

## Intercultural Dialogue and the Production of a Rhetorical Borderland: Service-Learning in a Multicultural and Multilingual Context

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This paper reports the process and outcomes of a multidisciplinary service-learning project in a major metropolitan area in southwestern Indiana that focuses on determining, then meeting, the needs of our growing Latino/a population. We discuss three service-learning courses involved with this project – one completed, one in progress, and one being planned. Deploying a theoretical apparatus emerging from sociology and intercultural rhetorical theory, we discuss our students' interaction with this rhetorical borderland and the processes of becoming and hybrid thinking that occurred in the process.

### I. Background and Participants

It is often pointed out by many that service-learning emerged from past traditions of Deweyan democratic education, '60s-based courses as happenings, Jerome Bruner's experiential learning, and the long tradition of critical pedagogy developed from the work of Paulo Friere and others. While this past clearly undergirds our understanding of service-learning, and we find ourselves harmonizing with its democratic and critical impulses, we also recognize the need

to push the underlying theory to its extremes in order to open it up to explain new combinations of experiences that emerge from our ever-evolving pluralistic public sphere. As Linda Flower points out, service-learning strategies have taught many to "*speak up*" and "*speak against*," "but they do not teach us how to '*speak with*' or '*speak for*' our commitments in a nonfoundational way" (2). Thomas Deans also points out that these rich critical traditions take us only so far, so could afford to be supplemented by having students "write themselves into the world" in order to "intervene materially into contexts beyond the academy" (8). Our goal in this paper is to dramatize our attempt to create "a rhetorical space that can support transformative relationships" (Flower 2) through exploring our area's interaction with its growing Latino/a population. We wanted to think through a process of aiding the newly arrived Latino/a population that would ease the problems that form around such culture clashes. In the process, we develop an understanding of this growing relationship as a rhetorical borderland in which fixed identities are challenged by mapping the figures, voices, and concerns of the borderland through an intercultural dialogue creating a sense of belonging "with." In addition, we highlight—with varying degrees of success—a process of becoming developed from critical reading and writing strategies along and about the rhetorical borderland that are productive of hybrid modes of understanding "with." While we continue to examine and reflect on the process of our projects, it is important to recognize they are still ongoing and we are still learning from their application.

On the way to developing these projects each of us experienced issues within our disciplines related to such applied work. The unique appeal to Hitchcock resided in the project's potential to network with participants who were primarily non-academics but who shared his belief in the need for "active citizenship." One of the challenges he has faced over the years is formulating a coherent response to the social imperatives inherent in being a Spanish expert in higher education. Part of the problem lies in adapting his own set of critical skills, acquired



in a framework founded on the notion of theoretical distance from one's subject matter, to the multicultural reality of the communities in which he has lived. A specialist in the contemporary drama of Spain, Hitchcock was trained in the early '90s primarily to analyze literary works with a level of objectivity that occasionally seemed to render secondary the problems of real human beings. While the lower- and intermediate-level language courses he instructed as a teaching assistant often centered on cultural issues, the notion of outreach through service-learning was simply unheard of. Yet in all three regions in which he has taught—the Southeast, New England, and the Midwest—demographic changes that translate to an increased Latino presence have forced him to discover concrete ways to reach out and assist the Spanish-speaking population to help them find more fulfilling lives, and to intervene into existing community structures that display varying degrees of acceptance to newly arrived immigrants. By necessity evolving into a generalist in Spanish who could always expect to teach a proportionate number of classes in language, culture, and literature at primarily teaching-centered institutions, Hitchcock came to understand as inevitable but also personally satisfying the acceptance of a high level of community engagement he would never have foreseen in a theory-oriented graduate program.

