critical and self-reflexive, local communities and their evaluation of this work remain secondary, appearing primarily in peripheral ways in the scholarship and evaluations of service-learning programs” (94). Even “some of the best work advocating a greater voice for community partners remains rooted in student concerns, while voices from the street remain secondary.” This tendency has resulted from the “trend toward top-down institutionalization of service programs,” which “frequently originate inside the university first and then seek out community sites of service” (90).

Indeed, as Mathieu illustrates:

Much scholarship related to service learning equates institutionalization with success. Statements such as these are commonplace: “The success of service learning will depend on the level of its institutionalization and how the faculty accepts, adopts, and implements it within the university (Scapansky 2004).” (96-7)

Similarly, Cushman’s argument for institutionalized, sustainable service-learning programs spearheaded by a public intellectual further demonstrates Mathieu’s point. In the following section, I will explain how Cushman’s public intellectualism, in spite of its advancements over Herzberg’s model of service learning, is still significantly hampered in its pursuit of genuine reciprocity among equal partners. Public intellectualism only

permits a partial hybridity of literacy practices, one that does not encompass all the “bits” that comprise different forms of literacy.

The Limitations of Public Intellectualism for Producing Egalitarianism and Reciprocity in Community Engagement

Cushman’s description in “Sustainable Service Learning Programs” of how the service-learning program at Berkeley developed illustrates how her goal of institutionalizing the program—referred to as the Richmond Community Literacy Project (RCLP)—at Berkeley preceded and, in spite of Cushman’s emphasis on reciprocity, ultimately trumped the relationship with the YMCA. She developed the idea while working as a full-time, non-tenure track lecturer in Berkeley’s College Writing Program. Among other motivating factors, she believed that the research opportunities of institutionalized program would raise the writing program’s “low” status on the “institutional totem pole” (51). She obtained grants to support the idea, hoping to establish a site in Richmond because most existing service initiatives occurred in Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco. It was at this point, with the plan and some financial support already in place, that she began to search for a community partner, eventually settling on a local YMCA. A new course was then established at Berkeley to recruit service-learning students for a new after-school program at the YMCA, and this course became the “cornerstone of RCLP” (51).

Once having made the decision to collaborate with the YMCA, Cushman worked with staff members to develop the program by “participating in their meetings, observing a number of their after-school programs, and by informally interviewing key staff members to see what they wanted in the after-school program” (52). Once again, this

process of immersing herself in the literacy practices of her collaborators distinguishes her sharply from scholars such as Herzberg, as well as the academic “horror stories” narrated by Mathieu, and is crucial for laying the groundwork for hybrid literacies in these relationships. She learned from the staff that they did not want the program to be a “rigidly structured” school-like environment, preferring that the undergraduates mix academic work with “engaging, fun, and flexibly structured workshops that took into account the desires of the youths” (52). It seems clear that Cushman’s efforts to integrate the staff’s needs and expectations into the service project helped create a respectful environment in which hybrid literacies could emerge.

Nevertheless, the YMCA staff’s input came toward the end of the program-development process. Berkeley and the YMCA did not have a preexisting relationship—with hybrid literacies already in place—upon which to build the ideas for the program and insure that the YMCA’s needs and goals would be incorporated from the conceptual stage. This process for establishing the RCLP indicates to a large extent why it produced partial hybridity; the YMCA’s purpose, objectives, and expectations were not incorporated into the foundation of the program, and consequently remained secondary to those of the public intellectual. And, it is the figure of the public intellectual who best illustrates both the manner in which Cushman’s model improves upon Herzberg’s and yet fails to develop truly reciprocal partnerships with nonacademic communities.

Significantly, Cushman advances the idea that the scholar must play *the* crucial role in the process of building sustainable community relationships:

Service learning programs that have sustained themselves have incorporated reciprocity and risk taking that can best be achieved when the researcher views the site as a place for teaching, research, and service—as a place for collaborative inquiry, with the students and community

partners. The professor in service learning needs to understand the workings of these organizations just as much as the students do... (43)

Cushman frames this requirement as much in terms of improving the quality of service, and hence the benefit to community partners, as to the researcher (and, presumably, the students). In particular, she argues that being onsite allows for more direct problem-solving than can occur when students merely report back to the professor in reflective journals or during class and office hours. She notes that professors in service-learning courses “rarely, if ever, go on site with their students to research, leaving these kinds of courses prey to a host of problems that can compromise the program’s accountability, curricular integrity, and, ultimately, its sustainability” (44). Hence, they are unable to engage in direct trouble-shooting when problems emerge and cannot use their own observations to improve/alter the curricula as necessary, thus reducing the likelihood of satisfying either sides needs or demands.

On the contrary, Cushman argues, creating a “research-based initiative” that “can take place in collaboration with community members and students” aids the “institutional viability” of the program by helping incorporate community needs into the project and unifying the course curriculum, as well as “legitimizing” itself as a serious, rigorous line of inquiry” to university critics (43-4). Cushman distinguishes “research-based initiatives” from “student-based” initiatives in that the latter do not integrate research into the nuts and bolts of the program design. And certainly the professor’s presence onsite can open up possibilities for handling the inevitable complications that occur when people from different Discursive backgrounds engage one another.³⁰

³⁰ For example, Cushman details one case regarding a student concerned that a young girl’s painstaking writing process indicated a potential learning disability. By being onsite and observing the interaction,

However, Cushman's emphasis on institutionalization requires the use of ethnographic research methods that allow the professor to legitimate her scholarship for academic audiences—both regarding the professor's own desire for career advancement and the pursuit of institutional support for the program itself. As we saw regarding *The Struggle and the Tools*, these ethnographic methods insure that the researcher will retain the most power in the relationship. We are also left to wonder what happens if the community partners do not wish to be used as subjects of research, or if they perceive that serving in such a capacity will negatively affect the project. Would this reluctance to participate as research subjects require the faculty member, unable to perceive possibilities for institutional support and professional benefits, to cease the program all together?³¹ Because the needs of nonacademic partners may not include answering to an institutional audience's demands for ethnographic research products, it would seem that partners unwilling to participate in this capacity would be excluded from potential collaborations with public intellectuals. Such programs could only move forward on the terms laid down by the scholar.

The dominant role played by the public intellectual illustrates the manner in which the sustainability of the service-learning *program*, rather than the *relationship* with the community, is the foremost objective and concern of Cushman's model. Ultimately, the needs of the program (and, by extension, the public intellectual) come first. Cushman assumes that nonacademic community partners always want service-learning programs to be sustainable, and remain as fixed in their rhetorical objectives as possible—since top-

Cushman helped the student realize that the girl wrote slowly because of her teacher's insistence on neat handwriting, not because of a cognitive deficiency (54).

³¹ We do not know, for example, whether the YMCA was chosen over other community organizations in part because of the willingness of its staff and children to participate as research subjects.

down institutionalization demands an emphasis on stability in order to meet the needs of academic timeframes and evaluative rubrics. However, if logistical realities for the partner shift, as can be expected in sites located in “the streets,” their goals and needs may shift as well. But once institutionalized, there is much less room for flexibility and innovation in a program’s design. Thus the process of institutionalizing according to university standards limits the extent of community input into the structure, purpose, and methodology of the program.

I do not mean to say that the professor should not look out for her own interests, and certainly one reason professors pursue institutional sustainability is the belief that doing so will allow for benefits to continue accruing to both parties. However, when the pursuit of specific research opportunities *predates* the relationship itself and heavily determines the purpose of the program, then even if the program’s design is established somewhat collaboratively, it is unlikely that such relationships will develop on the basis of egalitarianism and reciprocity. In such cases, it is too easy for the professor’s research to become the *primary purpose* of the collaboration, subordinating the interests, needs, expectations, and potential benefits of the other parties. And Cushman’s failure to illustrate any long-term benefits for the YMCA staff, children, and the service-learning students from Berkeley reveals this disparity. Ultimately, to make authentic reciprocity and leveled hierarchies in the collaboration possible, all of these factors—purpose, objectives, interests, needs, etc.—must dovetail as much as possible. Such circumstances are much more likely to ensue when the relationship is already in place before a project is designed and implemented.

To move toward greater reciprocity and egalitarianism, community engagement must break down the traditionally asymmetrical power relations between academic and nonacademic collaborators more than Cushman and Flower's service-learning models make possible. Although hybrid literacies make sense as the foundation of such engagement, the contexts in which they develop in these scholars' programs remain heavily tilted toward the institutional dominance of higher education. Neither the YMCA children nor its staff³² are truly equal partners in this model, and the fact that these scholars seek consciously to manufacture hybrid literacies as a pedagogical tool for their students, and ultimately use ethnographic research to portray this relationship (while taking full authorial credit for the work), demonstrates this imbalance.³³ Public intellectualism is still a top-down approach to engagement, and thus limits the extent to which a hybridization of literacy practices can occur.

In the following chapter, where I establish community action as a model of engagement that relocates Flower's and Cushman's hybrid literacies into non-strategic forums, I will elaborate on the importance of not concentrating on the efforts of a particular individual such as Cushman's public intellectual. Rather, it is necessary to promote first and foremost the cultivation of a healthy *relationship* that, ideally, transcends the participation of individual members. In the remainder of this chapter,

³² Or, as in the case of the CLC, the teen writers and other community collaborators in the organization's community conversations.

³³ I do not mean to argue that the ethnographic approach to research should be abandoned all together, no more than I wish for service learning in general to be stopped. In fact, ethnography has made possible the research and theoretical development of NLS, and thus has paved the way for a more egalitarian view of non-mainstream literacies. I merely wish to argue that, in spite of Cushman's and Flower's leveling efforts, ethnography tends to enact a hierarchical relationship between academics and nonacademics. Hence, for scholars who desire actively to implement mutually rewarding and egalitarian relationships with community members, the ethnographic approach will likely constrain efforts to develop such relationships. I concede that there might be circumstances in which community partners see a purpose for ethnography and feel they too can benefit directly from this methodology. But the issue at hand is that the audience for such work is usually limited to academic spheres.

however, I will explicate Paula Mathieu's notion of "tactics," which she sees as making possible more genuinely egalitarian and reciprocal relationships with nonacademic community members. Mathieu's tactical orientation to service learning, in conjunction with hybrid literacies, forms the theoretical frame for community action.

Tactical Service Learning

Mathieu's conception of tactical service learning also derives from de Certeau, who argues that tactics:

...are at one's disposal when one 'cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional location, nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality)' (xx). Tactics are available when we do not control the space.... To act tactically means to 'take advantage of 'opportunities' and depend upon them.' (16)

Tactical methods, then, better reflect the realities of much community work, where the stability and inflexibility that come from strategic planning are often not options. Tactics begin with the recognition that, since one does not control the space in which one operates, one must seek to capitalize on individual opportunities for action, and the circumstances making these opportunities possible could and likely will change. Hence:

If one applies tactical logic to community-based university work, one seeks not stability but clever uses of time. Also, tactical measures of success are grounded not in scientific proof but in rhetorical—and thus changeable—ideas and arguments. Tactics foreground the temporal and spatial challenges that street-based projects must always face—time challenges, incompatible schedules, the often conflicted spatial politics involved in deciding on whose turf work can and should take place. Seeing community work as tactical helps teachers and students realistically assess what work is possible and be open to radically redefining what is desirable academic-community work. Such an orientation requires a critical spirit of inquiry, based not on certainty but on hope. (17)

Nonacademic communities regularly face shifting demands, and their schedules and logistical realities often differ considerably from university timeframes. Consequently, relationships seeking egalitarianism and reciprocity should adopt tactical approaches to the collaboration, rather than allowing the academic side to “own” the collaborative space. To act tactically is to accept the reality that instability and contingency often define community work in the “streets,” and that one must work *with* these conditions pragmatically by maintaining a situational, flexible orientation to the temporal and spatial logistics of the partnership. Strategic approaches, on the contrary, seek to instill artificial order and stability in the collaboration, thus working *against* these logistical realities.

One of the key differences between strategic and tactical approaches is the manner in which the former seeks to solve problems, as with Flower’s emphasis on intercultural inquiry as a problem-solving technique, while the latter focuses its energy on the development and execution of concrete projects:

A problem orientation operates from a negative space, in that it seeks to solve a problem, ameliorate a deficit, or fix an injustice. There is a transactional quality to it—if the problem is not solved or the injustice ended, this work will be deemed unsuccessful. A problem orientation runs the risk of leaving participants overwhelmed, cynical, and feeling weak. A project orientation, however, privileges creation and design. Projects respond to problems but determine their own length, scope, and parameters, instead of being defined by external parameters... (50)

Since the problems on the “streets” are of such great magnitude: homelessness, poverty, illiteracy, housing issues, etc., the focus on problem solving can lead to ironically disempowering outcomes for participants when their efforts do not lead to the remediation of the issues. As we have seen, Cushman’s dual notions of activist research and public intellectualism, when confronting this daunting problem, force her into making belabored arguments that collaborations produce significant benefits for

community representatives even when the material conditions of their lives do not significantly change. Tactical projects, however, display an awareness of these overriding problems and seek some active response to them, but in conjunction with a realistic assessment of the project's short-term capacity to redress these problems. The expectation is that a "creative space in which interesting projects happen" will be engendered (51).

To make such creative responses to the problems of the "streets" possible, it is imperative that a strong, trusting relationship already be in place. Whereas top-down service-learning programs "frequently originate inside the university first and then seek out community sites of service," Mathieu's conception of service learning prioritizes the development of a relationship *before* a plan is developed to implement a service-learning project (90). She emphasizes the importance of not setting an agenda beforehand. Thus tactical projects develop organically out of the relationship itself, rather than the other way around. She explains:

In response to what I see as a problematic development of top-down service programs, I propose an alternative model for creating community-university projects that are tactical, localized, and begin from developed relationships within communities. Rather than starting from institutional imperatives, tactical projects foreground the needs and expertise of communities, and seek to highlight—and work within—the possibilities and limitations inherent in university partnerships. (90)

This tactical approach to service learning distinguishes the completion of concrete, individualized *projects* from the establishment of institutionalized *programs* such as the Community Literacy Center and the Richmond Community Literacy Project.³⁴

³⁴ Although the title uses the word "project" rather than "program," Cushman's emphasis on sustainability and institutionalization clearly aligns the RCLP with Mathieu's conception of a strategic program approach. Cushman also titles one of her articles about her model "Sustainable Service Learning Programs."

Some features of tactical engagement include viewing the community “as a source of expertise” and seeking “to work rhetorically within the specificity and limitations of space and time” (106). In terms of perceiving success in these literate projects, a tactical orientation suggests that “writing projects succeed if they manage to create something that has energy. Tactical writing rarely transacts or accomplishes anything concretely.” This conception of engagement seeks to shift the focus of partnerships away from judging whether some clear goal that can be neatly measured as constituting social change has been achieved. Rather, “each project garners energy and then ends, but during the process it is alive and engaged with the world” (54). Thus, for students and nonacademic collaborators involved in producing literate action together, success is measured not by whether the “problem” that creates the exigency for the collaboration is solved, but whether it promotes the relationship and creates a sense of vibrancy and enthusiasm about the possibilities for future projects. Partners “rely on hope and goodwill to go forward.”

Reconciling Tactics with Institutions

A primary reason Mathieu is wary of institutionalizing service-learning within a university-dominated context, as we have seen, is that doing so can impose a potentially unhealthy rigidity on the relationship, and can entail the university asserting control over the collaborative space. Tactics, on the contrary, foreground “rhetorical—and thus changeable—ideas and arguments” (17). This concern about the problematic implications of institutions such as universities is shared by Jeffrey Grabill, another scholar of rhetoric and composition interested in community engagement who

nevertheless seeks to tender a more flexible conceptualization of institutions, one that (perhaps ironically) in many ways parallels Mathieu's focus on hope. Like Mathieu's tactics, Grabill's re-articulation of the nature of institutions is grounded in rhetorical, and thus changeable, ideas. I want to put Grabill's rhetorical theory of institutions in conversation with Mathieu's conception of tactics, because a rhetorical conception might allow for institutions, in spite of their tendency to be perceived (often with good reason) as unchanging, domineering, and static, to be reconciled with tactical engagement. Such a reconciliation enables a vision of using community relationships to promote institutional changes within universities (even if individual relationships are radically insufficient to do so), and thus to make them more conducive to the practice of community action that I will articulate in the following chapter.

Grabill argues that literacy practices are almost always linked with institutions. Although most of the NLS scholars do not prioritize the role of institutions in literacy practices, David Barton is an exception, writing that "behind home, school, and work can be seen particular institutions [and] particular definitions of literacy and associated literacy practices are nurtured by these institutions" (quoted in Grabill 7). Building on this notion, Grabill argues that institutions "give literacies existence, meaning, and value" (7). But in making this point, he does not seek to portray institutions as "inanimate systems." He insists that institutions "are people; they are the systems by which people act collectively, whether you call that system a school, a particular corporation, or a community literacy program." In essence, then, "nearly all literate activity takes place *within* or *with reference to* specific social institutions,"³⁵ and thus institutions play an

³⁵ Consider, for example, the extent to which institutions such as departments of social services shape the use of literacy practices among the residents of Quayville in Cushman's *The Struggle and the Tools*.

inevitable part in the interactions of different literacy practices, especially in intercultural forums such as community-literacy programs, which are Grabill's primary interest.

