Writing in Service-Learning Courses

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Preface

One of the more important outcomes of research sponsored by the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing at the University of Minnesota has been the development of a number of bibliographies of interest to researchers and practitioners in composition studies and related disciplines. This bibliography by Linda Adler Kassner and Terence Collins is certainly important for its annotations of articles and resources about writing for and about post-secondary service-learning courses and programs—public and private sector internships, community service programs, and other experiential learning opportunities. Equally important is Kassner and Collins' discussion about writing for service-learning experiences. As they point out in their introduction to Writing in Service-Learning Courses, the typical model for the writing component of an internship or service-learning course is a student-generated report that records or explains the value of the experience for an advisor or program facilitators. Kassner and Collins ask us to examine current writing practices in service-learning courses in light of the significant possibilities of students writing about their experiential learning in new ways. They ask us to think about what else might be done with writing to make these unique learning experiences an opportunity for understanding and enrichment for both the students and the communities the students serve.

Given the current lack of research and exploration about how writing for service-learning courses might be used beyond the typical written reports of students' experiences. Writing in Service-Learning Courses offers a well-informed starting point for more conversation and experimentation.

Kassner and Collins' project is one of fifty-seven research projects funded by the Center

for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing to date. The Center annually funds research projects by University of Minnesota faculty to study the following topics:

- characteristics of writing across the University's curriculum;
- status reports on students' writing ability at the University;
- the connections between writing and learning in all fields;
- the characteristics of writing beyond the academy;
- the effects of ethnicity , race, class, and gender on writing; and
- curricular reform through writing.

We make grant recipients' research results available in the form of technical reports. More elaborate reports and extended discussions of Center grant recipients' work are available through our monograph series.

One of our goals is to disseminate the results of these research projects as broadly as possible within the University community and on a national level. We encourage discussion of Linda Adler Kassner and Terence Collins' annotations and interpretations of the literature currently available on using writing in service-learning courses. We invite you to contact the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing for information about other publications or Center activities.

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Series Editor
Mark Olson, Editor
May 1994

Writing in Service- Learning Courses

In the summer of 1991, with the support of a research grant from the University of Minnesota' s Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing, we began to examine ways in which writing has been used as part of experiential learning and service-learning courses in colleges and high schools. We did so for two reasons.

First, and most immediately, we were about to begin a three-year transition-to-college model program for urban youth at risk of not fulfilling their educational potential. The transition design involved cooperation between the University of Minnesota General College (the University's open admissions unit) and the Penumbra Theatre Company of St. Paul (Minnesota's only professional Black theatre company). Through the program, high school seniors in internships at Penumbra Theatre worked in performance, administration, and technical support and also enrolled in college courses at the University. The premise was that students could find a hospitable environment at Penumbra in which to invest themselves and from which they might find role models who valued and supported their aspirations toward higher education. The project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

Second, we knew that local, state, and national student service models were being discussed by both the political right and left. Indeed, a national service program called "Serve! America" was initiated by the Clinton administration shortly after our project began, and is poised to engage thousands of young people in service-learning projects through which they gain financial credits toward college expenses. Furthermore, we knew that service-learning projects were proliferating on many campuses. Groups such as the National Youth Leadership Council

and Project C.O.O.L. were gaining visibility and impact. It was our sense that the service-learning movement would either replicate patterns of elite reinforcement or serve to valorize the full range of student experience. We wanted to test ways in which the service experiences and literacy experiences of non-elite groups might figure in the emerging service-learning movement, and we wanted to see what shaping role writing and the composition community might play in that process.

Our review of the literature about writing in service-learning experiences, then, was driven by both pragmatic and ideological goals. Service-learning projects and internships have frequently included writing components. Most typically, such writing components have taken the form of already-successful students writing to report and to reflect upon their work and their personal growth, or, in the workplace/workplace-simulation internship, the focus has been on the forms and functions of workplace writing. For our FIPSE project, we needed to know about what was already available in the writing and service-learning literature that might be useful to us in setting up a meaningful model demonstration project with federal funds. At the same time, we were hoping to shift the internship/service model and the writing that serves it away from the subtle elitism of noblesse oblige inherent in many service-learning models.