Statham also faced some pressures away from such considerations. She had entered graduate school in Sociology in the early 1970s, having been involved in the anti-war, civil rights, women's and environmental movements. However, she soon became engrossed in simply surviving in a very quantitative program, and found it difficult to "model" the sorts of processes and issues she was truly interested in. At her first job, she found colleagues to work with who were using a more qualitative, critical approach, and soon began to adopt this framework, which she brought with her to a smaller, comprehensive institution and began to focus on more applied, local concerns – researching the closing of an auto plant, tracking women caught in new welfare policies, exploring reasons for dropping out of high school. Her evolution was helped



along by several leadership roles in Women's Studies programs, which allowed her to see things from a more interdisciplinary perspective and also to realize the power of applying one's expertise – involving students – in addressing serious societal concerns.

For Micer, the rhetorical disciplines—Composition and Rhetoric, Technical Writing, or Rhetorical Theory—have provided a space for implementing service-learning, as these disciplines have begun to advocate putting the content of courses—rhetorical and discursive structures and styles as ways of knowing and being—into action in service environments. In a technical writing course he taught, students created a user-manual for a Portable Vacuum-Action Cleaning System for a local company. While once uncommon, these writing assignments are becoming far more common as rhetorical classrooms turn more and more to the community to engage their students in learning that is deep, meaningful, and real. While still suspect by many in terms of traditional scholarship, the rhetorical disciplines have, for the most part, accepted service-learning in ways that many other traditional disciplines have not because theory meets practice in very clear ways.

## **II. Our Model for a Needs Assessment and Intercultural Dialogue**

As we have come together to pursue the issue of the integration of our growing Latino/a community, we have turned to the service-learning literature. Our collective hope was to determine the unmet needs in this community, and provide some solutions or encourage others to work to meet the needs we identified. Each of us became motivated to participate by a concern that this immigrant population be adequately heard and understood in our community, and as a result, able to live here more comfortably.

At its core, this project poses the following problems: How can a service-learning initiative help create a public forum that invites not only differing discourses to the table, but also distinct languages?



In the study described below, we examine the process of designing such a forum dynamically, through a partnership that has grown and reconfigured itself over time in response both to new opportunities and to consistently newer and newer understandings. We are troubled by the following material concerns: what forms would such a multi-lingual intercultural discourse take? What does it produce in terms of students' engagement, as well as our own? And most of all, what may it produce in terms of concrete plans for public documents that, like the forum itself, represent and serve a multilingual civic discourse that attempts to be inclusive and for the use of both the mainstream and minority groups?—in this case a growing and heterogeneous Latino/a population relatively new to the area surrounding our university, a regional comprehensive university in the southwestern corner of Indiana.

Part of the problematic we are exploring develops from what Elenore Long, in *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics*, refers to as “a whole set of nested alternatives” that emerge whenever members of the university engage with the local community for purposes of activist projects. For Long, these alternatives take the form of the following questions:

Do community-university partners do best to prioritize an ever-growing network of *relationships* in the faith that they will mobilize in response to exigencies that arise in the future? . . . Or should we . . . focus on circulating [a *conversation*] broader, more inclusive attitudes toward literacies—what literacy means and how it is practiced? Or should partners focus on pooling rhetorical expertise to support community-based agencies that, in turn, sponsor local publics? That is, is the problem of sustainability primarily an *institutional* concern for material resources, institutional interests, and social capital . . . ? If this is the case, we would do well to prioritize processes of research, methods, and outcomes. Or is the top priority *rhetorical engagement* on pressing social issues? If this is the case, what kinds of rhetorical interventions are up to the



challenge of helping everyday people bridge the cultural differences that otherwise threaten to keep us apart . . . ? (134)

While our initial projects did not begin as a direct response to these concerns, we have come to understand our projects as emerging from this broad domain. The point is, for Long as well as ourselves, to explore how we create a sustainable relationship between the emerging local Latino/a public, our university, and the broader public at large. We have opted for a patient, long-term approach, and as we move ahead, we find ourselves alternatively emphasizing our own “processes of research, methods, and outcomes” and also “rhetorical engagement on pressing social issues” that “help . . . everyday people bridge the cultural differences that otherwise threaten to keep us apart.”