Grabill recognizes the critique that institutions can be viewed as "intractable and oppressive bureaucracies insensitive to difference" (141-2). He nevertheless argues that institutions constitute rhetorically written bodies that are subject to change. Hence:

...an institution is a well-established, rhetorically constructed design, a bureaucratic and organizational site where people live and work and where they interact with others inside and outside the institution. But just as importantly ... institutions can be changed. Institutions are fundamentally constructed out of the discourses that make them possible and the discourses by which they operate. (127)

Because institutions are written, Grabill argues, they "can be rewritten" (8). Grabill believes that institutions, while they can do bad things, are not monolithic entities impenetrable to change. They are manifested by rhetorical, discursive processes, and thus people who can access the literacy practices that are validated within institutions have the power to change institutional structures, though this process might be a protracted one.

I believe this conceptualization of institutions as rhetorical, changeable entities is important because it allows a way to envision creating changes within seemingly inflexible institutions such as universities without forcing university-community relationships to submit to the figurative dark side of university institutionalization. In other words, such forms of community engagement might allow for institutionalization that occurs on the relationship's *own* terms, rather than according to the terms set forth by the university. Indeed, Mathieu holds out the possibility of institutionalizing community relationships if they are done "from the bottom up, project by project, relationship by relationship" (114). I support this point, and broaden its meaning to suggest that

institutionalization, if we think of institutions in Grabill's terms, might occur in ways that do not have to be defined and controlled by the university. In the following chapter, I will argue that as particular community-action relationships develop over time, building trust, commitment, and reciprocal benefits, they may increasingly resemble institutions in and of themselves. Indeed, the hybrid literacy practices gradually developing over time would represent the currency of such institutions.

Tactics in Practice: The *Kids' 2 Cents* Project

Mathieu details one example of a tactical service-learning project she participated in with her students at Boston College together with a street newspaper called *Spare Change News*. She had already served as a volunteer and trustee at the newspaper, and thus had formed a close relationship with the director, staff, and vendors before trying to implement a service-learning project. Having moved to Boston from Chicago (where she had worked at another street newspaper), she considered it imperative to understand “the local setting well enough” before she could think or talk about how “to help create anything new” (106). Ideas for collaborations emerged through conversations with the organization's director, as well as the vendors and staff of the paper, and a level of comfort followed from becoming increasingly familiar with one another.

In one instance, these conversations coalesced around creating a “supplement” to *Spare Change News* entitled *Kids' 2 Cents*, which would give homeless children an opportunity to “demystify the concept ‘homeless child’ by embodying it with words, stories, and images” (107). Mathieu developed this idea in tandem with the newspaper's director as well as the director of a local homeless shelter. She then offered (without

requiring) students in a class dealing with literatures of homelessness the chance to work with interested children, emphasizing that neither the students in the course nor any children should feel obligated to participate. Seven students decided to participate, along with a number of children at the shelter. The project was intended to last one semester, but by the end of the term it was clear that although much productive work had been accomplished, the group was not yet ready to publish. Thus, acting tactically, Mathieu offered students the choice to continue on the project after the term ended. Most agreed, and after three more months, *Kids' 2 Cents* was published. It contained equal parts “writing and images” by the children and student-written articles. The following year, although the course in which the project began was not offered, all involved “expressed a desire for the project to continue,” leading to the publication of another issue.

Thus, this project was tactical in that it “originated not from university needs but from the articulated needs of one community group (*Spare Change*), and involved another community group as well as university students” (109). The homeless children constituted a “source of knowledge, not a source of deficit.” And since:

...neither the course nor the project was defined by institutionalized service-learning structures, it could be adaptable in seeking to negotiate the timeframe between the university schedule and the organic needs of the project itself—the best way to build trust, continuity, and enough momentum. (109)

In fact, the project’s continuity remains a possibility depending on the desires of those involved, “not an imperative.” Rhetorical circumstances might change, making the publication undesirable or unnecessary in the future.

In this example, Paula Mathieu operates as someone versed in the discourses of the various academic and nonacademic community collaborators, negotiating between

them and not privileging one set of discourses over another. Nor does she prioritize the establishment of a sustainable program that combines the academic missions of research, teaching, and service as the primary objective of the partnership. Certainly, her presence in this relationship was crucial to both its initiation and its capacity to persist outside the bounds of the academic timeframe. This was not a relationship that would likely have survived her departure if she were unable to continue participating. But the project itself was developed and organized collectively. Thus *Kids' 2 Cents* was not a Boston College project in search of a community site in which to implement itself, but rather the organic outgrowth of a partnership in which all participants actively conceived of the purpose and designed its structure and parameters. This collaborative development process placed power and knowledge sharing at the center of the relationship, rather than the scholar's expertise and research objectives.

Like the issue of egalitarian participation of the partners, there remains the question of who benefits from this work and how, and we see that complete reciprocity remains aloof. The publication of *Kids 2' Cents* became a source of revenue for the vendors, allowed the children of the shelter and Mathieu's students to publish their own artistic and journalistic work for a real audience, and offered the students firsthand insights into, and participation in, community work that portrayed disadvantaged people as experts with knowledge integral to the culmination of the literate product. Yet, Mathieu, as the author of the book in which this example appears, seems to benefit most in material terms. Indeed, like Cushman, Mathieu clearly struggles with the benefits imbalance. Neither scholar can single-handedly change the academic system, which tends to validate scholarly work as authored solely by scholars and only in specific

contexts such as monographs and peer-reviewed journals. As I have stated previously, the modus operandi of the academy often serves to support traditional power imbalances even as it calls for community engagement. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, Mathieu has found ways to publish texts in *scholarly* contexts in collaboration with nonacademic community partners while sharing authorial credit with them. In doing so, she has joined a small but growing number of scholars within the field of rhetoric and composition who are challenging traditional academic conceptions of what constitutes scholarly work, as well as who merits credit for producing such work. These scholars are working with community partners on projects that, on a small, tactical scale, are helping to change the academy from within, and in so doing, are extending the theoretical developments of the NLS to their logical, practical ends.

Thus we see that, in Mathieu's terms, the *Kids' 2 Cents* project was "radically insufficient" to produce full egalitarianism and reciprocity ("Not Your Mama's Bus Tour" 76). But, by emerging from a relationship that was already in place, and by incorporating the purposes and objectives of the nonacademic partners into the fabric of the project's development, this project gets us closer to these ideals of engagement than can public intellectualism. In the final section of this chapter, I want to expand on Mathieu's understanding of the radical insufficiency of projects, and how it factors into the vision of social change that accompanies tactical service learning.

Social Change as Building Connections between People

Tactical community engagement requires firmly rejecting both critical pedagogy's grand conceptions of critical literacy and social change *and* Cushman's scaled-down

versions of these notions. Rather than focusing on either the direct mobilization of a committed group of activists or Cushman's re-conceptualization of social change as sophisticated, critically literate micro-interactions with institutional gatekeepers, Mathieu bases a tactical approach to social change in connections with people:

Tactical projects are grounded in timeliness and hope and as such seek not measurable outcomes but completed projects. The projects have value in themselves but hope for intangible changes—in students, in community members, in the university itself. The key to that hope, however, is an acknowledgment of the radical insufficiency of any single project. (*Tactics* 114)

Thus tactical projects operate through a sense of *hope* that over time, the input of creative collaborative energy and the output of interesting projects will lead to change on a larger scope. This hope recognizes that individual projects cannot achieve those larger changes, but they build on themselves through the cultivation of strong connections between people. The term “radical insufficiency,” then, does not mean failure. Rather, “To acknowledge the radical insufficiency of one’s teaching and to continue working against its limitations is a critical statement of hope” (“Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour” 76).

Mathieu’s vision is indebted to Paul Loeb, who “claims—and shows through many examples—that social change is a mysterious process and that one rarely knows when he or she has affected another or when social movements really grow” (*Tactics* 47).

According to Loeb:

...social change occurs through the actions and storytelling of many ordinary people but ... the full impact of such work is rarely measurable, especially not in the short term.... One works for and hopes for change in the powerful systems that script our society, but one does not look to transactional rewards as a needed extrinsic exchange for the act of writing. The doing of the thing itself has to be enough pleasure or reward, because being heard in a fractured public and making change in the world is a slow and unpredictable process. (47)

Mathieu's and Loeb's conception of social change, then, does not promise or expect grand transformation on a societal level, at least not in the short term. They see social change as possessing an intangible quality that cannot easily be measured by traditionally academic criteria for success.³⁶ Their vision also moves away from a dependence on showing evidence of critical literacy, even where its expression produces little in the way of substantive changes in people's lives. This narrative of social change is thus honest about the fact that individual projects will not radically change the material circumstances of community participants. And it also recognizes that these participants probably want to see substantive instrumental outcomes emerge from these collaborations, rather than symbolic rhetorical victories over gatekeepers.

However, I would argue that for these reasons, theirs is ultimately a more pragmatic vision of social change than the others we have seen. Critical pedagogy speaks of critical consciousness and the need for an end to structural inequalities, but often does too little in practice to achieve these goals, while the micro-vision of social change looks to find success in situations where little has actually changed for the better. Mathieu's vision, however, essentially moves beyond these "critical" conceptions of consciousness and change, recognizing their problematic dependence on transactional, extrinsic markers of success. Much more importantly, this tactical route to social change is to be reached with academic and nonacademic partners working together, whereas both Herzberg's service-learning model and those espoused by Cushman and Flower ultimately reinforce

³⁶ Completed projects may very well produce measurable outcomes for the community. Their rubrics might not be traditionally academic rubrics, and thus might not correspond to scientifically rigorous quantitative or qualitative research, but these participants retain the authority to determine which rubrics are most relevant to their needs. For example, the money made from selling copies of *Kids' 2 Cents* is a measurable outcome not subject to academic criteria for success.

a sense of distinction between these groups. Tactical engagement allows the partners *themselves* to determine which criteria for measuring the success or failure of the relationship are relevant to them, and whether or not these criteria are being satisfied. Finally, it creates flexibility for adapting projects to better address these criteria when community representatives judge that, in fact, their needs are not being met.

This vision of social change shows the importance of moving beyond the use of critical literacy as a key demarcation of whether service learning is successfully producing social change or leading to a more just world. The use of this term “critical literacy,” even when it is not hierarchically distinguished from other terms such as “functional literacy,” and regardless of whether it is writ large (as in the case of critical pedagogy), or writ small (as in the case of activist research and public intellectualism), ultimately distracts from substantive questions about whether community participants find value and meaning in collaborative work with academic institutions.

If higher education really does have a significant role to play in improving the lives of people in underserved communities, this process must emerge through building connections with people. To prioritize any other value or goal is, in practice, to adhere to a continuing pattern of community engagement that places the needs of the academy first. For these reasons, the narrative of social change that corresponds with tactical service learning serves as an effective building block for community action, as I will elaborate in the next chapter. When linked with hybrid literacies, tactical service learning creates the possibility for radically re-envisioning how institutions of higher education engage communities beyond the campus.

Chapter Five

Community Action: The Melding of Tactics and Hybrid Literacies for Egalitarian, Reciprocal Engagement between Academic and Nonacademic Community Partners

I have argued throughout this dissertation that within the broad spectrum of service-learning programs in place throughout the academy in general, and within the field of rhetoric and composition in particular, there exists a subset of efforts dedicated to promoting social change in underserved communities. I have argued as well that some scholars in the field who wish to promote these social change efforts, despite their good intentions, enter the collaborative space with a constricted definition of social change and an unwillingness to engage community members as equal partners. Rather, they separate their own students and the community representatives in terms of literacy goals for the two groups. Consequently, nonacademic collaborators benefit little, if at all, from engagement. Additionally, these service-learning arrangements cast students as voyeurs of oppression and disadvantage without giving them real opportunities to work with the subjects of their research in constructive ways.

Other rhetoric and composition scholars, however, in formulating their service-learning programs, have become better attuned to the needs, interests, resources, and goals of community members. Scholars such as Ellen Cushman have questioned traditional, wide-scale, and politically circumscribed conceptions of social change,

arguing convincingly that such definitions may bear little relevance to the lives and expectations of community partners. These service-learning practitioners have built upon the reassessment of literacy undertaken in recent decades by scholars of the New Literacy Studies to deconstruct the notion that different literacy practices can be categorized in terms of greater or lesser levels of sophistication, complexity, and advancement. In doing so, they have rejected the notion that some people, particularly middle-class, highly educated groups, possess superior literacy practices to working-class, less formally educated groups. In particular, Cushman uses ethnographic research to illustrate how disadvantaged people deploy ostensibly “functional” literacy in critically sophisticated ways to negotiate encounters with institutional gatekeepers, casting these micro-interactions as a more pertinent formulation of social change within these communities.

These scholars have in turn developed service-learning praxes dedicated to leveling the traditionally hierarchical relationship between academic and community partners. The foundation of these efforts emerges from the use of hybrid literacies accessible by all members of the collaborative to produce concrete literate action for social change in the community. I argued, however, that although hybrid literacies possess great potential for reformulating these relationships, the continued reliance on academic institutionalization, or what Paula Mathieu calls “strategic” engagement, constricts the hybridization process. Hence, I turned to Mathieu’s conceptualization of “tactical” service learning, which develops projects that can adapt practically and constructively to the inevitably shifting contingencies of community spaces, and which emphasize the establishment of a strong, reciprocal relationship between participants. I

have sought, then, to relocate hybrid literacies into a less programmatic and academically-dominated context.

In this chapter I articulate my conceptualization of *community action*, which emerges from this relocation of hybrid literacies into a tactical context. In doing so, I will complete my vision of community engagement as founded in the ideals of ethicality, and mutualism. Community action emerges from the idea that, in order to be practical, fair, and responsible, academic and community partners must cultivate egalitarian, reciprocal relationships that respond to the needs, expectations, expertise, and purposes of all participants. Neither the learning outcomes of students nor the professional advancement of scholars should be privileged over the relationship itself or the mutual conception of collaborative projects. Validating the knowledge, resources, and literacies of community partners, as Cushman and Flower urge, is a necessary but insufficient step toward ethically responsible engagement. It is essential that universities also discontinue the imposition of strategic, programmatic demands regarding research, teaching, and service onto the space of collaboration.

My articulation of community action begins with a detailed analysis of a praxis that satisfies many of its parameters, one undertaken by Eli Goldblatt together with community partners in Philadelphia. This “Open Doors Collaborative” offers a compelling example of academic and community literacy educators coming together as friends and allies in a tactical context and developing a relationship defined by hybrid literacies. The successes of this collaborative, and the significant advancements of this praxis toward egalitarianism and reciprocity, will help me demonstrate that, although founded in idealism, community action is a viable praxis in the field of rhetoric and

composition. In particular, that Goldblatt is the Writing Program Administrator at Temple University, and someone who recognizes that the concept of multiple literacies both complicates and invigorates work with community partners, also reinforces my argument that rhetoric and composition is a discipline well suited to the promotion and development of egalitarian, reciprocal engagement. Of course, just as Paula Mathieu understands that individual projects among tactical community relationships will be “radically insufficient” to redress structural inequalities, I argue that Goldblatt’s praxis, as well as the model of “knowledge activism” he theorizes from it, does not solve all the ethical problems of academic engagement with nonacademic communities. In important ways, knowledge activism falls short of the ideals represented by community action, and the evaluation of these gaps will serve as a useful transition between Goldblatt’s paradigm and community action.

In elucidating the meaning of community action, I will focus on the nature of the relationships forged by academic and nonacademic partners, the projects partners undertake, and the orientation toward evaluation and research they develop together. In each case, I will emphasize the goal of hybridizing the multiple “bits” that comprise Discourses and literacy practices. I will also articulate a corresponding vision of social change that builds on Mathieu’s narrative of forging connections between people; I will argue that the achievement of egalitarian, reciprocal, and ethically responsible engagement between academic and nonacademic partners *itself* constitutes important social change. In this respect, I will examine how community-action relationships might over time develop into institutions without necessarily losing their tactical orientation

toward engagement, if we conceive of institutions as rhetorical, changeable entities in the manner prescribed by Jeffrey Grabill.

In articulating this model of engagement, I understand that it would not make sense to pursue community action in all collaborative spaces. However, when one considers that community collaborations have often been characterized by a dominance of academic interests, needs, expectations, and goals; that the outcomes of such collaborations have primarily benefited the academic side; that the knowledge, resources, and aims of community representatives have regularly been undervalued or dismissed; and that community representatives have often been exploited for the advancement of academic research, prestige, and career advancement; then one begins to see the significance of pursuing a radically different conception of community engagement.

Melding Hybrid Literacies with Tactical Service Learning: The Open Doors Collaborative in North Philadelphia

In an article from the January 2005 edition of *College English* entitled “Alinsky’s Reveille: A Community-Organizing Model for Neighborhood-Based Literacy Projects,” Eli Goldblatt describes the “Open Doors Collaborative,” a relationship among partners from a variety of institutions in Philadelphia, including Temple University (where he is the writing director) and several neighborhood literacy programs. Goldblatt details the relationship’s emergence, as well as multiple projects that realized varying degrees of success. Goldblatt draws on this “critical history” (294) to theorize a model of service that he calls “knowledge activism.” In my ensuing analysis, I will argue that the Open Door Collaborative, from the circumstances of its inception to its current goals, represents a remarkable example of a hybridity of literacy practices pursued within a

tactical context. Ironically, however, Goldblatt's model of "knowledge activism" does not capture the full implications of this relationship's success at promoting egalitarianism and reciprocity, and instead re-distinguishes the scholar as the primary player in such work. In other words, his articulation of knowledge activism bears great similarity to Cushman's public intellectualism, including its limitations for mutualism, whereas the actual praxis of the Open Doors Collaborative provides a useful platform for me to begin conceptualizing community action.