Service-Learning: Context for Writing

Our prior history with internship and service-learning programs, coupled with anecdotal accounts in various articles about internship and service-learning courses, had taught us that writing is nearly always featured in such programs and courses. Two paradigms run through service-learning models now in place.

First, there are programs which aim to teach a "service ethic" or citizenship responsibility. The stereotypical shape of such service learning might go something like this. Successful students—honors students, say—are recruited to help those who are, or who are perceived to be, in need of assistance. They are homeless. They are immigrants. They are failing in school. They are old. They are poor. They are, most typically, "other." Writing, we know, can be a powerful tool for exploration and learning, but just as easily, writing serves schools' tacit role of replicating prior knowledge or attitudes consistent with the dominant culture's. In our review of the literature, we did not find service-learning writing models that challenge received knowledge; that ask questions about structural features of the social dynamics which govern our economics; that look straight in the face of the degradation of learning which results from racism; that resist replicating, under the banner of service, the process of "otherizing" those served Instead, the focus is either simple information transfer—"Here's what I did, give me credit, I did my time"; or it is self-reflective—"Here's what I learned working with_____ " (fill in the "other" worked with). The single noteworthy exception to this pattern is Herzberg (in press; see annotation).

A second extant model for a service-learning or internship program might go something like this: the prospective graduate of a college major lands an internship in a place where she or he can "try out" the application of academic coursework in the "real-life" workplace. The literature about career ladders is full of good advice on the value of such internships. In such a position, the intern is asked to perform a variety of tasks, for pay or not, which expose him or her to the day-to-day workings of jobs in their area of study. The writing in such sites is driven by the economics of those sites: grants and correspondence in non-profits and sales memos,

proposals, or work-team reports in the entrepreneurial and corporate zones. In these internship models the writing tasks are aimed at credential- and resume building. The student validates or finds "real world" correctives to what has been learned—or mis-learned—while in college.

At the outset, we recognized that programs of both types would serve many purposes. We expected to find varied uses of writing being employed in pursuit of the multiple goals served by such programs. In short, we set out with what has proven to be a naive assumption: that is, with all the effort and energy being put into service-learning and internship courses, we assumed that someone would have given serious thought to ways in which writing might be used critically to promote hard ethical and cultural challenges, to sponsor new learning about the larger culture, to give an edge of critique to the service-learning process. Instead, we found "report/reflect" or "practice" patterns only, patterns that are either overtly neutral in their expectations, or patterns that replicate prior definitions of the self (educated, descending into the world of the "served," "slumming," "not-the-other") in one of two ways: for service project, in elite terms, however unwittingly, as the person who enters the world of the "other" and gets to define that other, or for work-experience career ladder project as a now-experienced functionary in a corporate culture.

It is not our purpose to judge the intentions or outcomes of our colleagues who have initiated service-learning programs and use writing in them. But we do want to expand the discussion in the hope that writing can take service-learning projects in directions that do not merely serve the process of replication of elite, "otherizing" structures, which do not simply (or only) serve as training sites for would-be functionaries, and which do indeed build the critical competence and self/communal-esteem of our students.

In many respects, the field of writing and service learning is only beginning to emerge. Until now, writing has been used in service and internship project in very predictable ways, perhaps because the composition community has not yet provided significant direction or stimulus to thinking about how writing might support the service learner or intern in more substantial ways. Projects recently begun at Bentley College, Columbia College (Chicago), and Stanford promise to provide a forum through which the composition community might define its relationship(s) to this growing segment of the high school and college curriculum. In addition, at the initiative of Nora Bacon (University of California at Berkeley), the Community Service Writing Network has been formed as a special interest group of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Perhaps these new initiatives will expand the role of writing in service-learning courses.