We believe that one way to manage these ever-changing and somewhat competing demands is through mapping the rhetorical borderland in which the rhetorical and discursive practices of the university, Latinos (both newly arrived and those previously established), and Evansville's other ethnic and racial communities are rethought to help the differing communities bridge their differences. At the core of rhetorical borderland understanding, then, is an ontopolitical (Connolly 1-40) approach which recognizes that the transformative potential of thought also has an effect on how we live (exist) in the world: to think differently is to exist differently. This idea is also guided by the political matrix that defines contemporary rhetoric. As Luming Mao, in his *Reading Chinese Fortune Cookie: The Making of Chinese American Rhetoric*, defines it, rhetoric

...represents the systematic, organized use and study of discourse and discourse strategies in interpersonal, intercultural contexts, reflecting and reinforcing rhetoricians own ideology, their own norms of discourse production and discourse consumption, and their ability to persuade, adjust, and realign. (13)



It is the very contingent and partial nature of rhetoric that requires us to understand it from multiple perspectives, thus entering into conversations with differing kinds of rhetoric: all rhetoric is interpersonal and intercultural but is always already caught up in its own discursive modes of thinking and being. To rethink rhetorical understanding requires negotiation with differing models of rhetoric. When Mao charts the emergence of a hybrid Chinese-American rhetoric that develops from the interaction of contemporary European-American rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric, he identifies how the encounter changes the very subjectivity of the agents involved. In this encounter the subjects become identified not by their difference, but by their “togetherness-in-difference” which is not to be understood as a final state of success (a goal to be achieved), but the beginning point of how diverse subjects can begin the process of transforming their understandings and their interactions.

Mao further builds the notion of a rhetorical borderland from the combined work of Gloria Anzaldua, Henry Giroux, Mary Louise Pratt and others. For Mao, “becoming” and “togetherness-in-difference” are concepts that are part of the “borderland” metaphor. A rhetorical borderland is more than a metaphorical space, however, it is also a physical space where, in Anzaldua’s words, “two or more cultures edge each other” and, in Giroux’s words, “a space [is] ‘crisscrossed with a variety of languages experiences and voices’” (quoted in Mao 20). For our purposes, the response to the problem of engagement derived from our concern that the local Latino/a population be adequately heard and understood in our community and has taken the form of documenting, mapping, and overseeing the rhetorical borderland as it develops and changes in our corner of the Midwest. However, it is important to note that while we see rhetorical borderlands interact every day, they have a tendency to affect mostly those groups outside of dominant culture. Part of any project designed to intervene into rhetorical borderland issues is to make visible to the dominant culture the sometime invisible borderland.



This project did not begin as a service-learning project; rather it began as a simple attempt to engage with the wider community surrounding USI. Hitchcock, a faculty member in Spanish, had participated in a Lilly-endowed program called Connect with Southern Indiana (CSI) aiming “to boost Indiana’s retention of intellectual capital.” CSI became the proving ground for the genesis of this project. Hitchcock, with partners from education and the private sector, including the co-publisher of one of the area’s few Spanish-language newspapers, sought to create a project aimed at aiding the Spanish-speaking public, but would not do so without carefully eliciting the perspectives of that population group. They developed a Regional Hispanic Community Survey, presented at the formal conclusion of the CSI group’s endeavor in June, 2007, with three objectives: 1) to understand the characteristics of the local Hispanic community, 2) to define the needs of Hispanics, and 3) to determine the true population numbers. The team’s long-term goal was “to see the Latino community integrated into mainstream society, actively involved in all aspects of community life” in a way allowing it to “interact and contribute in a meaningful way while preserving important aspects of culture and traditions.” They struggled as a result of the need for a process in which the assessment of the gathered survey data would reflect multiple points of view, address the validity of prior assumptions, and rigorously go about defining “integration,” a slippery signifier if ever there has been one. They emphasized providing connections so needs could be met, while supporting the community *in keeping its culture intact* and projecting its cultural coherence to the non-Latino community. This is one clear way the rhetorical borderlands often remain invisible: the very discourse the community uses to enable minority communities often reconstitutes them as identity types.