From the beginning of his article, Goldblatt evinces great concern about the ramifications of community engagement, in particular the potential for exploitation of nonacademic partners. His depiction of the genesis of the Open Doors Collaborative displays anxieties akin to those addressed previously by a variety of scholars, especially Ellen Cushman and Paula Mathieu. He demonstrates a keen awareness of the potential for another academic horror story and endeavors to prevent this outcome. Even before portraying the nature of the relationship itself, he addresses the question of who benefits from engagement, in particular how relationships between academic and nonacademic communities tend to produce lopsided benefits for the academic side. He writes:

By publishing this article on community-university partnerships and teaching community-based courses ... I add lines to my vita and earn points in the economy of my college and profession. In contrast, directors of neighborhood centers must produce programs and services for their constituents with minimal expense and little room for experimentation, keeping one eye on their boards and the other on funding sources at all times. Manuel Portillo, the neighborhood center director I describe in this article, gains no tangible advantage in his organizing world for appearing in a learned publication; he still cannot get health benefits from the board of his small nonprofit organization until he brings in sufficient grant money in the next fiscal year. (275)

Goldblatt expresses unease about how the article itself provides him clear benefits that are not directly translatable to his community partners. This disparity of benefits is similar to the problems we have seen Cushman and Mathieu agonizing over.

Goldblatt also repeatedly stresses that community partners, in this case neighborhood literacy centers, face demands and logistical realities that can differ considerably from those present in institutions of higher education:

In school there are classes, schedules, books on syllabi, concepts to cover. In a neighborhood there are alliances and enmities, jobs and welfare, abandoned houses and fenced-off gardens. The terrain is less defined and the time isn't parceled out in fifteen-week intervals, but the needs are tremendous and the urgency persists like the stench of a hundred old oil-burning furnaces laboring in winter. (286)

This passage illustrates the differences between the relatively rigid structure of university life and the more chaotic, shifting, and high-stakes circumstances that characterize the neighborhood institutions. These considerable differences indicate why it is infeasible to implant academic institutional frameworks onto the collaborative space. In particular, the consistent and often urgent demands faced by community literacy centers cannot be neatly compartmentalized into semester-long timeframes with artificial beginnings and endpoints. The people running these centers also face institutional demands, but of a different nature than their academic counterparts.

Without using Mathieu's terms, Goldblatt indicates why academic "strategies" do not correspond to these institutional spaces. These methods, he argues:

...may not be the most suited for the needs of adult learners in a neighborhood literacy center or children in an after-school program. They need teachers who are not just passing through and programs that do not appear one year and evaporate the next. They need literacy programs that take into account the array of demands on a stressed community. Most of all, they need tutors who see individual learners as whole people and university partners sensitive to the entire missions of local agencies, not

just researchers studying subjects in sites or educators supervising students in field placements. (276)

The needs and objectives of community partners, particularly those working in literacy centers, cannot be accommodated by the traditional one-semester-and-done structure of service-learning programs. Moreover, these partners require greater sustained and comprehensive commitment than tends to be illustrated by scholars who focus on their own research and field supervision over the goals of the literacy center. In order to produce reciprocity and egalitarianism, such relationships cannot conform to traditional academic models of engagement. Therefore, it is best for scholars to enter into such relationships without a pre-defined plan for what *they* themselves, as well as their institutional overseers, wish to accomplish. For these reasons, Goldblatt initiated these relationships without a coherent set of objectives. The collaborative began as a series of dialogues among various community members who shared similar interests about community-based education. As he explains:

I entered into conversations with my partners on this project with few expectations and no particular goal except that I wanted to meet some people working at the nexus of ESL, technology, and literacy issues within small agencies in the North Philly community. (284)

This modus operandi recalls Mathieu's point that tactical engagement prioritizes the establishment of a relationship before setting out to determine what projects partners will try to achieve together.

In fact, before participating in this collaboration, Goldblatt had spent several years working on community-based literacy projects through a component of Temple's writing program called "New City Writing." This academic unit enabled "scholars and students interested in the cultural formation of literature and literacy" to pursue projects focusing

on “community-based writing and reading programs that lead to publications as well as educational ventures whereby schoolteachers, neighborhood people, and university-related people can learn together” (283). Indeed, one of New City Writing’s publications, *Open City*, which “collected writing by homeless people, school kids, and local writers on subjects like food or shelter,” is reminiscent of the *Kids’ 2 Cents* project discussed in chapter four. New City Writing had even founded New City Press, which publishes “book projects related to specific communities in the Philadelphia area.” Hence this organization had already shown a dedication to pursuing projects that benefit both university and community partners. More relevant to Open Doors, this work had allowed Goldblatt to create networks with various literacy educators and other community leaders in Philadelphia, and these relationships became the basis of the Open Doors partnership.

Specifically, Goldblatt narrates an initial meeting with Manuel Portillo, director of an educational program called “Proyecto sin Fronteras” (285). He had learned of Manuel,³⁷ a refugee from Guatemala, through a colleague and another community organizer, and thus knew of Manuel’s “strong interest in educational programs that encourage greater civic participation in the community.” Goldblatt first sought out Manuel, then, not in the guise of a public intellectual bringing an established idea for a project to a community member, but rather as an ally in the pursuit of community-based literacy education. At this informal meeting, which Goldblatt describes as having taken place “over hamburgers and coffee,” the two men learned that they possessed mutual acquaintances in the “Guatemalan refugee community and in the foundation world.” In the spirit of tactical engagement, they left the encounter “with no particular plan but the start of a working friendship” (285).

³⁷ Goldblatt refers to him as “Manuel” throughout the article.

Goldblatt narrates in detail the progression of the relationship, specifically how more people were brought in both from New City Writing and other community-based education centers, and how this process became the basis for determining what projects to pursue together. One of the new partners, Johnny Irizarry, the “director of an adult-education program in the heart of the Puerto Rican community,” was both an acquaintance of Manuel and a previous collaborator with New City Writing. In fact, “Johnny and Manuel had been talking about developing an approach to literacy and education based on the realities of the Latino neighborhoods,” and Goldblatt and a colleague at Temple, Steve Parks, agreed to work together with them on this plan. Goldblatt explains the mutualism inherent in this process, which was defined by the various participants sharing their self-interests, knowledge, and expertise:

As we talk we learn more about the challenges people around Proyecto face, what the funding issues are, who teaches and studies there regularly, how the church relates to the school it founded but must let grow independently. I listen for the self-interest of the neighborhood within multiple issues, I express my own self-interest in the project, and I try to see this neighborhood specifically as opposed to others in the city or an abstract concept of poor communities. Most of all I allow myself to be guided by Manuel, to learn to trust his vision while still recognizing where I have useful observations to add of my own. We are working together to identify underlying themes that can form the basis of future projects, and both of us eventually agree that building leadership capacity among the people who go to Proyecto is a central objective. (286-7)

This passage makes clear how the relationship itself acted as the primary basis and frame of reference for project development. The members of the collaborative taught and learned from one another, shared and received useful resources, and gradually developed a vision for projects as a function of the relationship-building process. Furthermore, the pursuit of concrete benefits for community partners was a central goal from the start.

The collaborative quickly grew to include Felice Similaro and MaryAnn Borsuk, the director and assistant director of another adult-education center called “Urban Bridges” (287-8). This third center serves a “very mixed community, including Haitians and Puerto Ricans, Cambodians and Africans, with youth programs as well as literacy and technology courses” (288). Having representatives from three distinct educational centers, as well as New City Writing, added to the complexity of the relationship and required that everyone be respectful of one another while engaging in this process of “identifying underlying themes.” Through this negotiation, a mutual sense of trust and a desire to sustain the relationship emerged as well. Goldblatt’s account of the ensuing development of the Open Doors Collaborative demonstrates clearly the tactical nature of the partnership; in particular, we see both sides depending upon and taking advantage of opportunities as they materialize.

At a meeting in which the various participants discussed their plans, Goldblatt took notes that would become the basis for a statement of goals and purposes. The document was revised collectively as members developed a set of objectives around “establishing a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction that is reality-based and transformative for learners,” and for sharing resources in an effort “to maintain computer services, attract and retain excellent staff, and buy hardware and software at competitive rates” (289). While these were determined to be the overall aims of the collaborative, the specific first project they decided on was to:

...develop a curriculum that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry, communication skills, and leadership ability within the specific context of North Philadelphia neighborhoods. This curriculum would also integrate the information technology students are learning in the small computer labs that have grown up in many community centers and

churches. It could function as a stand alone course or as a component of a GED program. (289)

Having developed the project idea, they chose not to seek funding immediately, which would have been the natural next step of a “strategic” approach to engagement. Instead, they consciously resisted “the temptation to look for funding from a foundation”; each member had experienced situations where a dependence on foundation money led to “all kinds of planning and evaluation procedures” that produced outcomes where “most of the money in the grant went to experts who planned and evaluated but added nothing to the work with learners” (289). In other words, at this stage the partners agreed that the inflexibility and bureaucratic framework that result from answering to a specific group of money suppliers could have deterred the work, placing a tight structure with an unhelpful rigidity onto a relationship requiring adaptability in order to nurture itself, especially at the beginning. Instead, the collaborators agreed not to “‘chase the money’ in this new alliance but formulate [their] plans and goals first, before [they] began talking to anyone about funding.”

As the collaborators’ work continued through the following spring and summer, the group shifted plans based on the logistical realities they faced. Goldblatt describes how “an idea of sponsoring a retreat for North Philly community agencies was transformed into an effort to write a grant proposal to support a collaborative project just among our organizations” (289). At this point in the relationship, due to the funding needs of some of the participating groups, working on a grant now seemed appropriate. Thus we see how an initial idea to put on a large-scale retreat became the germ of another idea to support the members of the collaborative in their own work. Goldblatt recalls a point made by Felice that articulates this shift in focus:

Felice, who kept Urban Bridges afloat by paying close attention to funding opportunities, ran across a Request for Proposals (RFP) from the U.S. Department of Education that seemed tailored for us. As she put it at the meeting where we shifted from the retreat idea to the grant, ‘We don't want to run after the money, but we have to run our organizations, don't we’? (289-90)

This example illustrates how nonacademic community partners can also face significant institutional demands, but of a nature that does not follow the regularity and recurrent timeframes of higher education. The kinds of grant opportunities available to literacy centers, for example, can appear suddenly and haphazardly, shifting over time along with the objectives and relative largesse of philanthropic foundations and government agencies. The Open Doors Collaborative faced these contingencies and shifts in material realities by adjusting their project plans accordingly.

Consequently, the group “worked intensively on that grant proposal.” Then, plans shifted again, and they ended up not submitting it. But rather than describing this change in course as a failure, Goldblatt emphasizes how the process of working together helped build the overall relationship, which included a difficult process of negotiating their way through inevitable disagreements. Through the preparation of the proposal, they:

... weathered some conflicts across [their] programs arising from personal styles and organizational cultures. The language [they] produced for that proposal looked as if it would work for other grants in the future, but the founding ideas were taking shape with each iteration. (290)

This passage again evinces the tactical orientation of the collaborative. They demonstrated a strong ability to adapt to varying circumstances, and in fact to perceive changes as *opportunities* rather than as setbacks. The larger objective of building a long-term relationship was enhanced by this process, partially as a result of having to trudge through these disagreements and clashes. The Open Doors Collaborative, then,

constituted a more extensive hybridity than can be achieved by public intellectualism, one that more comprehensively reflected the various “bits” comprising a literacy practice, including the purposes, needs, and goals of those participating.

Even the composition of the collaborative changed after a year and a half due to the various participants’ necessities of meeting institutional demands. According to Goldblatt:

Johnny was under heavy pressure from his agency to write grant proposals that would save them, and he no longer had time to meet with us. Felice resigned to pursue other projects, and MaryAnn stayed on at Urban Bridges as the group made the transition to connect with a larger social service agency called Episcopal Community Services. (290)

This change perhaps best exemplifies Mathieu’s concept of tactical approaches to community engagement, because certain members of the collaborative only continued to participate as long as it was feasible for them. The participants who left the collaboration did so not because they were dissatisfied, but because material circumstances had made participation no longer possible. Whereas up till now we have mostly seen examples of university institutional frameworks constricting the ability of academic representatives to participate in community collaborations, in this case it was the community partners who faced restrictive claims upon their time. Strict adherence to university timeframes above all others would imperil the chances of successful engagement with many community representatives who adhere to less rigid, but no less significant, timeframes of their own.

In the case of Open Doors, however, Manuel and Goldblatt were in a position to continue with their relationship and had built up sufficient levels of trust and respect, so the two “continued to meet and develop projects” (290). Goldblatt even took on an official role at Proyecto as chair of the advisory board. Thus a relationship that had been

fostered by various people, and that reflected the basic themes and values they shared, had become stronger than the role of any individual participant, making it possible for the collaborative to continue working after the departure of several original members.³⁸

Goldblatt argues that the “Open Doors experience gave concrete expressions to the problems and possible solutions we could apply to neighborhood literacy centers” (290), and these concrete expressions manifested themselves in the projects he and Manuel later pursued together. Again, rather than marking the end or failure of the group, these membership changes led to other opportunities undertaken in the spirit of the original group’s primary objectives.

This new project included an inversion of the typical service-learning scenario, whereby university students enter a nonacademic space to pass on their knowledge to community members. In this case, Goldblatt’s own students became the *recipients* of knowledge from their community counterparts, as he “invited four students from Proyecto to participate” in a class of his at Temple. As he explains, these students from Proyecto became the first class of “community educators” (290). Significantly, this coming together of students from Proyecto with Goldblatt’s “graduate and undergraduates classes” occurred only *after* the relationship itself had been in place for some time, with Manuel and Goldblatt having figured out how to maximize the mutual benefits of this convergence of students from different institutional contexts.

At the time of the article’s publication, the participants were searching for funding in order to eventually return to the original “Open Doors partners and develop both the

³⁸ It should be noted that Goldblatt’s continued presence, like Mathieu’s continued presence in the *Kids’ 2 Cents* project, does seem to have been a crucial factor. Without his ongoing participation, it seems unlikely that Open Doors could have persisted. This reality indicates that the collaborative, though showing much development over the other examples of service-learning praxis we have seen, does not entirely de-emphasize the vital role of the scholar.

sharing of professional staff and the training of community educators” (290). The collaborative had developed a proposal to create “service-learning experiences in Proyecto classes” whereby “Community technicians, like community educators, could be paid a stipend to help maintain computer labs in local churches and centers as a means of combining on-the-job training with neighborhood collaboration” (291). The Open Doors group thus demonstrated the idea that community engagement need not exist solely for the purpose of having university students serve others. Beyond this, the collaboration prioritized the goal of ensuring that community educators received financial compensation and opportunities for professional advancement as a consequence of their participation—a direct, material benefit for sharing their resources and expertise.

In regard to the partial dissolution of the original group of participants, Goldblatt states resolutely that he perceives the Open Doors project:

...not as a failure but a long-term investment in helping neighborhood leaders identify problems related to literacy and work toward local solutions that eventually will change the way North Philadelphians move through training programs and the way Temple students relate to centers like Proyecto. (290-1)

Whereas under a “strategic” framework, the loss of some members and the necessity of altering plans might have proved a death knell for the entire collaboration, these changes became the beginning of a new and successful series of projects. And, we perceive as well Goldblatt’s hope that this egalitarian, reciprocal relationship might become the beginning of a long-term process of change in how *both* the non-university adult education centers of North Philadelphia *and* students at Temple come to understand the roles of different literacy practices in multiple communities. Through this process, Goldblatt explains, students come to see the importance of a “shift in focus from

individual to collective improvements” (291), a change that reflects what I shall describe below as a central idea of community action, that an individual’s identity is intrinsically intertwined with the communities in which she participates.

To reinforce this last point, Goldblatt discusses the example of a Proyecto student named Lourdes, who served as a community educator for his own students. Manuel uses a meeting of “rhetoric-composition graduate students from Temple” with students from Proyecto to stress the importance of understanding “how any individual functions within his or her multiple communities.” He asks the Proyecto students, “What are the communities from which you come and to which you wish to return?” Lourdes answers that she has three communities:

One was in the block or two around her house, a microneighborhood in North Philly populated by immigrants from the Dominican Republic like herself but also by people from Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries. Another was the neighborhood around her husband's little grocery store, a renovated building in an African American neighborhood where the drug trade is intense but where people had been friendly to her and her husband. Lourdes noted that many neighbors there helped her learn English, and now she felt a commitment to make life better in that community, too. Finally Proyecto itself served as a crucial community for her. She was attending classes in computer literacy there three times a week so that she could help her children with their homework. She said at first she couldn't do more than turn her computer on and off, but now she could set up a system and handle word-processing software. She had developed a strong bond with the others in her advanced technology class and wanted to continue working with them. She took great pride in her growing abilities to speak English and manipulate a computer system, but she realized that she had much more to do if she wanted to contribute in significant ways to all these communities. (291)

Each of the communities Lourdes participates in bears a concomitant literacy practice that must be learned and understood. The concept of multiple literacies is at the core of her experiences and an important lesson for Goldblatt and his graduate students. In particular, she recognizes the manner in which her “own self-interest was intimately tied

to the well-being not only of her family but also of the friends and neighbors who have helped make her life since arriving in this country more hopeful and productive” (291). Lourdes’s explanation emphasizes her potential to use literacy to improve both her own life and that of her various communities. Although Goldblatt does not specifically refer to hybrid or community literacies in the article, the holistic engagement between literacy and community demonstrated by the Open Doors Collaborative reflects an even greater hybridization of literacies than we witnessed in the practices of Cushman and Flower.