Literature Review

In assembling the literature review that shaped our findings, we consulted with University of Minnesota Education Reference librarians. At their suggestion, we ran both subject and keyword searches of various types to capture as much relevant information as possible, both published and fugitive. When "service-learning" and "writing" were coupled in ERIC and BRS searches, nothing was captured. Since this most logical pairing produced no results, we turned to other subjects and keywords suggested by our librarian colleagues: "adult literacy" and "writing," "prior knowledge," "experiential learning," and "non-academic writing." Once initial items were identified, relevant bibliographic items were traced. Authors of several pieces were contacted individually to identify fugitive literature. Some items have only marginal relevance to the topic at hand. Given the paucity of attention to the topic, however, such marginal items have

been retained. The outcome is presented below. When relevant, each item in the bibliography contains a brief notation of the search domain that identified it:

AL/W—Adult Literacy/Writing

PK—Prior Knowledge

EL—Experiential Learning

NAW—Non-Academic Writing

Bibliography

Bacon, N. (1993). Community service writing network directory 1993-1994. Informal paper available from Nora Bacon (bacon@garnetberkeley.edu).

Abstracts and information for contacting eight programs nationally, featuring writing instruction in connection to service-learning projects.

Brown, R E. (1993). Service-learning and advanced student writing: Reflections. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 1993 (available from the author c/o Bentley College, Waltham, Massachusetts).

A preliminary descriptive report on uses of writing in a service-1earning curriculum funded by the U.S. Department of Education—Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education at Bentley College.

Castaldi, T. (1989). Adult learning: Transferring skills from the workplace to the classroom. *Lifelong Learning: An Omnibus of Practice and Research 12,*17-19. (AL/W)

Descriptive essay about writing produced by adults in a U.S. labor history class. Suggests that students transferred writing skills from the workplace to the classroom. Concludes that students do not separate education and work, and that writing skills/styles developed in the workplace are used in academic writing. As such, students whose work demands "academic" writing (summary, analysis, etc.) are more successful in the classroom, while students whose work demands other writing styles (e.g., technical) are less so.

Chesky, J., and Heibert, E. (1987). The effect of prior knowledge on high school students' writing. *Journal of Educational Research, 80* (5), 304-313. (PK)

Study examines students' attitudes toward assignments and quality of compositions based on students' prior knowledge. Evaluates student essays on the basis of quality, length, context—

creating statement (orienting reader to subject), cohesion and syntactic complexity, and error analysis. Concludes that students better like writing on subjects about which they have prior knowledge.

Easley, A (1989). Learning through writing. *Journal of Developmental Education, 13,*10-12. (EL)

Suggests that teachers fail to instruct students to use writing as a resource for learning and that current approaches to teaching ignore the value of students' personal experiences. Easley believes that each student has a "pool of knowledge" and that meaningful learning is related when learners bridge the gap between that "pool" and knowledge required for a particular situation/learning experience. Writing, which requires both recreation and reflection, can assist in the "bridging" process. Assignments, which should highlight the students' "knowledge gap," should help students become aware of their own learning/writing processes and discover the relationship between learning and writing. Easley also urges commitment to conference groups and journals.

Gardaphe, F. L. (1994). Coming of age in the city. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition, March 1994.

Describes the general relationship between service learning and composition courses in which service is the core of writing. The paper grows out of the author's experience in program transformation at Columbia College, Chicago, where many sections of composition feature linked community service. The Columbia program was the subject of a 1994 CCCC panel, "Extending the Walls: Linking Community Service with Composition," featuring Gardaphe, A. Greene, and M. Withrow. (See citations for Greene and Withrow, below.)

Greene, A. (1994). Community service: Empowering student writers. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 1994.

A companion paper to Gardaphe, above.