CSI team members found it difficult to implement their plan in part due to the constraints imposed by conflicting professional schedules, in another due to their simple lack of experience in conducting such research. Hitchcock’s discipline of modern languages clearly afforded



him access to more advanced students of Spanish who, through their considerable proficiency in the language, could aid him directly in surveying heritage speakers and, as he imagined it, translate questions and answers from the survey. Nonetheless, a coherent assessment of the intercultural dialogue that would be taking place called for an integrative approach that was facilitated with the addition of Stham to the USI faculty in 2007 as Professor of Sociology and Director of Service-Learning. Given her experience with conducting needs assessments of Latino populations, Stham recognized the possibility she and her field might offer in seeing the project through to fruition by implementing it in her "Human Interaction" course. This capstone course for 15 undergraduates and 5 master's degree students seemed an apt vehicle for interdisciplinary cooperation. Stham suggested a focus group as opposed to a survey approach, and applying methodology that would allow us to hear the actual voices and perspectives of those in the local community.

The students in this course did a qualitative, focus group study in and around the local Latino community, using a Symbolic Interaction approach set forth in the course text (O'Brien). The text focused on the process of identity acquisition and maintenance through ongoing interaction, often discussing the position of marginalized groups in society, raising points that were then applied to the issues faced by the Latino/a community being studied. The Symbolic Interaction perspective undergirds much qualitative work in the field of Sociology, in a way that often sees itself in opposition to more mainstream quantitative work. A combination of ethnographic approaches (field observations, structured depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus groups) are used to produce narratives that reflect the actual lived experiences of often marginalized groups (Strauss and Corbin, Lincoln and Guba), providing an avenue for those voices to be heard. The epistemological notions underlying this approach take "truth" as perspectival and often focus on the plight of oppressed groups.



Using this approach with students can be a powerful experience. Once students sort through the influx of information and learn how to analyze the data, their confidence grows and they begin to reflect on what they are learning. With this project, and an earlier project of depth interviews with welfare recipients, students wrote about their prior assumptions about the group being studied. Sometimes these beliefs were based on previous experience; for example, one student working on this project with the Latino community wrote that he had had a traffic accident involving a Latino man who had no insurance. The student reported that he came away with extremely negative feelings toward the entire group. As the semester ended, he reflected that his impression of the community had changed, that he now had more understanding about the varied experiences of the entire Latino/a community.

Students analyzing the depth interviews with welfare recipients reported a similar trajectory; they had assumed the individuals involved were lazy and just did not want to work, but they now understand the various ways they had come to be poor and so came to believe that most of the poor were working very hard to improve their situation and were often victims of things beyond their control. These changed perspectives seem possible without direct contact between students and the group in question, as both groups above were analyzing qualitative data others had collected. The power of the personal narratives the students were reading, looked at in the detail required by the content analysis, constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss) both classes employed, were the central force in this transformation. Learning may be enhanced as students are given the space to work through their reactions and reflections. Actual interactions do not always allow for this consideration, especially if the interactions are tumultuous, and may actually engender resistance. This is not to say that interpersonal interaction is irrelevant or unnecessary in producing meaningful and lasting change, just that this methodology of engaging students in the process of qualitative research can be transformational. In terms of the model we are using



here, these kinds of narratives help students to understand how they are existing at the juncture of a rhetorical borderland which requires them to, at the very least, rethink the dominant structures of meaning and rhetorical scripts as the only versions of how to understand these cultural interactions. Once we began to involve our students, we began to see change as emanating from several levels: the change in the community suggested by our work and then acted upon by us or others, but also the change that occurred in our students, as they began to see things in a different ways, as they gained more information and perspective. It is our belief that many of the negative feelings currently aimed at this population arise largely from lack of understanding and awareness, as illustrated by some of our students' prior attitudes and beliefs.