This focused attention toward, and mutual respect of, various peoples’ multiple literacy practices and discourses, also evinces the developments of the New Literacy Studies. We see specific elements of hybrid literacies at work as Goldblatt details the specific skills and resources he brought to the collaborative space:

My experience, the resources I could contribute, and my noninterventionist approach gave me a certain credibility to participate in the organization-development process. I helped found and nurture the Open Doors Collaborative, and I continue to work with Manuel and Proyecto. A study leave from my university when we first got started gave me time that others in the group did not have, and I have contacts in the city literacy network and foundations that proved useful from time to time. My writing skills allowed me to take good notes and shape them into a document we could rework collectively. My experience with literacy instruction and research helped because I could suggest language in grant proposals that might convince funders. I spoke Spanish passably and taught high school in the neighborhood; this local knowledge allowed me to listen intelligently to the conversation. Most important, I was willing to invest time and energy without being in charge, to build alongside others working in the neighborhood rather than enter the scene with a plan already formed. (292)

Rather than entering the community with an assumption of academic superiority, particularly regarding language practices, Goldblatt endeavors to, as he puts it, meet community partners “on their own ground,” a process which was made possible by his connections in the ESL community, his prior teaching experiences, and his facility with

the “local knowledge” of these institutional discourses. The conversations themselves appear to have taken on a quasi-English, quasi-Spanish format, with some native English speakers and some native Spanish speakers, all of whom were conversant in each others’ native languages. Clearly, the work involved an amalgamation of a variety of literacy practices. Indeed, Goldblatt’s own facility in negotiating these multiple literacies made it possible for him to serve as a secretary for the collaboration’s minutes and to write up notes that would be lucid to all members and that could be collectively re-shaped. Participants were also able to determine which form of discourse would be most palatable to various external audiences. Thus they paid keen attention to the needs of various target audiences, such as possible grant funders, and to which forms of literacy would have the greatest rhetorical effect on each audience.

The Limits of Egalitarianism and Reciprocity in the Open Doors Collaborative

In some places Goldblatt seems to overlook the extent to which his role in the partnership may have proved dominant over others. Although he claims that he was not “in charge” of the relationship, his status as “note taker,” as well as the fact that he himself is the author of this article, would suggest that in important ways he *was* in charge. For example, as the group’s secretary, he can shape the narrative about what has happened in meetings. This is a powerful role, for if people recall events in a meeting differently, his notes, as the only written record of what went on previously, will likely be the final arbiter.³⁹ I do not mean to suggest that Goldblatt would attempt purposefully to

³⁹ One might perceive Goldblatt’s note-taking as a carry-over of the ethnographic approach to literacy-based research in nonacademic communities. In other words, although the article itself does not represent ethnographic methodology, he retains responsibility for the “data” produced by the group, which, as we have seen in the other chapters, gives him power to control the published outcomes of the collaborative.

compose meeting minutes in a way that would privilege his own ideas or contributions, but it would seem inevitable that different people, as a consequence of their differing worldviews and goals, might compose at least slightly different narratives about a meeting's conduct. Presumably, then, if someone else in the group were also taking notes, or if the role were shared by different people at different meetings, the overall account of the meetings would more fully reflect the group's collective memory.

Similarly, since Goldblatt is the sole author of this article, we do not know whether all members of Open Doors would agree that no individual controlled the relationship. We do not know, for example, the specifics of how conflicts were resolved in practice. Goldblatt does note that his partners cooperated with him on the article (although we do not learn about the specifics of this cooperation), and thanks them for their "willingness to allow [him] to publish their real names and the names of their organizations," which, he argues, allows "the piece to function less as an ethnography study and more as a critical history" (294). Nevertheless, we only gain access to their voices through the filter of Goldblatt's analytical lens, and we are left to wonder whether, if they were writing an account of the collaborative, they would arrive at the same conclusions.

Goldblatt also verifies that the other partners do not acquire tangible benefits from the publication of this article in the way he does. Thus even in this more egalitarian praxis, the tensions that have been articulated about the ethicality of representation and reciprocity never entirely go away. The Open Doors Collaborative proves "radically insufficient" to create a comprehensive hybridization of literacy practices and reciprocity. However, like Mathieu, Goldblatt views this relationship as a sign of hope for what can

be accomplished in writing programs to produce egalitarian, reciprocal engagement, essentially moving us further toward an ideal where community educators can come together as allies to enhance literacy education in each others' communities. He suggests that, in participating in such relationships, scholars can "reframe for ourselves the sites and texts of literacy instruction through satisfying and reciprocal relationships with our neighborhood partners" (294). By ratifying a vision similar to Mathieu's "tactics of hope," Goldblatt successfully avoids having to practice the strange dance with reciprocity we have seen from Cushman, who acknowledges that her research relationships do not produce substantive material benefits for her partners while simultaneously insisting that the relationships achieve genuine reciprocity.

Knowledge Activism and Public Intellectualism

Toward the end of the article, Goldblatt characterizes the Open Doors Collaborative as an example of service learning he calls "knowledge activism." This concept refers to the process of meeting people "on their own ground" and observing "the situation without preconceived notions of what they [need] or who they [are]" (292). Goldblatt explicitly ties knowledge activism to his role as an academic, because it extends to the "institutional resources" he has at his "disposal for [his] partners' needs." These resources included grant money that the Temple University Writing Program had received and that could be funneled toward community projects, and some start-up funds for the community-educator training project. Indicating his understanding of how university resources should not be *imposed* upon nonacademic partners, he stresses that resources available to scholars because of their "professional (and privileged) positions

... must be offered responsibly and cooperatively,” and that “it is cynical exploitation to offer resources with hidden agendas based primarily on university-determined objectives” (293). Nevertheless, his characterization of knowledge activism recalls Cushman’s public intellectualism, particularly in the way he highlights his own role in these interactions.

Granted, he is writing for an academic audience, and writing program administrators in particular. Yet, throughout most of the article he emphasizes the collaborative nature of the relationship and the different resources and expertise various participants have brought to the table, but in these final pages he succumbs to a reemphasis on the academic’s role. After relating the long list of resources he offered to the collaborative, he only briefly summarizes, as well as merges, the contributions of his partners (293). Moreover, his conceptualization of knowledge activism does not indicate the manner in which his community partners might also serve as knowledge activists. This leaves unanswered questions, such as whether Goldblatt believes it is possible for a community educator not directly tied to the university to also embody the role of a knowledge activist, and if not, why not. The knowledge activist, like Cushman’s public intellectual, is very much an academic figure.

Knowledge activism, then, does not fully capture the significant progress Open Doors has achieved over other praxes of service learning in terms of promoting egalitarianism and reciprocity, and instead falls back on re-distinguishing the scholar as the primary player. Yet, along with the example of *Kids’ 2 Cents* detailed by Mathieu, the Open Doors Collaborative represents as ethically responsible and egalitarian a praxis of community engagement as has appeared in service-learning literature within the field

of rhetoric and composition. For these reasons, Open Doors will serve as a useful frame of reference for me as I articulate community action and expound on its various features. Indeed, relying in particular on Open Doors, I will come back to the various praxes of service learning I have examined previously in order to concretize, as well as complicate, my theorization of community action. In some places I will use examples that already follow many of community action's ideals, and elsewhere I will use them to demarcate and reflect on the gaps between these ideals and what has already been achieved; i.e., these examples will help me elucidate what must yet be accomplished to move the field further down the road toward ethical, egalitarian, and reciprocal engagement.

Community Action

I define *community action* as a model of engagement that uses hybrid literacies within tactical contexts to pursue projects designed mutually by, and producing shared benefits for, academic and nonacademic partners. Community action thus draws on Linda Flower's and Ellen Cushman's conceptions of hybrid literacies, but relocates them into tactical collaborations that position the community *relationship*, rather than a service *program*, at the center of the engagement process. Hybrid literacies and tactical engagement form a natural communion with one another, as the logic of hybrid literacies essentially demands the use of tactical engagement, and vice versa. In other words, tactical engagement enacts a hybridity of literacy practices in a more comprehensive sense than public intellectualism (or even knowledge activism) makes possible. As a consequence of this more holistic hybridity, community-action projects maintain a pragmatic flexibility in the face of the inevitably shifting contingencies and logistical

realities of community spaces, and thus enact a more reciprocal relationship between the various constituents. At the heart of community action is the idea that an individual's identity, including her purposes, needs, and well-being, is fundamentally intertwined with the purposes, needs, and well-being of the multiple communities in which she participates.

I want to stress that community action is an ideal vision of ethical engagement between academic and nonacademic partners. Such a relationship has not yet been comprehensively achieved in practice. But when so many university collaborations with nonacademic communities, in particular those that have prioritized the achievement of social change, have proven ethically problematic, it is necessary to envision something markedly different. Moreover, I do not consider the idealism at the core of community action to be naïve or quixotic. Significant advancements have occurred in the field of rhetoric and composition in recent years, progress which has culminated in the praxes of scholars such as Paula Mathieu and Eli Goldblatt. These developments inspire me with the *hope* that we can move ever closer to attaining these ideals, even if any individual relationship proves “radically insufficient” to do so. Now, in elucidating the meaning of community action, I will focus on five key aspects of engagement: *The nature of the relationship between academic and nonacademic partners, the projects undertaken by partners, the outlook on evaluation and research, the orientation toward institutions, and the concomitant vision of social change.*

The Nature of the Relationship

The Role of Hybrid Literacies

Community action begins with the cultivation of hybrid literacies between academic and nonacademic participants. As discussed in chapter four, hybrid literacies are a practical manifestation of the NLS' rejection of literacy dichotomies such as "functional" vs. "critical" and "oral" vs. "written." Hybrid literacies thus mark an important departure from service-learning practices that solidify and reinforce the distinction between the academy and the community even while ostensibly trying to bridge this divide. Hybrid literacies do not privilege or judge the literacy practices of any individual or group, but constitute a melding of the various participants' personal and institutional experiences with language and literacy. They may combine various forms of oral and written discourse from academic and nonacademic sources and emerge from formal and informal exchanges. They need not form a brand new literacy practice, at least not at first, but it is imperative that the literacies used in the relationship be accessible to all members. And over time, the literacy events of early encounters can gradually coalesce into new, mutually-accessible literacy practices that can serve as a powerful symbol of intercultural collaboration and inquiry.

In an environment comprised of people from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds who possess different interests, expectations, and goals, it is inevitable that conflicts, along with the necessity of negotiation and compromise, will occur. People will disagree at various times, and there will be miscommunications, especially during initial encounters. Using these moments of conflict and negotiation constructively, and allowing a communal form of literacy to emerge from them, can help participants familiarize themselves with one another and begin the process of developing a productive relationship. As we saw in the case of the Richmond Community Literacy Project

(RCLP), where students from Berkeley worked with children at a YMCA, hybrid literacies can significantly aid the process of relationship building among people with little or no prior association.

However, the process of forging a hybridization of literacy practices must extend beyond the fusion of various forms of oral and written discourse. According to the NLS' idea that Discourses (with a big "D") represent an "identity kit" (Gee, "What is Literacy?" 3), inter-Discursive collaboration requires a hybridization of the purposes, goals, expectations, needs, and demands various participants bring to the table. The intercultural inquiry and negotiation that make hybridization possible must begin from the onset of the relationship, rather than after one group (namely the academic side) has already established the primary objectives for the collaborative. In the case of the Open Doors Collaborative, the hybridity of literacy practices certainly included various forms of written and oral discourse, and even included multilingual interactions in English and Spanish. More importantly, since the projects undertaken developed organically out of the development of the relationship, the group was able to keep its focus on the needs and goals of all participants to a much greater degree than occurred in the RCLP.

Tactical Engagement

Closely corresponding with the development of hybrid literacy practices is the adoption of a tactical orientation to engagement. Rather than focusing on traditionally strategic academic outreach (in Mathieu's conception of "strategic"), the aims of which often bear little relevance to the aims of nonacademic partners, community action reflects the reality that work in the community requires flexibility in the face of shifting logistical

circumstances. As Paula Mathieu has shown, acting tactically means responding pragmatically to inevitable changes in the material demands, needs, and capacities of various participants.

This accommodating orientation toward the logistics of community work marks a significant shift in thinking and practice regarding collaborations with communities. Instead of seeking programmatic, academic institutionalization as the relationship's telos, community action views institutionalization with a healthy skepticism, and only pursues it when all member of the collaborative agree that its expected benefits outweigh its expected costs. Community action begins with a relationship between people from academic and nonacademic backgrounds, and the cultivation and preservation of the relationship remains the primary motive throughout. For this reason, community action engenders a different philosophy of what constitutes "successful" engagement than the academically-dominated evaluative methods that have generally been used to judge engagement in the past.

Specifically, by focusing first and foremost on the value of the relationship, community action has the power to overcome the potential disappointments, frustrations, and setbacks that may correspond with the actual work collaborators perform together. Project ideas that do not work out as originally planned, rather than being entirely abandoned or turned into narratives of failure, can become useful learning opportunities that pave the way for future, adapted projects among the same people, or with new participants. And although any individual project will be, as Mathieu has demonstrated, "radically insufficient" to redress the structural inequalities present in underserved community spaces, the continued desire of collaborators to meet and work with one

another is an important indication of success. Indeed, I will argue below that the development of an egalitarian, mutually-rewarding relationship among people of varying cultural backgrounds can *itself* be viewed as a significant manifestation of social change.

Qualities of the Collaborators

Since community action is a relationship-centered form of engagement, the primary feature governing its potential concerns, of course, is characterized by the participants themselves. Because of the local contextual factors present in every relationship, it would be impossible to prescribe universal characteristics that must be present in all participants for community action to become possible. Moreover, people from different cultural and community backgrounds may possess different convictions about the characteristics that are most conducive to intercultural collaboration. Yet, we have seen a variety of characteristics that promote greater capacity for negotiating obstacles to egalitarianism and reciprocity. For example, Peck, Flower, and Higgins, in describing the intercultural collaborations at the Community Literacy Center, argue that they must occur within an “atmosphere of respect, a commitment to equity, and an acknowledgment of the multiple forms of expertise at the table” (210). Thus the willingness to suspend judgment, to perceive issues from different participants’ perspectives empathetically, and to focus on the assets each participant can contribute, are all important features for encouraging familiarity and progress toward literate action.

This process of familiarization includes learning how different members operate; negotiating their different needs, expectations and goals; figuring out how to maximize the impact of the resources each person brings to the collaboration; and nurturing a

unique manner of communication among people who represent a multiplicity of Discourses. Participants must then decide what projects they wish to pursue together, and what audiences the group wishes to engage. Clearly, when a relationship *already* exists among members of the collaboration, such as was the case with Paula Mathieu at *Spare Change*, the process of devising collaborative projects can occur more efficiently. But even then, once students are brought into the collaborative mix, as we saw with the publication of *Kids' 2 Cents*, the process may slow down considerably as newly-introduced strangers learn to cooperate with one another. Also, the more participants are *already* familiar with each other's language practices, the easier it will be to develop more comprehensive familiarity with each other's literacy practices. For example, that the members of Open Doors were bilingual in Spanish and English greatly facilitated communication and allowed for a quasi-Spanish, quasi-English discourse to emerge.

Focus on the Relationship Itself

The merging of hybrid literacies and tactics at the core of community action signifies a context in which the parameters of a relationship between academic and nonacademic partners, as well as the collaborative work they pursue together, have not been predetermined by one or two individuals from the group before the relationship even begins. As we have seen repeatedly in the service-learning praxes analyzed in previous chapters, when one person's efforts become the central focus of the collaboration—even when that person possesses strong convictions about the importance of reciprocity—it is likely that most responsibility for the work, along with the benefits and prestige, will likewise accrue to that person and the institution with which she is

affiliated. Thus, the cultivation of hybrid literacies is most likely to advance the development of a relationship defined by mutual trust, respect, and tolerance both *before* and *during* the process of deciding which projects collaborators will undertake, and whom the concrete products of the collaboration will address.