Harris, E. (1989). Effects of experiential learning on formal teaching and learning processes. *Equity and Excellence 24,* 41-42. (AL)

Recommends that because adults often have trouble transferring experiential skills into the language of the academy, more research be devoted to experiential learning for teachers of adult students. Posits that adults' experiential learning commonly relies on inductive learning whereas academic learning relies on deduction. Says that students must undergo what Freire (1970) and Bruner (1962) call a "transformation," so that their knowledge can lead to new insights.

Herzberg, B. (in press). Community service and critical teaching. *College Composition and Communication.*

Reports on a Bentley College writing course devoted to the study of literacy and schooling. The course provides a context for service-learning work tutoring in a homeless shelter. Both elements of the course are described in some detail. The approach taken and the direction charted suggest that this will be foundational piece as the composition community addresses the role of writing instruction in service learning at all levels.

Hutchings, P., and Wutzdorff, A (Eds.). (1988). Knowing and doing: Learning through experience. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 35.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

"Paperback sourcebook" containing six chapters about experiential education. The first

chapter reviews basic theory and models regarding experiential education and summarizes the experiential program at Alverno College in Milwaukee, where the editors taught at the time. The second chapter summarizes an experiential education project for highly motivated engineering students at Worcester Polytechnic Institute; the third describes a Washington, D.C., and internship program for advanced undergraduates. The fourth chapter is devoted to adult learners and the essential self-assessment skills that they should bring to their education; the fifth chapter compiles strategies for students to make the most of the philosophies of experiential education described in the "sourcebook."

Laurman, D., Schroder, M., Sroka, K., and Stephenson, E. R. (1985). Workplace and classroom: principles for designing writing courses. In Odell, L. & Goswami, D. (Eds.), *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*. New York: Guilford Press. (NAW)

Describes assignments in five advanced composition courses, all of which integrate assignments based on real situations faced by business writers. Assignments ask students to consider audience, context, and consequences of writing. Authors use three different kinds of assignments:

- memo assignments that contain scenarios to which students must respond;
- data sheet assignments that list basic facts, history, and goals which students must shape into a narrative; and
- letters that students must write in response to a given situation.

Authors conclude that realistic assignments help writers develop a more precise sense of conceptualization and audience.

Leeson, L. (1989). Beyond process pedagogy: Making connections between classroom and adult literacy. *College Composition and Communication, 40* (1),73-79. (PK, AUW)

The subject is a writing workshop for California Conservation Corps (CCC) members held at the University of Southern California. Suggests that moving literacy/writing work from the classroom to the workplace is difficult for member/writers because CCC is bureaucratic and does not value writing as it is valued in the classroom. The classroom, on the other hand, is valuable because it is removed from "real life" and writing about "real" work (e.g., that encountered in the CCC) is no more "real" than writing about "imaginary situations" for Corps members.

Luce, I. (Ed.). (1988). *Service-learning: An Annotated Bibliography linking Public Service with the Curriculum.* Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education.

This is a standard comprehensive reference bibliography on work in the field of service learning at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Representing work by 200+ authors, it covers service-learning, experiential learning, and volunteerism. None of the work cited addresses questions of writing and its uses, suggesting the paucity of information on the subject.

Miller, M., & Daloz, L. (1989). Assessment of prior learning: Good practices assure congruity between work and education. *Equity and Excellence, 24* (3) 30-34. (PK)

The authors argue that returning students, because their knowledge from "outside" is not acknowledged, are often frustrated when returning to school. They suggest that to bridge the gap between experiential knowledge and school, institutions are trying to assess, evaluate, and certify experiential learning, often by having students assemble portfolios of their prior

knowledge/experience for evaluation "according to college-level criteria." They further suggest that outcome-based education is appropriate for learning assessment. Students also learn from the process of self-assessment, which gives them higher self-esteem and increases self-awareness.

Montgomery-Fate, T. (1990). Wading in: John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and the Chicago Transit Authority. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 1990. (EL)

Descriptive address suggesting that experientially-based learning and writing espouses distractions, movement, and disorder and that students become distant enough from the subject/object relationship to discover new ways of learning. Building on Dewey and Freire, the author says that students should use the surrounding community to become participating subjects, not passive objects. Based on this notion, the presenter designed a sequence of community-based experiential assignments.