Within this framework, the Hispanic Needs Assessment represents what Linda Flower would call a Community Problem-Solving Dialogue (CPSD): "A CPSD tries to bring the voices of Academic Discourse, along with those voices described by that discourse, to the table" (Flower 105). The CPSD builds understanding through collective inquiry into the issues surrounding a community. The definition and production of community as well as awareness of the means by which a community establishes itself and adds to its own understanding is significant here. To communicate across these boundaries requires intercultural and interlingual awareness. Creating a CPSD requires the building of a kind of intercultural communicative competence by which a discursive agent could reduce error by increasing its knowledge about a culture and eliminating the cultural stereotypes that frame initial understandings—precisely the kind of development that happened to Professor Statham's students in their analyses of personal narratives. This has long been the generative model in intercultural communication, as represented by a host of theorists working on what they call the dimensions of culture. For example, Geert Hofstede has created series of indexes based on five dimensions that impact culture: Individualism, Uncertainty Avoidance,



Power Distance, Masculinity, and Long-Term Orientation. For Hofstede, the value of these indices is relational and not essential. That is to say, if a certain culture has a High Masculinity index, which indicates the tendency for aggressive behavior, then that behavior is only relationally valid in interaction with other cultures. Hofstede is not claiming these traits are essentially embodied in the being of each individual member of that culture.

According to these cultural-dimension-based thinkers, someone can develop communicative competence by learning these behavioral traits and using them to seem more like an insider. However, critics challenge models like Hofstede's because they "lack depth in describing cultural mindsets used in daily activities, and ignore the institutional molding of these mindsets" (Gannon 236). Thus the dimensional approach needs broadening in order to maintain the goal of dealing with the Latino community in terms that respects its cultural identity. Moreover, intercultural researchers challenge competence as a teaching model. Michel Candelier of the European Center for Modern Languages argues that because competence requires idealized constructions outside of actual discursive production, its teachability is questionable: "One can even wonder – and this speaks in favour of the usefulness of producing a list of resources – whether a 'competence' ... linked so closely with the diversity of situations where it is used, can really be 'taught'" (18). Candelier goes further and views competences mainly in the domain of social usage / needs, while resources seem rather to belong to the domain of cognitive (and developmental psychology). As a result, while competences come into play when one engages with a task, resources can be defined determinately and worked on practically in the classroom thereby "contributing to the development of competences *via* the resources that are activated" (18). Our collective goal is to find and use the resources that can trigger the kind of rethinking necessary for our students to develop competences within themselves and their communities.





### III. The Courses and Projects

The outcomes of our course projects demonstrate the ways that service-learning can ensure that immigrants' political concerns are considered in the classroom, especially highlighting their need for access to resources and issues pertaining to stereotyping that often create a "fear of the other." But the needs assessment conducted by the first course (Statham's) is also the beginning point for the understanding of the relationships between communities as a rhetorical borderland not just as a site for multicultural interaction, but also for the mapping and development of an understanding of rhetorical resources for negotiation of meaning in communities.

Statham's class organized and conducted 11 focus groups during February and March of 2008, intending that the information would be used by organizations attempting to meet the needs of our growing Latino/a population. The focus groups included Latinos with a range of educational levels and occupational experiences, as well as Anglos who could shed light on the larger community's perceptions. Six of the groups were conducted by Statham, her students, and other community volunteers in English, five in Spanish by Hitchcock, a student, and a heritage speaker on the faculty of another area university. Sites for the groups included four English as Second Language classes for adults, two groups of primarily professional people (Latino/a and Anglo) attempting to assist this population, one Latino/a professional society, one group of Spanish-speaking employees for a local company (white and blue collar workers), and three groups of Anglos (one a student group, another a group of adults in a small neighboring town, and a third group of professionals offering health services to the local community). Because the groups themselves were fairly homogeneous (often the strategy with focus groups), we did not witness much of the code-switching or intercultural interplay that is often encountered in bilingual groups. All of these conversations were carefully transcribed by a professional transcriber or a Spanish-speaking student. The



absence of linguistic shifts may be attributed to two factors: the presence of a facilitator completely fluent in Spanish at all of the Spanish-language sessions and the careful transmission in Spanish of the ground rules for the sessions. Following human subjects protocol, participants were promised confidentiality, instructed not to use their full names and asked to give consent orally on tape, rather than signing consent forms. The settings where the groups met included a public library, churches, and a factory—"natural" contexts, in other words, in which the respondents regularly worked and met for a variety of purposes, ranging from social to educational to spiritual. In many cases, the focus group was held at a regularly scheduled gathering time. In others, the conductors traveled to places of employment for special meetings. While the quotes from the focus groups given below represent points that most in our sample seemed to agree with, we identify the type of group for further clarification.