Community action, then, does not seek to centralize attention on the work of one or two individuals participating in the collaborative, but rather on the collaborative itself. It operates according to the idea that the welfare of an individual is intricately interwoven with the welfare of her communities, and thus the pursuit of positive changes should not endeavor to isolate individual benefits from community benefits. Granted, because relationships between academic and nonacademic communities have traditionally been dominated by the interests, needs, and goals of the academic side, it is likely that the circumstances espoused by community action in its most ideal form will not immediately manifest themselves in practice. Even in the work Paula Mathieu and Eli Goldblatt, whose community collaborations demonstrate most clearly the promise of community action, the scholar continues to initiate most relationships and their corresponding projects and also continues to obtain the most salient benefits from the work. For example, we saw participant turnover in the Open Doors Collaborative, but this turnover occurred among community partners at some of the literacy centers. Goldblatt's continued presence seems to have been critical to the viability of the relationship. Similarly, one must wonder if *Kids' 2 Cents* would have come to fruition if Paula Mathieu had been unable or unwilling to continue participating after the original semester ended. Thus, the concept of community-action relationships capable of enduring the loss of any individual member is an ideal that will not be true of most relationships. As long

as scholars play the primary role in instigating most community relationships, as well as envisioning their concomitant community projects, their presence will continue to be, in practice, essential for the continued vitality of partnerships.

However, zeroing in on an individual figure such as a public intellectual or a knowledge activist as *the sine qua non* of community engagement serves to reinforce these tendencies. Community action, by seeking to transfer focus away from the scholar to the relationship engendered by all participants, helps to counteract the dominant function of the scholar; i.e. it promotes a relationship-centered collaborative space. Community action seeks to bring us closer to a time and space where we can, as Sarah Jewett entreats us:

...imagine what a program might look like if *community* life were situated in the foreground instead—where communities design university initiatives, where the daily and yearly school schedules of youth shape university commitments of time, and where university students begin their study of literacy in the context of the home lives of their young partners. (237)

The Role of Students in Community Action

One of the benefits of hybrid literacies, as Cushman and Flower have shown, is that they help counteract the propensity to differentiate students and community partners by desired literacy goals. Whereas the “literacy divide” encourages students to view themselves as distinct from, and intellectually more advanced than, their community counterparts, hybrid literacies discourage taking a judgmental stance toward different literacy practices. Thus hybrid literacies reduce the likelihood of students entering the community space with a condescending, arrogant, or savior-like mentality. Additionally, in most cases, a relationship between the course’s instructor and members of the nonacademic community will already be in place before students enter the collaborative

mix. This is because community action does not try to send students to community representatives with whom the instructor has little or no familiarity.⁴⁰ Instead, the instructor should already be a member of the nonacademic community, or at least a respected outsider well-versed in that community's literacy practices. Hence, an instructor will have discussed with partners how to bring students into the collaborative space in a way that will maximize benefits for everyone. In cases where projects have not been defined before students begin their participation, or when original ideas are determined to be infeasible, students can participate in the process of determining, or revising, the plans for what everyone will accomplish together.

Operating in this manner requires trusting students—namely, that they will perceive the relationship and the work as more than a class project with a grade attached. The logic of community action inevitably leads toward the hope of students remaining members of the collaborative; however, following a tactical approach to engagement, and thus pursuing flexibility in the face of inevitable change, allows community action to work with the realities of some turnover. For example, in the case of *Kids' 2 Cents*, most students continued working on the project after determining that a single semester was insufficient to prepare the newspaper to all collaborators' satisfaction. Within a rigid, “strategic” structure, *Kids' 2 Cents* would almost certainly have been deemed a failure, as students and their community partners would have finished the term without seeing the publication of any concrete, literate output of their work. Acting tactically allowed students to participate actively in reevaluating and re-planning the logistics of the project, allowing both the relationship and the project to continue beyond the end of the term.

⁴⁰ Recall Mathieu's point from chapter four that sending students into the community “cold” can lead to academic “horror stories” that discourage communities from future collaborations with universities.

Furthermore, because Mathieu herself was a member of the organization producing the street newspaper, she was able to work with the shifting needs, demands, and material realities of the collaboration—what Cushman calls “on-site troubleshooting.” Similarly, the students observed Mathieu’s dedication to the community with whom they were working, thus helping them understand the value of participating in the project beyond the confines of the original course. Had she merely observed the students and community partners from the classroom and through reflective journals, it would have been much more difficult to adapt the project to the needs and goals of everyone involved.

Project Development

Sharing Resources and Expertise

Due to the tactical nature of community action, projects develop out of the process of relationship building between academic and nonacademic representatives. Unlike the majority of service-learning projects, which are typically devised at the academic site and only then brought to the collaborative space, community action emphasizes the importance of having projects develop organically *from* the relationship itself. Academically-devised projects necessarily place academic interests at the forefront of the collaboration, and consequently produce benefits primarily for the academic side; with community action, the relationship comes first and the projects afterward. Participants from both sides offer input into the project’s design and action plan in order to ensure that everyone benefits. Similarly, all participants contribute available knowledge and expertise deemed useful to the collaboration. Neither academic

nor nonacademic resources are privileged over the other. This practice does not mean that academic knowledge and resources are to be dismissed or ignored in favor of nonacademic knowledge and resources, but that *both* should be utilized to promote the good of the relationship.

A potential consequence of striving for egalitarianism may be the hesitancy of academic participants to utilize the ample and various resources made available to them by virtue of their membership in the academy—a reluctance springing from their fear of appearing paternalistic. As Cushman writes, “Intervention without invitation slips into paternalistic imposition: missionary activism” (*Struggle* 29). However, although university resources should not be *imposed* upon the community, they should be exploited when deemed useful for the work. Rejecting the divide between academic and nonacademic forms of knowledge requires having “respectful ideas about individual agency and intelligence,” and operating from an understanding that community residents “know what’s best for them” and will let scholars “know when and how to help” (29).

I would argue that this concern about paternalism itself reflects the traditional, if sometimes implicit, assumption that university knowledge is more advanced and important than nonacademic knowledge. Actively disabling the capacity of academic representatives to offer their expertise and resources to the collaborative space does nothing to counteract this assumption; on the contrary, it validates the assumption and suggests condescension toward the community. It does not indicate trust that community partners know what will be most beneficial for achieving their goals. Perhaps still more significantly, the failure to make use of these resources would deprive collaborators of important tools for producing literate action. Community action refrains from making

comparative value judgments about the different forms of knowledge and expertise of each participant, but capitalizes on the relevant resources that people, and the institutions they represent, have to offer.⁴¹

Tactical Flexibility

Whereas “strategic” programs tend to be rigidly structured, community action projects possess greater latitude to respond constructively and creatively to changes in the material and logistical conditions faced by various members of the collaboration. As was noted in my examination of Mathieu in chapter four, strategic community engagement can offer some benefits to the collaboration such as freer access to certain kinds of financial support. However, they also significantly constrain attempts to level the traditional hierarchies of community relationships, as well as the capacity to adapt to change. For these reasons, community action projects should be wary about seeking external funding, doing so only when everyone involved agrees that it would be the most beneficial decision for the group. For example, members of the Open Doors Collaborative chose initially *not* to “chase the money” and seek external funding for their inchoate projects. However, at a later date, the sudden occasion of a Department of Education grant, combined with the necessity of finding support for the literacy centers’ continued survival, led them to work vigorously on a grant proposal; finally, when circumstances once again changed, they chose not to submit the grant.

Similarly, when it comes time to produce literate action for external audiences, participants must demonstrate rhetorical ingenuity in order to maximize the effectiveness

⁴¹ In some cases, these resources may include *time* to work on the relationship. In the case of Open Doors, for example, Goldblatt began participating in the group during a study leave from his duties at Temple.

of the action. Depending on the audience the group wishes to engage, different literacy practices will be more effective than others. In the case of the Richmond Community Literacy Project, Berkeley students and YMCA children interacted with one another through a hybridity of oral and written discourse but ultimately produced more “standardized texts” for an audience comprised of YMCA staff and the children’s parents; this decision about the literate action was made to satisfy the rhetorical demands of that audience.

Negotiating Institutional Constraints

Scholars have struggled to make research emerging from service learning “count” as legitimate academic work, although within the field of rhetoric and composition, the various scholars whose work I have examined in this dissertation have led the way in trying to resolve this problem. Indeed, this problem is perhaps the primary reason scholars such as Ellen Cushman put so much emphasis on institutional rewards for community engagement. Her conception of public intellectualism as a melding of the academic missions of research, teaching, and service, is in part a methodology for ensuring that scholars do not fail to advance professionally as a result of pursuing social change in underserved communities. Cushman’s and others’ concerns about academic incentives are understandable and entirely justified. Yet, as we have seen, their efforts too easily come to *define* the work, and thus they constrain the possibility of producing an egalitarian and reciprocal relationship, even though these goals are among their priorities. Since community action seeks even greater egalitarianism and reciprocity, scholars practicing it will also face institutional challenges.

Although, as I will argue below, institutions of higher education (in particular within the field of rhetoric and composition) are making some shifts in the direction of validating non-traditional scholarship, there clearly remains a long way to go. Among other problems, the university's semester structure and its continued slow embrace of community-based research must be addressed. In order to pursue a relationship not defined by traditional hierarchies and disproportionate benefits, scholars must try to negotiate, as best they can, these institutional hurdles. Of course, what this process of negotiation means will depend on each scholar's particular institutional circumstances. But it may be necessary to postpone or even give up efforts at institutionalization, which may mean not receiving—at least not immediately—the kinds of institutional support scholars quite naturally hope to acquire. In environments where negotiating such institutional impediments proves extremely difficult—whether due to rigid incentive structures, general lack of support for community engagement, etc.—scholars may be better off not trying to pursue community action.

Research and Evaluation

Relationship as Primary Unit of Analysis

While many scholars who pursue research in nonacademic communities have endeavored to increase the social relevance of their work (see chapter three), the benefits for nonacademic research participants often remain of secondary importance in these studies, including in the context of service learning—as is the case with Cushman's public intellectualism. However, Nadinne Cruz and Dwight Giles offer a different perspective of research emerging from service learning that fits more comfortably within

the framework of community action. In an article from the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* entitled “Where’s the Community in Service-Learning Research?”, Cruz and Giles address the problem that service-learning related research too frequently exists for the primary purpose of promoting academic interests, including student-learning outcomes, the demands of those funding the research, and the ideal of “scientific discovery,” while paying little or no attention to the benefits community counterparts do or do not receive. However, the authors do not suggest merely complementing academic objectives with an added focus on “community outcomes” (29). As they point out, significant practical problems exist for trying to measure community outcomes. Methodologically speaking, the fact that “communities are complex constructs” makes it virtually “impossible to control for all of the variables that can confound a research study.” Indeed, we have seen from Mathieu’s analysis of community spaces that the material and logistical conditions in which engagement occurs, as well as the participants, can and likely will change over time. Instead, the authors argue that:

...a strategic direction for research on the value of service-learning to communities should focus less on evaluating ‘community outcomes’ and more on developing greater skills in using research as a process for sustained collaboration between universities and communities. This research should be used as a means to develop new knowledge and information of value to each, as well as to serve as a tool for ‘making things happen’ within the context of an organized effort to shape the quality of lives of those in the community. (29)

Research, then, should seek to produce practical benefits for both academic and nonacademic partners as a function of their involvement in the collaborative—i.e. to create knowledge that ultimately serves the relationship itself and furthers the goals of creating positive change in the community.

At the heart of Cruz and Giles's revised conception of community-based research is their proposal to make "the university-community partnership itself be the unit of analysis." They argue:

This is based on the assumption that the partnership is the infrastructure that facilitates the service and learning and is both an intervening variable in studying certain learning and service 'impacts' as well as an outcome or 'impact' in itself.... The fundamental questions would include: Is the partnership better now with service-learning than it was before without service-learning? Alternatively, are service and/or learning better because of the quality of the partnership? (31)

Making the partnership the primary unit of research, whether formally or informally undertaken, promote one of the key goals of community action described above: that the relationship itself, rather than any individual participant, is the primary focus of the collaboration. The kinds of questions listed here can help participants determine whether the projects they have commenced upon are worthwhile in their current form, need to be revised in some way, or perhaps should be abandoned altogether. The members of the collaborative develop their own methods for evaluating project outcomes according to their own parameters. Indeed, the key parameter for determining whether people are satisfied will be their willingness to continue participating.

Thus, Cruz and Giles's reformulation of the role of research in service learning, one which maximizes attention to issues of responsibility, ethicality, egalitarianism, and reciprocity of the research, can be extended rather harmoniously to community action. They reject "imposing research on the community or cajoling the community to take research seriously because our grant requires it or our higher education institution or service-learning community would like it" (31). In other words, their conception of action research seeks to minimize the kinds of hierarchically-infused research practices

that can be inflicted upon community partners through service learning. Instead, as with community action, these authors advocate the co-definition of problems and goals, the co-design of projects and action plans for completing these projects, and the co-creation of rubrics for evaluating the success of the projects and the relationship itself.

This approach to research also corroborates community action's reconstitution of the notions of "success" or "failure" in engagement, which will be addressed below.

"Strategic" programs are generally tied to traditional academic measurements of success, such as scientifically rigid qualitative or quantitative evidence of specific outcomes that include: student learning, projects completed according to academic timeframes, and the production of academically-legitimate knowledge. Community action, however, is not limited to these rubrics of evaluation. As the parameters for determining the success of the relationship are negotiable, they may or may not include traditional academic metrics, depending on particular circumstances, but determinants of success need not be strictly defined by such metrics. In some cases, key parameters may include measurements related to the amount of income obtained by nonacademic partners as a consequence of their participation, or whether they have found better employment, housing, or academic opportunities. Moreover, one project that does not work out as planned can become the germ of another project. A sudden change in membership can become an opportunity for new ideas and positive interactions, as well as a morphing of literacy practices within the relationship. Indeed, such events occurred multiple times in Open Doors.

Research Emerging from the Projects

Community action projects seek outlets for sharing ownership and authorship of the literate products of the relationship. We saw in chapter four that public intellectuals who engage in “activist research” also seek reciprocity for their collaborative work with community partners. Nevertheless, their dependence on ethnographic fieldwork often prevents nonacademic partners from sharing authorial credit for the academic products of the relationship, appearing in this literature as subjects whose voices are filtered through the narratives of the scholars. Moreover, the fruits of the ethnography are most often geared toward academic audiences while promoting the professional advancement of the ethnographer. Hence the benefits accruing to scholars as a result of these publications generally do not extend to their nonacademic counterparts. Conscientious scholars have endeavored to reduce these disparities by encouraging community input into the development of the research questions (McTaggart; Porter and Sullivan; Greenwood and Levin; Cruz and Giles), and even, like Cushman, sharing royalties from book publications of the research. However, as I argued in chapters three and four, these efforts can only go so far to counteract the hierarchical consequences of using ethnographic research. It is fundamentally an academic approach to research whose relevance and significance apply primarily to academic contexts.

I do not wish to rule out entirely the use of ethnographic research for community-action projects, but doing so would require significant effort to establish reciprocity. This might mean ensuring that the products of the ethnographic work could be used to enhance the operating practices of all partners, or finding a complementary outlet for which nonacademic collaborators would control authorial rights, and which would confer equally valuable benefits upon them as do monographs and journal articles published by

scholars. However, in practice, equalizing the benefits from project publications will be a slow process, and greater benefits will likely continue to be obtained by scholars in the near future.

In many cases, community partners do produce joint publications in non-scholarly contexts, such as the hybrid texts emerging from the Community Literacy Center, or *Kids' 2 Cents*. Such publications are an important way to illustrate the collaborative work of the group to external audience. Of course, the benefits obtained from pursuing such publications will depend on specific contextual factors that must be negotiated by individual groups. However, the possible benefits are truncated in the case of the CLC, due to the rigid timeframes in which they are produced. Moreover, scholars writing about the CLC tend not to focus on the issue of how substantive the benefits of such publications are for community partners. But even in tactical contexts, concerted effort must be made to find outlets for joint publications that will produce benefits on a plane equal to those conferred upon academics for producing scholarly research.

Joint Publications in Scholarly Contexts

An increasingly viable option for collaborators, particularly within rhetoric and composition, are possibilities for jointly-authored publications *within* scholarly contexts. This field has been at the forefront of slowly changing institutional practices regarding the proper recognition of untraditional community work within the academy. Indeed, considering that this field has been heavily influenced by the New Literacy Studies' reevaluation of literacy practices, this fact is not surprising. For example, perhaps as a natural extension of the increasing amount of research performed by compositionists on

community literacy practices, more efforts are being made to find outlets for co-ownership and co-authorship of research.

Among publications in the field, we see that in a collection of essays entitled *Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom*, Paula Mathieu co-published a chapter with a community partner named Karen Westmoreland Luce and several members of the *Streetwise* writing group: Michael Ibrahim, William Plowman, and Curly Cohen. This writing group consisted of several regular contributors to the *Streetwise* newspaper in Chicago. Similarly, a brand new peer-reviewed journal in the field entitled *Community Literacy*, whose first issue appeared in the fall of 2006, declares that its mission is “to provide a place where academics and other community literacy workers can share ideas, learn about activities and projects, discuss theory and practice, and share resources” (4). This journal is dedicated to promoting literacy-based work pursued jointly between academic and community partners. As the journal’s Call for Papers states:

The peer-reviewed *Community Literacy Journal* seeks contributions for upcoming issues. We welcome submissions that address social, cultural, rhetorical, or institutional aspects of community literacy; we particularly welcome pieces authored in collaboration with community partners. (4)

As with the co-authored chapter mentioned above, this CFP denotes a significant shift in thinking about what constitutes legitimate academic research. Rather than excluding nonacademic partners from sharing ownership for the literate products of the relationship, this journal actively *pursues* shared ownership.