This presentation is based solely on a CTA ride assignment, for which students had to ride an "el" or a bus through the "heart of the city" and write about the experience. By taking students out of familiar environments in this way, the author argues that they will begin to order their thinking through writing. He describes some student approaches to assignments and concludes that after completing the experientially-based assignment sequence, students look at the world as a "whole people."

Munce, J. (1982). Toward a comprehensive model of clustering skills. National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE). Occasional Paper # 1. (EL)

Suggests that there are skills which are useful both to scholars and professionals; that

those skills can be identified and clustered to show their similarity; and that once educators, students, and employers are aware of them, those skills can be integrated in learning both in and outside school. Goes on to propose new "skill clusters" for liberal arts students so that they can develop workplace skills more readily during their education. Clusters include research and investigation, information management, communication and persuasion, human service, organizational management, and design and planning that develop professional skills. Says that by clustering in these categories, students will develop skills without forcing them to place premature emphasis on job acquisition.

Odell, L., Goswami, D., and Quick, D. (1983). Writing outside the English composition class: Implications for teaching and for learning. In Bailey, R., and Fosheim, R. M (Eds.), *Literacy for Life: The Demand for Reading and Writing.* New York: Modern Language Association. (NAW)

Research compares writing of undergraduates and legislative analysts. Considers attitudes/practices of each group regarding audience, purpose of writing, and writing process. Finds that legislative analysts, because they had a clear sense of audience and purpose, were more directed in their writing and were more conceptually focused throughout the writing process. Undergraduates, because writing questions often bear little relation to their own knowledge and draw instead on instructors' knowledge, were unable/unwilling to articulate audience and were uncritical about sources for/subjects of writing. Concludes by suggesting that writing teachers push students to test source-authors' conclusions against their own experiences and that the teachers create assignments about which they are not the "experts."

Sansregret, M (1985). *Recognition of Prior Learning: An Administrator' s Guide.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 261 202) (PK)

Developed at John Abbott College in Quebec (a college for two-year university preparatory or three-year vocational education). Meant to help administrators help students prepare portfolios for college credit. Chapters cover examples of recognition of prior learning, sources, historical overview, rationale, definitions and propositions, ways of recognizing experiential learning, quality control, main parties involved in recognition, and an operational model.

Reither, J. (1991). Bridging the gap: Scenic motives for collaborative writing in workplace and school. (From an untitled work in progress, supplied by author)

Says that writing teachers have incorporated workplace writing practices in classroom, but do not pay any attention to conditions that make those practices possible. As a result, classrooms are often contradictory—valuing writing based on one set of assumptions but in settings that are dominated by another (institutional, hierarchical, etc.). Works from the view that writing is always collaborative, a dialogic process—building on others' knowledge and providing "written knowledge" for others to build on. In the workplace, writing is grounded in a situation of different motives, needs, expression, and identity than those established in the traditional classroom. Suggests that teachers work towards re-creating workplace "scenes" of collaboration, where process (learning) is as important as product. Suggests that students become "managers" of the class, with teacher as "project manager."

Tomlinson, S. (1990). Writing to learn: Back to another basic. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 42,* 31-39.

To make sense of new information, students and teachers must employ active learning and relate it to prior knowledge and experience. Without writing, students can face overload.

Suggests journal writing across the curriculum, brief in-class assignment, and writing every day to avoid overload. Hopes that students will apply abstract theories learned in class to "future jobs."

Watters, A., & Ford, M (1994; in press). *Writing for Change.* New York: McGraw Hill.

With a companion "implementation guide," this is a textbook for studying community issues and for integrating community service writing into expository college writing courses. Readings focus on relationships of individuals to communities. The implementation guide is published in formats easily individualized to specific site needs.

Withrow, M. (1994). Community service and composition: Roles, aims, and volunteer work. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 1994.

A companion paper to Gardaphe, above.