The students in the class were trained to analyze qualitative data using a content analysis approach (Glaser and Strauss). Themes which emerged from repeated readings by several individuals were then further examined for finer details. Several themes emerged that seemed to account for the data as a whole. First, the data suggest that the city's Latino/a population perceives this community in Southern Indiana to be friendly, accessible and peaceful, that it is, overall, a good place to raise a family. The transcribed comments below from varied groups illustrate this point:

The people have acted very well, nice businesses; there is no racism like in other regions of the United States. (3, English as a second language group)

Raising a family... it's a good place, even though when you hear a lot about meth labs and problems with the students ... there's not too much like that. I think it's a good place to raise a family. It's a family place. . . . It's not like Atlanta . . . here it's more . . . calm. (5, Latino/a Professional Association)



...it was very important for us to get any of the jobs that we got here, so . . . that was . . . one of the things that I find very attractive here, and of course along with that is . . . the . . . access to all the resources and everything that we can have. (8, professional group, Anglos and Latinos)

However, our respondents also reported that Latinos have encountered significant problems with language barriers, stereotypes, and access to services and medical treatment. Both Latinos and Anglos said there was a problem with lack of cultural diversity:

The music lacks something here . . . . When I got here . . . almost no one listened to the music . . . I missed the fresh fruit . . . the huge papayas . . . (11, Spanish-speaking employees, white and blue collar)

There is quite a big gap and we, as Americans need to be educated as to what their culture is. Once we are able to learn more about the Hispanic, the further we can progress with our society. (6, Anglo student group)

Focus group participants also reported problems gaining access to basic services:

...Doctors, services, garages...everything you need...What is lacking is for people to be aware...If I didn't come to mass, as I do...We should be able to find information, like you see sometimes available in restaurants...It's not reaching people, the information is not getting out there... (2, professional group, Anglos and Latino/as)

It was my monthly time to be examined and I was going to hospitals and...all the other hospitals...were closed because of...the weather. We went to three separate hospitals and they were all closed. We went to one and they wouldn't attend to me. They asked me if it was urgent... (4, English as a second language group)



Also there is no map, even though a great effort was made to get one in Spanish, the little book with bus routes, but there is no map that tells you everything about the regular routes, so that if I live in this place ...I can take this one here and here I change...there isn't any that will tell you, this line covers such and such parts of the city, I can use transportation from here, and then change, there just isn't any. (1, English as a second language group)

A complaint about the lack of access to community information was also consistently registered, insomuch as news items are always delivered in English:

Latinos are seeking radio stations to have school closings in Spanish and also on local news stations...How many times do people go out exposed to a danger because there isn't any way to find out in Spanish what is happening, then you hear alarms on television, but the majority of Hispanics don't know any English, they don't have channels in Spanish, it's all in English, so they don't find out about what is going on. If the local station doesn't... start a Spanish language channel, well, maybe this isn't the moment for an all-Spanish station, but now when there is a weather alert or something, above all. (2, professional group, Anglos and Latino/as)

However, the problem discussed more frequently involved assumptions, stereotypes and harassment:

They were harassing in class and speaking very demeaning and there were some Mexican students, legal and their parents work at [SPECIFIC COMPANY]. They started getting phone calls at the house in the middle of the night, they starting getting [harassed] by other kids that were in the class and the teacher said... "All those little Mexicans." So that's happening here already. (8, professional group, Anglos and Latino/as)