However, at the same time, this journal shows the challenges that scholars who wish to create egalitarian, reciprocal relationships with nonacademic partners face. For example, the Editorial Advisory Board of *Community Literacy* is made up almost entirely of university professors. One advisor does come from the Tucson Area Literacy

Coalition, and another from Salt Lake Community College, but these are a clear minority. Furthermore, in spite of the CFP for collaboratively-authored articles, *all* of the articles in the first issue were written by assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. Additionally, there were four reviews authored by PhD students, but none of the contributors to this issue were community members from nonacademic institutional contexts.⁴² Hence, we see that the journal's pursuit of a more egalitarian, reciprocal form of community engagement faces inertial obstacles. Yet, now that the journal exists, community collaborations in rhetoric and composition looking to jointly publish the outcomes of their work have an established forum for doing so.

Scholars will understandably continue to pursue publications in such contexts as disciplinary journals, anthologies, and monographs. Thus it is necessary to consider ways in which such publications could more directly benefit nonacademic partners. I would argue that there are two tiers of significance for promoting jointly-authored publications in scholarly contexts. The first level involves the increased egalitarianism and democratization that would go into the process of writing such work. Nonacademic partners would retain ownership of their voice, rather than appearing filtered through the analytic gaze of the scholar. Goldblatt takes a step forward in this direction by eschewing traditional ethnography in order to refer to his partners' actual names and organizations, and thus allowing them to receive proper recognition for their efforts, but we still do not have clear access to their perspectives on the challenges and rewards of the relationship. The chapter co-authored by Mathieu and her community partners, as well as the new forum of the *Community Literacy Journal*, mark a still more significant distinction from

⁴² Some articles co-authored with graduate students appear in the journal's second volume, but none co-authored with community partners.

the manner in which nonacademic partners usually appear in academic contexts. These community writers appear under their own names and retain ownership of their words, rather than appearing anonymously with their voices filtered through those of the scholar.

The other primary issue has to do with the tangible benefits of scholarly publications, and establishing reciprocity here will likely prove more challenging. Goldblatt acknowledges that Manuel Portillo gains no tangible benefits from appearing (but not as a co-author) in his article in *College English*. This reality raises questions about what could be changed to make it possible for Manuel to benefit more directly from such publications as well. Had he been a co-author, perhaps he could have used it to help illustrate the effectiveness of his organization in a grant application, and thus increase the odds of receiving funding. As for the community writers partnering with Mathieu, if they have goals to be professional writers, the chapter in the scholarly volume might have added to their résumés. Again, the possible benefits of publishing in such contexts should be discussed among partners to determine whether it would be worth their while. Certainly, in many cases community partners might not see the pursuit of jointly-authored scholarly publications as relevant to their collaborative interests. In general, more effort is required for finding forums that will produce equally valuable benefits for community partners. Hopefully the field of rhetoric and composition will continue to lead the way in gradually altering the structure of the academy to fit the needs of people pursuing untraditional community work, in turn creating ever more favorable conditions for the manifestation of community action. Indeed, a primary purpose of this dissertation is to offer a theoretical framework upon which efforts to make the field more amenable to community action might coalesce and build.

Community-Action Projects as Budding Participatory Institutions

As discussed in chapter four, Jeffrey Grabill seeks to develop a more positive, change-oriented perspective of institutions than is held by many people interested in social-change work. He believes “it is necessary to consider communities and institutions as concepts that can work together. This is difficult because objections to institutions and institutional change are often raised from the perspective of ‘community’” (91). For example, Grabill points out that John McKnight, a scholar-activist who has long criticized social-service institutions for focusing on deficits and needs in underserved communities rather than assets and strengths (see *The Careless Society*), views “institutions as coercive, violent, and illegitimate,” whereas he perceives communities as “the proper place of collective action” (91). Thus McKnight creates a binary; communities represent “informal, unmanaged, associational” entities driven by “consent,” whereas institutions “cannot be changed because they are homogenous and monolithic and lack communal qualities of care” (91). However, Grabill shows the error in this binary by pointing out that many of the entities listed by McKnight as examples of communities are also institutions, including “churches, enterprises,” and “civic groups” (92). In essence, if McKnight views the organization doing positive work, he aligns it with communities, and if he views the organization as harming the community, he calls it an institution. In this respect, Grabill sees McKnight as having an “idealized and nostalgic” conception of community.

Grabill, on the contrary, recognizes that institutions “are everywhere, exist on a number of levels, and cannot be avoided” (92). Essentially, we must resign ourselves to

the inevitability of institutions; we “cannot locate community *outside* all social institutions because human associations themselves become institutionalized.” Grabill believes that perceiving institutions as monolithic and unchangeable is “dystopic.” Instead, it is necessary to perceive institutions as “visible spaces *within* which people interact,” and as locations for “individual and collective action.” Grabill (along with Mathieu and myself) agrees with McKnight’s basic critique that institutions “can cause harm and be completely removed from the people with whom they work” (92), but he views this problem not as an objection to institutions “*per se* but rather to the ways they are designed.” But just as “*communities are constructed* and can be conceived in terms of any number of issues: race, ethnicity, spatiality, ideas, or other affinities,” so are institutions constructed. It is necessary—though difficult—to “construct communities and their related institutions in a meaningful way such that one reinforces the other” (92). Hence institutions can be “ethical spaces within which people feel like they belong and through which they feel they can act.” And it is in *this* sense of institutions as ethical spaces in which people consensually participate, and as rhetorical entities that can be written and rewritten by these participants, that I argue community action can reconcile itself to institutionalization.

I do not believe my contention that community action can potentially produce new institutions is in fundamental disagreement with Mathieu’s tactical approach to community engagement. I have expressed my agreement with Mathieu’s concerns about the colonialist implications of universities attempting to control collaborative spaces through institutionalization. The kind of institutionalization I propose as possible for community action operates along the lines set down by Grabill, focusing on institutions

as localized places comprised of people who make decisions through discursive rhetorical processes, and thus write and rewrite the terms of the institution's nature and existence.⁴³

In other words, institutionalization would not occur according to terms set by the university, but by the participants in the collaboration themselves. Grabill's sense of institutions is one that still takes root in the building of relationships between people.

Like Mathieu's "tactics," the concept of hybrid literacies also corresponds well to Grabill's articulation of institutions, in particular because he views literacy practices as fundamentally linked with institutions. Indeed, although Grabill does not use the phrase "hybrid literacies," his work clearly builds on the theoretical developments of the NLS. Moreover, like Cushman, he attacks the traditional binaries of "critical" and "functional" literacies by focusing on the rhetorical sophistication of literacies practiced in nonacademic spaces such as workplaces. He even sees one of his projects in the book as rearticulating a "critical functional literacy," the very idea of which bears the hallmarks of hybrid literacies. I object to the term "critical functional literacy" because it reinscribes the dichotomy of critical and functional rather than dismantling it, but nevertheless, Grabill's perception of the "meaning and value of literacy" as "situated within specific institutions" (4) enables me to envision how hybrid literacy practices might foster new institutions—ones that define their own framework and that still maintain tactical flexibility.

In elaborating the design of what he refers to as "participatory institutions," Grabill emphasizes the importance of equal participation, and his terms are reminiscent of the respectful, accepting stance toward different literacy practices espoused by the proponents of intercultural inquiry. He argues that to "participate equally is to possess

⁴³ Coincidentally, Grabill titles the final chapter of his book "Tactics for Change."

certain institutional literacies,” which means having “access to the processes of decision-making within an institution” (124). In this sense, literacy refers to the “discursive means to participate effectively,” and “acceptance refers to a ‘listening stance.’” Thus access does not merely get someone a “place at the table,” but the “rhetorical ability to participate effectively and the structured requirement to listen to what others say” (124). These are the kinds of features that make the development of hybrid literacies possible.

Although Grabill supports his dual construction of communities and institutions with two cases, the first one a chapter of the United Way in Metro Atlanta that is linked to service learning at Georgia State University, and the second a grassroots community-based effort in Atlanta called Operation P.E.A.C.E., I prefer instead to examine a case more relevant to community action and the field of rhetoric and composition, that of Open Doors. In important ways, the Open Doors Collaborative points toward this more positive sense of institutions; it certainly operated as a rhetorical entity that has been repeatedly written and rewritten by the people participating in the organization. Their initial deliberations essentially constituted the birthing process of a new institution according to terms defined and negotiated by the members of the collaborative, terms that were capable of being rewritten by these same members (or new members coming to the organization later). This process included the composition of a mission statement of goals and purposes and a guiding vision that encompassed the multiplicity of literacy practices represented by the various members. Moreover, all participants came to the group from their own institutional contexts. Indeed, this fact influenced the development of the group, for during the process of writing the grant (that was inevitably not submitted), they “weathered some conflicts across [their] programs arising from personal

styles and organizational cultures” (290). The literacy practices that gradually emerged in this organization reflected the institutional experiences of its members, but no individual institution sought to wrest control of the collaborative space in a strategic way. For the most part, it remained a site of shared ownership.⁴⁴ Similarly, we saw that the group never lost its tactical flexibility in response to shifting contingencies.

Ideally, the forging of equitable relationships such as those engendered through Open Doors would in turn radiate outward to the institutional contexts in which each collaborator resides. If we think of community-action relationships as budding participatory institutions, it is important that they retain the tactical flexibility that drives egalitarianism and reciprocity—i.e. that they resist the grosser bureaucratic features often associated with institutionalization. But if we do conceive of community-action relationships in this manner, then they offer a way to envision the eventual promotion of institutional change on a larger-scale. In other words, one imagines the institutions of both academic and nonacademic participants beginning to benefit from these relationships, and thus changing their modes of operation, as a result of contact with members of the collaborative and from the literate products of the work. In the case of higher education, for example, this might include changing how scholarly work performed in untraditional contexts is perceived and validated.

In chapter two, I discussed Anne Ruggles Gere’s articulation of the extracurriculum, and examined how this concept, along with Shirley Brice Heath’s contention that in coming decades, the extracurricular increasingly will become the curricular, makes community engagement crucial to the continuing development of the

⁴⁴ Of course, as I have already argued, in important respects Goldblatt’s presence and role may have proved more dominant than others, and I have not tried to argue that Open Doors represents the comprehensive attainment of community action. However, it goes remarkable lengths toward this ideal.

field of rhetoric and composition in the 21st century. In Heath's vision, the walls of the Ivory Tower will increasingly begin to crack and crumble as the 21st century rolls on, whether institutions of higher education want them to or not. In turn, I envision community action, in its articulation of a way for institutions of higher education and the communities surrounding them to work cooperatively to improve the welfare of both, as having the potential to lead the way in this gradual transition. Community action, then, is not merely about creating forms of social change within underserved communities, as if institutions of higher education can somehow be seen as distinct from these communities. As David Maurrassee has written, and as we saw in chapter one, because of academic institutions' geographical rootedness in local and often socioeconomically stressed environments, increasingly the "fate of communities is the fate of higher education" (5). And this means that higher education needs to change along with these communities if both are to survive, let alone thrive, in the next century.

I do not mean to minimize the challenges and complexities inherent in efforts at institutional change. Indeed, in the concluding chapter I will explore some of these difficulties, examining Kirk Branch's contention that institutions of higher education constitute "morally ambiguous" contexts (189), and that civically-minded educators's goals will often conflict with the aims of the institutions in which they work. I understand that, while possessing an ideal vision of how institutions can function better to achieve a more just and equitable world, one still faces the daunting task of trying to *enact* these ideals within institutions as they currently exist, with their various flaws and bureaucratically inertial forces. In some cases the ideals I have spoken of here, such as joint authorship of the research, may not be feasible or even desirable to all participants.

In practice, depending on the specific institutional contexts in which scholars and community partners find themselves, the ideals envisioned by community action will be easier or more difficult to implement; community-action projects must adapt to these realities. Indeed, in this final chapter I will examine my own experiences working with community partners in Detroit in the pursuit of egalitarian community engagement, in particular how we have responded to various institutional hurdles from both the academic and nonacademic sides. Clearly, these efforts have been “radically insufficient” to create Grabill’s idealized participatory institutions. Yet, they also have had important successes that engendered a sense of hope for what can be accomplished in the future, namely, for pushing ever close to the ideals of community action.

Community Action’s Orientation toward Social Change

We have seen different paradigms of social change running through each of the models of service learning that have been examined in preceding chapters. Bruce Herzberg’s conception of social change, for example, is rooted in a wide-scale movement to end structural inequality. This vision positions service-learning students as the leaders of this charge for structural change, and thus mostly dismisses the goals, needs, and faculties of nonacademic partners. Herzberg’s orientation toward social change reinforces a fundamental sense of division between academic and noncommunity representatives, and may bear little relevance for the people it ostensibly seeks to uplift. In place of this one-sided paradigm, Ellen Cushman redefines social change in a manner more germane to the lived experiences of underprivileged community residents. She perceives change as manifesting itself through the daily interactions of community

members with institutional gatekeepers in order to feed, clothe, and raise their families. However, although the community members she has studied demonstrate critical consciousness, she herself admits that their encounters with gatekeepers rarely produce concrete material gains. And although she employs “activist research” to assist her research subjects (as they assist her in pursuing professional advancement), the benefits accruing to these subjects are quite modest in comparison to her own.

The model of service learning accompanying Cushman’s vision of social change, public intellectualism, seeks to create greater egalitarianism and reciprocity between academic and nonacademic collaborators, and makes important strides toward this goal through the use of hybrid literacies. Yet, public intellectualism remains rooted in the traditionally programmatic framework of academic institutional work. Academic interests continue to dominate these relationships, leading to concrete benefits for academics and ambiguous ones for community partners. Thus, the methodology of public intellectualism ultimately prevents the goals of egalitarianism and reciprocity from being achieved, and curtails the likelihood of achieving its vision of social change.

The paradigm of social change corresponding with Paula Mathieu’s tactical approach to service learning is rooted in a sense of hope that projects undertaken collaboratively will over time engender a world of greater justice and equity. The key to this sense of hope is a pragmatic realism that any individual project will be “radically insufficient” to achieve these large-scale goals. This vision recognizes that social change is an inherently enigmatic and unpredictable process characterized by fits and starts, forward and backward steps, and consistent encounters with frustration punctuated by fleeting but powerful moments of excitement and triumph. The changes that occur

generally manifest themselves through interpersonal connections in ways that cannot be conveniently measured.

The conception of social change that corresponds with community action builds on Mathieu's merging of hope and pragmatism but takes root less in the actual striving for completed projects than in the nurturing of a healthy, lasting and mutually rewarding relationship. In other words, community action views the process of building an egalitarian, genuinely reciprocal relationship between academic and nonacademic communities *as a form of social change itself*. This pursuit constitutes a forceful striving for social equity undertaken amidst traditionally asymmetrical power relations. Of course, as with Mathieu's paradigm, key to the sustainability of the relationship is the capacity to work collaboratively on mutually-beneficial projects defined by some form of literate action.

Mathieu's sense of hope is significant for community action, because genuine egalitarianism and reciprocity will not appear immediately. Due in part to the inertial forces of traditionally hierarchical, exploitative relations between academic and nonacademic partners, these ideals of engagement will take time to achieve. And, admittedly, social change as perceived through the lens of community action will not, in and of itself, radically alter fundamental structural inequalities that characterize underserved communities. However, this orientation toward social change does posit a way for members of both communities to view each other as equals. It offers, then, real promise for higher education's goal of engaging its surrounding communities in ethically responsible way that can produce positive benefits for all participants.

Making the Extracurricular Curricular: Community Action and the Pursuit of Democratic, Participatory, Humane Institutions

One of Ernest Boyer's primary motivations for promoting the concept of engaged scholarship was his fear that higher education was becoming too much of a "private benefit" for those fortunate enough to attend, and straying too far from the democratic advancement of the public good (14). Moreover, John Dewey, to whom all who see the promise of engaged scholarship owe a great debt, believed that a "society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his full stature" (quoted in Deans 35). "From this democratic political perspective," James Berlin argues, knowledge is a "good that ought to serve the interests of the larger community as well as individuals" (223). Community action is about egalitarianism and reciprocity, and about helping participants come to see their individual narratives as fundamentally intertwined with the narratives of their communities. Ultimately, then, community action is about democratic practice.

I believe that enacting hybridities of literacy practices within tactical contexts has the power to produce beneficial changes within both academic and nonacademic communities, as well as helping members of such relationships understand how their individual progress is linked with the progress of the communities in which they claim membership. In the long run, I envision a fundamental shift in the practices of academic community engagement, as relationships that have so often served to reinforce hierarchies between different communities give way to mutually beneficial, ethically responsible, and non-hierarchical forms of engagement. Such a transition would constitute a significant step toward a more democratic, and more humane, world.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The Prospects for Community Action

In many respects, Kirk Branch shares my idealism about how institutions of higher education can promote positive change in underserved communities through the educational literacy practices they promote. Educational literacy practices, he argues, “always invoke a future world that ought to be” (8), and the question becomes deciding which world it is that these literacy practices should be used to enact. In fact, Branch titles his book on this subject *Eyes on the Ought to Be*, taking this phrase from the work of Myles Horton at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. The book is shaped by “Myles Horton’s belief that any goal worth working toward is one that is ultimately unachievable, that if “your ultimate goals were ones you thought you could achieve, you were limiting yourself” (11). According to this idea, to “work toward something that seems impossible to realize is not a mark of futile activity, but a sign that you might have chosen the right goal.” Hence, having one’s eyes set on the ought to be means teaching to create a kind of world, as Horton put it, *in which we need to live* (quoted in Branch 18, *italics in original*). Horton and Branch, then, advocate for educational literacy practices aligned with a vision for a more just and sustainable society.

This sense of unachievable goals has been invoked repeatedly in this dissertation. It was seen in Paula Mathieu's characterization of the "radical insufficiency" of tactical community engagement projects. Mathieu theorizes the role of hope in community engagement, and understands that individual projects will not redress the inequalities that create the necessity for the work, but hopefully will create energy and excitement for further projects that, over time, will gradually get us closer to redressing those problems. It was seen as well in the work of Jeffrey Grabill, who recasts the very notion of institutions as rhetorical entities that, being written, can also be rewritten; this rewriting can produce participatory institutions defined by egalitarianism and democratic practice.

Like these other scholars, along with myself, Branch specifically conceives of educational literacy practices in terms of enabling this future world in which we need to live, rather than the world as it currently exists. In a point echoed by the scholars of the New Literacy Studies, Branch observes that literacy education on its own has no intrinsic value (26). In the case of Highlander, which worked to create Citizenship Schools that enhanced literacy education among southern African Americans on an enormous scale, the goals were not simply about developing literacy skills, or even about passing literacy tests for enfranchisement, but about promoting community development (157). Literacy education, then, "mattered only insofar as it helped adults work toward becoming more democratically active, first-class citizens enacting broad social change" (26). Highlander, then, helped communities understand "that they could be part of a process of social change" (152), and Horton defined educational literacy practices primarily in terms of the social order that they should engender (160).

Yet, like the other scholars whose engaged scholarship I have examined, Branch possesses significant misgivings about what higher education can do to foster social change in practice. Over the course of his book he teeters between the idealism represented by Horton's educational mission and a significantly more modest recognition of the institutional constraints most teachers face. And this sense of vacillation, as well as his attempts to grapple with it, is quite relevant to my work; the scope of the questions he asks can be extended to the feasibility of community-action projects achieving their ideals of egalitarianism and reciprocity. These questions cannot be answered easily or blithely, but only over time in the process of pursuing such projects. In the second half of this concluding chapter, I will reflect on my own experiences with community engagement, and in particular my struggles to operate within, or in partnership with, institutions that seem ill-designed to meet their own stated educational objectives. And, in doing so, I hope to begin the process—one that will inevitably protract over a number of years—of responding to the formidable challenges posed by Branch's work.

Branch acutely understands that the various institutions in which he has taught, from adult education programs to correctional facilities to university classrooms, possess aims that have often conflicted with his own pedagogical objectives. Within jails, for example, his desire to emphasize the subjectivity of inmates as human beings and students was incompatible with the institution's perception of them as criminals and misfits whose behavior must be modified to fit with social norms (88). Branch realizes that, for the institution to accept his perspective would have required acknowledging as well the need to reform the entire criminal justice system, a recognition the great majority working within these institutions would be very loath to accept.

In terms of pursuing Horton's unachievable goals, Branch reminds those of us who work within state institutions such as correctional facilities or universities that the "location of our teaching practices ... will always mean that such unachievable goals will exist in tandem with official educational goals we may not embrace or believe in" (12). Highlander itself operated within a unique institutional setting mostly of its own creation, and it was not directly tied to the American higher educational system. Highlander, then, is "not a model that educators working within official institutions can enact, not the least because those institutions shape ... the discourses guiding the works of the teachers within them" (187). Branch seeks, therefore, to figure out "how to teach within institutions and systems that have goals we cannot wholly accept" (14). Existing alongside his desire to link educational literacy practices to the futures they are supposed to enable is his understanding of "the permanent obstacles in the way of achieving an activist ideal of citizen-teacher, as well as trying to figure out how to work toward that ideal anyway, even though we'll never reach it" (42).

To clarify this problem of institutional aims conflicting with personal aims, he conceptualizes the "cannon in the classroom," which specifically emerged out of the first instance of ministers teaching in jails in late-eighteenth-century America. The warden of this Philadelphia jail, unenthusiastic about the prospect of two ministers educating the incarcerated, "demanded that a cannon be placed next to them on the platform from which they taught, aimed at and ready to fire on the assembled inmates" (22). This cannon, beyond serving as a security measure, acted "as a continuous reminder that the students were inmates, that the ministers worked in the jail, that the institution still held sway during the educational process." Branch argues that most institutional classrooms

have some kind of metaphorical cannon in them, one which represents the fact that the “institution employs us to achieve its own goals, even when, or especially when, we see our individual goals as primary” (22). This process can, Branch believes, create “unresolvable conflicts for many teachers,” such as the conflicts he has faced teaching within correctional facilities.

Branch contends that working within such institutions, which constitute “morally ambiguous” contexts (189), means accepting the inevitability of these constraints. He submits to the notion that in his “position as a university professor,” for example, in “a system predicated on social and cultural reproduction,” his “work serves that system” (187). But, rather than resigning himself to the idea that teachers, particularly university professors, must inevitably “work in service of social and cultural reproduction” (187), Branch believes that gaps exist within the mechanisms of reproduction, and that these gaps make resistance possible. These “teachers must carve out a space to act within discourses and institutions, even those that appear so restrictive as to almost determine action.”

Branch ultimately calls on civically-minded educators to enact what he calls a “trickster consciousness,” which is a process of finding creative ways to resist the institutional force of the cannon in the classroom. “The ends of such a process,” he argues, “should not be to escape, but to work in service of covert, situationally grounded, and always constrained action” (189). This trickster invokes Basil Bernstein’s notion of “recontextualization,” which allows one to recognize institutional constraints while still finding gaps within the system that allow one to pursue one’s personal values. The “trickster” fights institutional processes that seek to determine what is “thinkable” in

legitimate discourse and what is not, and sees the “inherent indeterminacy of those boundaries” as the “gaps within which scholars and teachers can operate, if not independently, at least perhaps other than in the specific interests of the systems for which they are employed” (198). The trickster seeks to create “pores” within these processes of reproduction, ways in which those who work within institutions are not “wholly determined.” Branch then turns to a complicated analysis of sociological terms such as “regulative discourse,” “instructional discourse,” and the “pedagogic device,” and it is at this point in his argument that I become uneasy about the challenges faced by those seeking to transform community action into agents of institutional change.

I understand Branch’s project to offer those teaching within “morally ambiguous” contexts some hope, and a means for enacting this hope, that they can pursue educational literacy practices geared toward creating a world in which we need to live; I understand, then, his desire to maintain a sense of Horton’s visionary pedagogy within massive bureaucratic systems by helping us negotiate “the dialectic between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be” (211). And it is not simply the abstruse sociological language of covert resistance, which may have little bearing in spaces of community engagement, that concerns me. It is the fact that the reality of what he proposes here seems to stray too far from his own commitment to pursuing Horton’s unachievable goals. Finding pores within unrelenting processes of cultural and social reproduction simply seems too far removed from the idealism that drove Branch to title his book *Eyes on the Ought to Be*.

Rather, these concluding passages are much more akin to the concluding passages of Richard Miller’s book *As if Learning Mattered* (and I shared the same sinking feeling reading both, in which Miller offers a stark characterization of the fundamentally

bureaucratic nature of adult life in general, and academic life in particular. This book details the significant challenges—mostly leading to overall failure—faced by several historical figures to promote educational reform within overbearing bureaucratic systems, from Matthew Arnold’s work as a school inspector for Britain’s Education Department in the 1870s, to Scott Buchanan’s disillusionment with the Great Books programs he helped establish. Miller emphasizes the “essential and necessarily symbiotic relationship that exists between the intellectual and the bureaucrat, each of whom depends on the other to make the work that they do possible and meaningful” (216). When one resigns oneself to realizing this state of affairs, as Miller argues all reform-minded scholars inevitably must, what remains “for those who want to change what can be changed, is tinkering on the margins of the academy—altering admissions standards ... training teachers to think differently about the assumptions underlying the idea of native intelligence ...” (212). To pursue these incremental changes, Miller⁴⁵ argues, is to accept the hybrid⁴⁶ persona of the “intellectual-bureaucrat.” The “most one can hope for,” he continues, “is that fostering the development of this ... intellectual-bureaucrat—will produce an academic environment that rewards versatility as well as specialization, teaching as well as research, public service as well as investment in the self.”

⁴⁵ Miller himself seems caught in a vacillation between invoking educational literacy practices geared toward unachievable goals and a much more pragmatic, sober understanding of the possibilities for institutional change. Indeed, as I discussed in chapter two, his article entitled “Composing English Studies: Towards a Social History of the Discipline” offers a visionary perspective of how compositionists can draw on “the political possibilities that composition’s unique location in the academy affords” by rereading the “institutional history of English studies in light of the solicitation and treatment of student writing” (174). Miller envisions significant institutional and political changes resulting from such a rereading, which include rescuing the student “from theoretical oblivion,” making possible “a critique of departmental and curricular reform proposals on pedagogical grounds,” and “providing a record of the range of local solutions to the problems all English departments face in teaching students how to read and write in the academy.”

⁴⁶ This form of hybridization registers a very different feel and tone from the optimistic sort represented by hybrid literacies.

Yet, ending on a note of (admittedly muted) optimism, Miller characterizes these incremental bureaucratic changes as entirely achievable, if extremely difficult. He offers hope to reform-minded educators by pointing out, in a passage reminiscent of Branch's conception of the trickster's pores, that "*constraining* conditions are not *paralyzing* conditions" (211, italics in original), and that when one enters an institutional system and learns about "its ritualized practices, its shortcomings, its prejudices, and its strengths, one inevitably discovers that 'relatively autonomous' working spaces are there to be found." Such a process merely requires one to:

...possess remarkable tolerance for ambiguity, an appreciation for structured contradictions, a perspicacity that draws into the purview the multiple forces determining individual events and actions, an understanding of the essentially performative character of public life, and a recognition of the inherently political character of all matters emerging from the power/knowledge nexus. (213)

Miller sums up all of these qualities, which might ostensibly seem beyond the purview of any individual, as representing attributes "all highly valued on the contemporary critical scene" (213), and thus (theoretically) possible for university professors versed in the arts of critique to adopt. This intellectual-bureaucrat capable of making small changes on the margins of academic life is a corollary to Branch's "trickster," who seeks out the pores that exist within institutional structures in order to make them operate in a modestly more humane fashion. Branch himself might not appreciate the analogy, but his trickster seems to bear much greater similarity to Miller's intellectual-bureaucrat than to a comrade of Horton using educational literacy practices to create a world in which we must live.

These articulations of the trickster and the intellectual-bureaucrat offer little reason to expect significant institutional reform, particularly not in such bureaucracy-

heavy places as contemporary institutions of higher education. Branch and Miller recognize that ideal visions of a more equitable and humane world will not necessarily (or even likely) become real, and that those who wish to create such a world must compromise heavily on this idealism in order to produce even limited institutional changes. I find their arguments to be powerful and compelling; they force me to wonder about the feasibility of Grabill's entreaty to rewrite institutions, as well as the possibilities of promoting egalitarian, reciprocal community engagement when hierarchies and disproportionate benefits are currently the institutional norm. Yet, I cannot entirely accept these arguments. Community action has its eyes planted firmly on the ought to be; its vision of ethical engagement in rhetoric and composition allies itself with Horton's unachievable goals and relies on Mathieu's conception of the radical insufficiency of individual projects to move further toward these goals. Does this idealism make community action hopelessly naïve? I think the successes of Highlander suggest otherwise.

Over the course of his book, Branch moves from the idealism represented by Horton's resolute vision of educational literacy practices set on creating a world in which we must live, to seeking out "pores" in the process of cultural and social reproduction represented by institutions of higher education. He seems, then, to move from the realm of unachievable goals to the realm of the achievable, if we accept Miller's contention that modest institutional reform is entirely possible. The transition, it seems to me, is too expansive. The Highlander Folk School, although not affiliated with American higher education, nevertheless constituted an institution that faced its own clear sets of constraints. As Branch himself points out, Highlander was at one point shut down by the

Tennessee Supreme Court for supposedly constituting a “communist menace” (163).

Yet, operating amidst constraints as powerful as the Red Scare, the school still managed to become a major player in both the Industrial Union and Civil Rights movements, feats which surely constitute something much more considerable than pores within the forces of reproduction.

Indeed, the lesson of the Citizenship Schools offers much room for hope regarding the role of educational institutions in promoting community change through educational literacy practices. The brainchild of Esau Jenkins, these schools started in a tactical manner, with Jenkins, after teaming up with Septima Clark, taking his ideas about community literacy education to Highlander, whose workshops were used to develop the idea. And, after engaging in much work to better understand the needs, conditions, and resources there, the first Citizenship School was started on Johns Island, South Carolina. It started small, with 26 students attending the first school, all of whom managed to obtain the vote (Schneider 155). Moreover, the schools were run in a way that emphasized the development of hybrid literacies, with local people who lacked formal educational training generally serving as teachers, and with the instruction focusing on the knowledge and purposes each student brought with them into the classroom. Bernice Robinson, a beautician who became the first teacher of the Johns Island Citizenship School, told her students, “I am not a teacher, we are here to learn together. You’re going to teach me as much as I’m going to teach you” (Horton 103). The Citizenship Schools quickly spread throughout much of the south, helping catalyze a voter registration movement that eventually reached more than 1,700,000 people (Schneider

156). From small, tactical beginnings emerged outcomes that changed how the institution of democracy in America functions.

In offering this example, I do not mean to suggest that community action will result in achievements as noteworthy, inspiring, and momentous as those accomplished by the Citizenship Schools, although Stephen Schneider bases his call for rhetoric and composition scholars to become more active in the “many forms of rhetorical education taking place outside of traditional classrooms” on the success of these schools (163). However, these historical accomplishments show that the fight for unachievable goals can lead to rather amazing outcomes. In other words, the achievable may at times approach the unachievable more than one would gather from the possibilities envisioned by the trickster and the intellectual-bureaucrat. Yet, the force of Branch’s and Miller’s arguments cannot be dismissed, and while seeking to pursue community action, I will remain ever cognizant of their entreaties for pragmatism. Indeed, considering my own history of trying to maintain an idealist perspective while dealing with institutional realities, I could not do otherwise. Even as my interest in pursuing positive community change has grown, as well as my interest in combining this work with academic scholarship, my understanding of the complexities of educational institutions in a variety of contexts, as well as the challenges of making them more conducive to helping underprivileged people achieve their aspirations, has grown as well.

Making do within an Organizational Period, or Envisioning Institutions Designed for Success

The role of educational institutions in improving the welfare of local communities, or their failure to do so, became of paramount importance to me during my

experiences teaching English as a Foreign Language in Uzbekistan through the Peace Corps.⁴⁷ In 2003 I took a leave of absence from my graduate studies at the University of Michigan to experience educational environments very different from those I had encountered previously as both a student and teacher, and to use teaching as a way to promote positive community change. My primary assignment was to prepare future teachers of English at the Pedagogical Institute in Nukus, the western capital of Karakalpakstan, which is an arid, semi-autonomous republic in Uzbekistan. Like most new Peace Corps volunteers, I had high ambitions for what would be accomplished in my 27 months of service. But I quickly learned about the systemic flaws in Uzbekistan's educational system, flaws which were particularly acute at postsecondary institutions such as the one where I taught.⁴⁸

I experienced the consequences of these larger problems firsthand through my attempts to negotiate the corruption of the educational system. Of the many significant problems with education in Uzbekistan, the most acute one is the fact that teachers, paid meager salaries by the government, have become habituated to demanding bribes from their students for grades. The actual process is rather complicated, but the main idea is that students pay a certain amount of money each semester to each of their teachers, depending on the grade they wish to receive. To receive the Uzbek equivalent of an "A," of course, requires the most money. Among the many negative consequences of this

⁴⁷ In reflecting on my observations of educational institutions in Uzbekistan, and later on in Detroit, I by no means seek to suggest that my perspectives on these places or institutions are definitive. These reflections have emerged from my experiences working in or with these institutions, and thus reflect my personal understanding of how they operate.

⁴⁸ Following the demise of the Soviet Union and Uzbekistan's declaration of independence in 1991, the country has struggled enormously in economic and political terms. In that time, it has had only one president, Islam Karimov, a "strong man" who has ruled the country and government in an increasingly tyrannical fashion (Murray, Bissell).

bribery is that most students, once acculturated into the system, quickly lose their academic motivation.