...some boys knew that I was the only Hispanic in that building... kids from the university...they were always doing something, putting stuff on my car, and they knew I was Hispanic...I don't know if they are really racist or if they simply didn't like Hispanics. (11, Spanish-speaking employees, white and blue collar)

...right now the Hispanic population does not trust anyone, because they're trying to feed their families, trying to not get caught...not get thrown in jail. (2, professional group, Anglos and Latino/as)

...We who have to do the worst jobs, take up the worst stuff...often they order us around rudely, and we don't think that is right, because there is a lot of racism.....on the part of the supervisors, and it's rare to find a supervisor who's not that way at [SPECIFIC COMPANY]. There are one or two that aren't racist like the rest... All the Americans are... (11, Spanish-speaking employees, white and blue collar)

My husband's from Bolivia and we found that a lot of people just assume that he's from Mexico because he has an accent... We've even had people say my sister-in-law speaks Mexican. (2, professional group, Anglos and Latino/as)

I have an accent, and as soon as I open my mouth, I'm asked, 'Where are you from?' And when I say Mexico, they don't seem impressed, and I'm like, 'Did you know that I have a master's degree and probably more education than you do?' (2, professional group, Anglos and Latino/as)

I have a coworker who stared at me and asked me, 'How much you charge me for mowing my lawn?' I told him, 'I charge about \$100.' He said, 'Oh, that's too much,' I said, 'How much do you charge?' He said, '\$50.' 'Okay, mow my lawn.' He looked at me and turned around and went away and after talking...he realized that I was an engineer and he was an electrician, then he apologizes



and I said, 'Well, don't use the people for how they look.' (5, Latino/a professional association)

From our transcripts, the class derived this list of needs that were emphasized in the focus groups:

1. Start a Spanish radio and television station, and do announcements in Spanish;
2. Hire bilingual staff for schools, hospitals, clinics, etc.;
3. Offer easily accessible classes in English on a consistent basis;
4. Create Spanish-speaking or bilingual day care;
5. Offer education about different cultural groups to the community at large;
6. Offer more help for parents trying to help their children with homework;
7. Create a Latino Welcome Center for newcomers, include temporary housing;
8. Create a total picture of METS routes in Spanish that shows the entire city;
9. Offer small business training to members of this community;
10. Improve access to drivers' licenses and insurance;
11. Create a visa category for those with less education;
12. Establish a process for granting visas and extending stays through consensus;
13. Put local resources into efforts to improve the situation. Do not depend on volunteers.



As you will see, other service-learning classes have been able to pick up on some of these issues, and other community groups are attending to others. Statham and Hitchcock spent a good deal of time visiting with groups to discuss how these needs could be met. The local paper is now publishing a Spanish/English newspaper every other month. A local bank is spearheading efforts to fund business training for the small business owners in this group. Several community organizations are looking into establishing bilingual day care situations. Several groups are talking about collaborating to increase access to English classes. The class produced a power point for presentation, and a narrated version is now on our service-learning website, for anyone in the community to access.

While some of the sentiments contained in the quotes were more or less common among some of our subgroups – for example, the more educated Latino/as were more likely to emphasize accessibility issues, problems with being mistaken for lower status workers and knew more about the resources in the community while less educated Latino/as more often talked about difficulties finding English classes or jobs or getting to work and stressed more often their image as hard workers, and Anglos were less aware than Latino/as of all of these issues—there was remarkable agreement across these groups on many of the issues raised and the way the community was characterized. The comments can be summarized as representing a candid, constructive, and occasionally pointed critique of the community in which Latino/as live and work.

These common threads of marginalization tying together the various discourses encountered in the eleven focus groups indicates that variations in socioeconomic background and English language proficiency do not diminish the shared sense among Latino/a respondents of the pervasiveness of the simplistic Anglo reduction of the “other.” It also reveals a widespread perception among Latinos of the absence of existing communicative vehicles capable of facilitating both the



recognition and appreciation of the integrity and diversity within the Latino/a community by many of those outside this group. Some of these views appear to be shared by some Anglo groups, as well. Nevertheless, the general attractiveness of the region, in offering Latino/as the opportunity to build a new life in a historically safe and wholesome environment, can be seen as instilling within the respondents the belief that mobilization of the community and a coherent action plan merit a significant effort to alter the cultural landscape. Such a conclusion is certainly evident in the constructive suggestions for improvement that the needs assessment document summarized. Hence, service-learning has the potential to identify/uncover serious issues and, based on the response to our presentations, motivate community players (including other service-learning instructors) to respond to these needs. And the expression of issues in narrative form has the potential to change the views of the students doing the work, as well as those receiving the information.