When I learned about this corruption and the extent of its reach into the institution, I naïvely believed that I could overcome it through a variety of factors: the force of my enthusiasm, the fact that I was the first native speaker of English most of my students had ever met, and my offering them a corruption-free oasis from the rest of the Pedagogical Institute. This plan seemed to work for a short time, as students were excited to have a native English speaker in their classrooms, and they appreciated the chance to learn about American culture. Unfortunately, once the novelty of having an American teacher wore off, students generally returned to their previous habits. They increasingly gossiped and chatted amongst themselves during class (at one point I explained that I would not mind their goofing off as long as they did so in English rather than Karakalpak, but this pedagogical ploy did not work); a growing number stopped handing in homework assignments; and many students started coming to class late and, eventually, not at all. When I saw this pattern of decreasing interest taking shape, I adopted a variety of failed measures to stop the entropic process. I cajoled students; I chatted with them about the problems in the educational system and assured them that I was on their side; I commiserated about the bribery and the scarcity of economic opportunities; at times, I even rebuked them, trying to invoke a sense of guilt at the fact that I had traveled halfway across the world to teach them, while they were failing to uphold their end of the bargain. I also expelled misbehaving students from my classes and even refused to teach entire groups in favor of the more motivated ones, but all of my ideas, aside from making me feel like an increasingly intolerant teacher, failed to stem the

overall trajectory of decreasing academic interest. As my personal frustration built, I came increasingly to entertain the thought that I had become a glorified babysitter in this particular institution of higher education, where teachers pretended to teach and students pretended to learn.

As time went on, I tried to cut my losses and focus the bulk of my attention on the few students in each class whose motivation remained strong, who maintained dreams of forging a “better life”—which usually meant becoming a translator, the most prestigious job one could attain with a degree in English, and moving to another country (especially the United States). I established an after-school English club that offered a variety of resources, from English-language movie nights to game nights to practicing for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (a prerequisite for studying in America or England), etc. I had a number of regulars and eventually opened the club to anyone in the community who would like to take part.

But a source of greater angst than the lack of motivation from most students was my increasingly keen realization that even the talented, hard-working students had very limited options for translating their efforts into professional and socioeconomic advancement, i.e., for realizing the aspirations that drove them to pursue academic success in spite of having so many good reasons not to bother. And, as they approached graduation, it seemed even these motivated students came to understand this reality as well. Toward the end of my second year, even my most motivated students seemed to resign themselves to not realizing their dreams, and they stopped attending the English club or participating actively in my regular classes.

I don't think there is any realistic reason to expect that educational institutions in Uzbekistan, or any other aspect of its civil society, will improve in the near future. The situation will almost certainly continue to deteriorate. These institutions are currently designed for failure, and it is hard for me to look back on my experiences in Uzbekistan as constituting anything else; I cannot reflect on this time in the hopeful sense of radical insufficiency articulated by Paula Mathieu, but rather as stark, unremitting failure. Within this system, I had no power to fight for institutional change. I was a visitor with no administrative authority; my tools for change were goodwill and rhetoric, tools which proved hopelessly futile without some institutional authority to supplement them. And even had I possessed greater power to promote change, the two-year assignments favored by Peace Corps would not have allowed sufficient time to understand the system, and to create positive relationships and trust, before having to leave.⁴⁹ At this time, I had not conceived of the possibilities for community action, but in any case, such opportunities did not exist in that context. For that matter, even becoming an intellectual-bureaucrat was beyond reasonable possibility. Located within a totalitarian system that brutally stifles dissent, the educational literacy practices operating in Uzbekistan's educational institutions do not encourage independent or critical thinking of any kind, let alone for creating a future world in which we need to live. These educational literacy practices, in other words, approach the polar opposite of those advocated by Highlander.

The demons of this experience haunted me when I returned to the University of Michigan to finish my doctoral program in rhetoric and composition. However, they also helped me resolve that if I were going to pursue a scholarly life, I must merge this

⁴⁹ In fact, Peace Corps's operations in Uzbekistan were closed in June, 2005, about 6 months before my group was scheduled to complete service.

academic work with community engagement in ways that would hopefully lead to the kinds of positive changes I did not see occurring in Uzbekistan. Included in this resolution was the realization that I must respect and work with various community members' reasons for engaging in partnerships with university representatives. If they defined meaningful change as developing educational tools from which they have felt excluded in the past, and which they deemed necessary for lifting themselves out of poverty—which may or may not extend to political advocacy for making the system itself less exclusionary—then I must accept their definitions (while also offering them mine). For me, increasingly, this resolution has meant helping students in underprivileged environments negotiate the path of getting to college and being prepared to succeed once there, and for the past few years I have worked in partnership with community members in multiple neighborhoods in Detroit to increase access to higher education for traditionally underserved students. The results have proven to be, as Mathieu would predict, radically insufficient to change the structural problems that prevent large percentages of young people in Detroit from achieving their educational aspirations. Yet, promising successes on a limited scale provide reason for hope that future projects will bring people closer to a set of circumstances in which the majority of young people there can develop the means to realize their goals.

My interest in access to higher education among underprivileged communities, and the prospect of fostering institutional change to promote this goal, began with my participation in the work of the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good at the University of Michigan. The Forum seeks to promote change on a variety of fronts, from community engagement to larger systemic change—i.e. to engage

communities at what Director John Burkhardt calls the “grassroots” *and* the “grasstops.” My work there began as part of Access to Democracy (A2D), a three-year action-research project aligned with Governor Jennifer Granholm’s goal of doubling the number of college graduates in Michigan over ten years.

A2D originally worked on the policy level with Lieutenant Governor John Cherry’s Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth, but later began convening deliberative dialogues with community members throughout the state of Michigan in response to the question, “Who is college for?” Through participating in this project, I learned that most Michiganders do believe in the importance of higher education.⁵⁰ And yet, high school graduation rates in places like Detroit, as well as various rural areas in the state, indicate the extent to which the realities of access do not correlate well with aspirations in underprivileged communities. In having the chance to speak with community members directly through some dialogues, and to read the transcripts of the more than 100 other dialogues held throughout the state, I learned more about the factors that lie behind the disconnect between educational aspirations and outcomes. These factors of course include expected obstacles, such as poor-quality schools and financial burdens, but the dialogues also revealed mixed feelings among many community members about a variety of issues, such as whether all people really should have access to higher education, whether higher education is in fact necessary for a better life, whether it will actually produce better-paying jobs (especially in a state as economically challenged as Michigan), and whether academic culture alienates young people from their home cultures.

⁵⁰ Nationwide, 87% percent of the general public believes that high school graduates should go directly onto college after graduating, rather than acquiring a decent paying job, and 76% believe that a college education is more important today than it was 10 years ago (Immerwahr).

This research data was illuminating, yet in addition to convening the dialogues in various communities throughout Michigan, a process which posed a number of demanding and often frustrating (as well as expensive) logistical difficulties, the project hoped to move people in these communities to create a sense of commitment, and to develop the nuts and bolts of an action plan, to actually increase educational outcomes. Although in some cases the dialogues produced initial enthusiasm among community members for moving toward a commitment to action, and in one case a vision statement was composed and funding sought, this energy mostly fizzled. The research designs and parameters of this particular project, which started at the University of Michigan and moved out into the community afterward, were configured more toward conducting dialogues than toward developing an action model for increasing access to higher education. Staff members tried to maintain a balance between research and community engagement for change, but in reality the scales tipped decisively toward the research; moreover, the parties funding the project seemed more interested in the research than in the sustained commitment to an action model.

This research produced helpful knowledge about educational constraints and, in the case of some A2D staff members, conference presentations and articles that helped them move farther along the path toward gainful university employment.⁵¹ But as of yet, we are unaware of significant outcomes for community members, and I fear that some people who participated in this process, having experienced the initial excitement of a new project, may have felt burned by the inability for either side to sustain their commitment or the money to infuse it. However, soon after I began working on A2D, I

⁵¹ Indeed, I myself am currently working with other A2D staff members on an article that reflects the successes and failures of the project. Thus, the research work continues, but the action project faces a much more uncertain future.

became involved in another Forum-related project that, although admittedly more geared to the “grassroots” than the “grasstops,” also pursued more of the ideals of community action. This project involved working directly with motivated, talented young people to prepare them for success in college, and began tactically through the development of a relationship with partners at a Detroit high school.

To be certain, Detroit is surely one of the most troubled cities in America. Driving around neighborhood areas, I come across one boarded-up, abandoned house after another, many of which have clearly been torched. The population, which approached two million in the 1950s, has now dropped to under one million, and thousands of people continue to leave the city each year (“Detroit Drops Below”). Indeed, in some respects, when I am in Detroit I am reminded of my experiences in Uzbekistan. These similarities were especially resonant when I partnered with a high school in the Detroit Public Schools, particularly in terms of the difficulties of negotiating bureaucratic hurdles, the relative lack of technological capacity, and the oftentimes low morale of faculty and administrators. However, in spite of these formidable and unrelenting challenges, there are wonderful people and organizations throughout the city dedicated to creating the Detroit that ought to be, and I have been fortunate to be able to work with some of them. They seek to change how young people in Detroit perceive of their educational and economic opportunities, to widen the scope of their ambitions, and to help them be both confident, and academically prepared, to pursue these wider aspirations.

As a result, I have seen genuine hope for something better, that although on the whole these educational institutions utterly fail too many students,⁵² it remains possible for motivated young people who persevere through graduation to attend college. And if they manage to obtain a degree, a process which of course often presents another series of tremendous hurdles—as we learned in A2D—these young people open up enormous opportunities for themselves and their families. In other words, whereas I found that institutions of education in Uzbekistan are designed for failure, institutions of education in Detroit seem designed for exception⁵³—that is, to help small groups of students become exceptions to the rule of cultural and socioeconomic reproduction.

As I stated above, even the most motivated and gifted students in the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute lacked realistic opportunities for translating academic effort into realizing their professional and personal aspirations. In Detroit, such students *do* possess options for pursuing what they consider to be meaningful social change for themselves and their families. And, certainly, there are many compelling reasons to view access to higher education as a means for social change. In economic terms alone, when one considers the impact a college degree has on one's earning potential, as well as the likelihood of that person's own children attending college, it becomes clear the considerable extent to which increasing access to higher education among low-income students can radically change their futures. A black male with a college degree, for example, will likely earn on average \$1 million more than a black male who just attends high school (McShepard 4). Additionally, a college graduate's children are more than

⁵² A recent report indicated that only about 32% of students in Detroit graduate from high school in four years (Bouffard).

⁵³ My thanks to John Burkhardt for helping me abstract from my experiences in Uzbekistan and Detroit in terms of their institutional operations.

twice as likely to go to college as a non-college graduate's children (College Summit). Thus, low-income students who manage to become the first in their families to graduate from college may in fact be permanently lifting their families out of poverty.

I am heartened by the fact that the work my partners and I have pursued resembles some of the ideals of community action. These projects were co-conceived, co-designed, and co-developed in a way that reflected a hybridization of everyone's reasons for participating. Indeed, this process had a set of challenges not unlike the ones described by Eli Goldblatt in regard to the Open Doors Collaborative. The projects have also morphed tactically on a regular basis depending upon the availability and willingness of collaborators from both the university and the community to participate, and upon the institutional demands and shifting contingencies faced by everyone involved. And, though the numbers of student-participants have not been large, these efforts have produced benefits that seem to approach the reciprocity demanded by community action. All of the students who participated at the beginning of the project have gone on to college, with several receiving prestigious scholarships, and the community leaders for whom college access is their life mission have realized greater success in these objectives, if on a limited scale. However, because their voices do not appear here, they lack the opportunity to state for themselves whether they have found the benefits to be reciprocal, leaving me to ask the reader to accept my word on the matter.

For my part, I have seen firsthand that community-engagement projects seeking egalitarianism and reciprocity can actually work toward these ideals. And, of course, this short piece about the experience appears in my dissertation, which is helping me move toward my goal of acquiring a tenure-track position in rhetoric and composition. Because

of my concerns about the literate products of community partnerships, I (like Cushman, Mathieu, Goldblatt, and others) have struggled over how much to write, or not to write, about this work. As I stated in the previous chapter, these issues about authorship and ownership will remain imminent in years to come. Since this text is not jointly authored with my partners, it does not occupy a large space within the dissertation, and I have endeavored not to adopt my partners' voices as my own. I can also say that, as of yet, we have not sought opportunities for joint publication of the results of our work, nor am I sure that my partners would see any concrete benefits in pursuing such opportunities.

Moreover, although our success in helping a small number of students go to college have been exciting and rewarding, I cannot escape the reality that the work I have pursued with various partners in Detroit schools and neighborhoods has largely accepted the status of these places as institutions of exception. We have not been able to work with massive numbers of high school students, nor to improve the city's overall high school graduation rates, nor to raise school report cards under No Child Left Behind, nor to stop the Detroit school district from having to close 34 schools in the summer of 2007 due to the tremendous decline in the city's population. We certainly have not been in a position to radically change the institutional structure of Detroit schools, and I do not expect these larger structures to change in the near future.

Unfortunately, institutions designed for exception are not remotely sufficient to meet the needs of people in struggling areas like Detroit. And, one could argue that, in working with the institution as it is rather than advocating for institutional change, those of us involved in this college mentorship project have helped perpetuate the problems in the current system—i.e., we help ensure that the Detroit school system remains designed

for exception rather than transforming it into an institution designed to engender the success of the majority of students. In essence, the educational literacy practices we have adopted in this project envision a more positive “ought to be” for the few students who have participated in the project, while having no significant say about the “ought to be” of the overall institution.

Indeed, community action, with its emphasis on tactical engagement and the ability to remain flexible in the face of shifting logistical contingencies, does seem more geared toward “grassroots” work than “grasstops” work. For these reasons, I cannot dismiss Miller’s and Branch’s arguments that, pragmatically speaking, institutional change is an incremental process spearheaded by tricksters and intellectual-bureaucrats, and it produces only modest, marginal, and tentative gains. However, in institutional terms, having one’s eyes on the ought to be means envisioning institutions designed for success, with the people who populate these institutions forging their own definitions of what success means for them. Such is the unachievable goal at the heart of community action. I do not believe that tricksters and intellectual-bureaucrats have the power to convert institutions designed for exception into institutions designed for success.

In fact, following the initial successes of the college mentorship project, my partners and I developed tentative plans to enlarge it. We had ideas about how, given time to expand to enough people, this work might ultimately create an expectation among a greater percentage of students in Detroit that college is for them. Our vision surely constituted an unachievable goal, as such a change would move Detroit Public Schools considerably down the path toward becoming institutions capable of helping all students and families who occupy them to realize their educational aspirations. In our case,

circumstances changed, and these long-term plans had to be set aside. But a core group of people who started this project remain committed to this goal, and we remain hopeful about pursuing further projects that will get us ever closer to the unachievable.

While recognizing the forcefulness of Branch's and Miller's conceptualizations, I choose not to link community action with the trickster or the intellectual-bureaucrat. I prefer a different way of thinking about institutional change that leaves more room for optimism, while ironically being more in line with how Branch himself conceives of educational literacy practices through much of his book; I turn then to another crucial aspect of Myles Horton's vision for community change. In his autobiography *The Long Haul*, Horton distinguishes between "organizational periods" and "social movement periods" (165). As he states:

It's only in a movement that an idea is often made simple enough and direct enough that it can spread rapidly. Then your leadership multiplies very rapidly, because there's something explosive going on. People see that other people not so different from themselves do things that they thought could never be done. (114)

In times of social movements, conditions that seem immutable can change very quickly as people come to see themselves as "clearly part of a collective struggle that encourages [them] to increase [their] demands" (115). As a result, people "who work to create a decent world long for situations like this."

But in fact, most of the time people live in organizational periods. During such times, institutional change might indeed be incremental and tentative, which can be very frustrating for people committed to pursuing a world of greater justice, democracy, and sustainability. Even limited progress is hard-won and seems to take much longer than it ideally should, or would, if one were in a social movement period. Unfortunately, Horton

argues, it is not possible to “create movements,” and we cannot predict when one might begin. Rather:

...if we want to be part of a movement when it comes, we have to get ourselves into a position—by working with organizations that deal with structural change—to be on the inside of that movement when it comes, instead of on the outside trying to get accepted. (114)

People committed to unachievable goals must continue to work within organizations, though these institutions are morally ambiguous, and try to build the conditions that might one day lead to a social movement—in which momentum reaches some kind of a critical mass and produces an explosion of changes over a short period of time.

I propose community action as a means for pushing forward during this organizational period, and helping to slowly make institutions of higher education more conducive to the scholarship of engagement envisioned by scholars like Dewey and Boyer. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, I believe the discipline of rhetoric and composition is uniquely located within the academy to lead the way in producing these institutional changes. Yet, in spite of the field’s relative suitability for community action, such work may indeed resemble a trickster-consciousness or intellectual-bureaucracy more than a full-fledged institutional rewriting, and individual community-action projects will be radically insufficient to bring about the kind of movement period described by Horton. Yet hopefully they will help lay the groundwork for such a happening.

In many ways, institutions of higher education are already designed for success, which is why “93% of Americans agree that ‘colleges and universities are among the most valuable resources to the U.S.’” (Bok 310). These institutions played a significant role in making the United States the world’s most powerful country following the Second

World War. Considering this power, scholars like Ira Harkavy and John Puckett envision the academy as having fabulous potential to “help deal with the enormous complexity of our society and world” (559). I firmly agree with these scholars, but I recognize that achieving this potential will first mean rewriting these institutions so that the scholarship of engagement becomes more central to the academic mission. If this rewriting is an unachievable goal, pursuing it remains an imperative for scholars committed to a more just world, and if individual projects are radically insufficient to enact this goal, we must still remain hopeful that we can push toward a more ideal world. I offer community action as one possible vision of higher education’s role, spearheaded within rhetoric and composition, in pursuing such unachievable goals. In the meantime, community action’s eyes will remain firmly planted on the “ought to be.”

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