Micer’s class built upon this work. When he heard about the Hispanic Needs Assessment developed by Professors Statham and Hitchcock, it occurred to him that this might be a powerful way to engage his students in thinking through an intercultural rhetorical problem. What we found in the needs assessment was an opportunity to do a series of projects that would benefit the Latino/a community on two levels: reducing their burdens in belonging to a new community and increasing the new community’s understanding of their new neighbors. His Intercultural Technical Writing (ITW) class began with the premise that when a person writes and designs texts they are doing so for global audiences which often have different rhetoric(s) for communicating. On the one hand, a rhetoric-based technical writing course which starts from this premise will take the understanding of diversity to be of primary interest, and not an additional construct, thereby transforming the study of diversity within business, scientific, and technical writing fields. On the other hand, in its most practical terms, a course in the rhetoric(s) of intercultural technical writing will prepare students from a host of disciplines with the ability to discern, understand, and



use the codes, conventions, and structures of discourse of differing cultures as resources for the development of strategies designed to improve relations across rhetorical borderlands. Starting with the Needs Assessment as a CPSD, the ITW class decided on three inquiry-based projects: a translation of the Metropolitan Evansville Transit System's (METS) bus route maps; a pamphlet that explains cultural differences within as well as between Hispanic populations in the area; and a brochure that outlines the types of identification needed to attain access to necessary services of survival (school enrollment, driver's license, health, rental, auto, homeowner's insurance, and so forth). In this way, our project did begin with the political concerns of immigrants, and continues to do so. For the purposes of space, we will present only the METS map project.

The Hispanic Needs Assessment, as a CPSD, establishes more than needs, providing for intercultural communicators the resources by which competencies can be developed to construct rhetorical hybrids—a Latin-American rhetoric of sorts. The job of the members of each community is to identify these resources so they can see how to translate them into rhetorical hybrids. Again, it is necessary to see this as a kind of transformation of the self, what Mao calls “becoming,” in which a performative identity is constituted for the performance of a competency. Without the direct material production of a rhetorical borderland, such performative competencies are often left undistinguished. The goal of ITW—while taking into account its listed course outcomes—also developed the necessity of drawing the attention to the very idea of an existing rhetorical borderland without which any changes to the community's already existing practices would seem to be wasteful expenditures of both time and money.

The first objective of the class was to do the required research that would allow us to generate a list of resources from which we could base competence on specificity and not generalized cultural sensitivity, a model that requires working through stereotypes and the gradual erasure



of the stereotypes. Instead, for the class to focus on creating discursive practices that would not interrupt the community's sense of culture, we needed to understand specific discursive practices in their otherness as members enact or perform them. The Needs Assessment functions in high regard here, as do the narratives Statham's students analyzed. They become an archive of “speech acts” in which members of the Latino/a community, not particularly fearful of reprisal so perhaps more culture-bound than other kinds of communication, complain, promise, construct, explain, and question their world with words.

Using the work of intercultural technical communicators Thatcher, Conoway and Wardrope, and Wardrope, the class identified the following resources as rhetorical resources we should try to implement in our documents: *palanca*, or leveraging—using someone with power to communicate for you; *simpatía*, “agreeability in the face of disagreeability” (Wardrope); *respeto*, an expectation that people should be treated with dignity, reflected through appropriate non-verbal behavior; *confianza*, or trustworthiness—preferring the trust and confidence of established relationships and cultural insight over credentials and outsiders; and *personalismo*, reference to the degree of warmth of a personal relationship. The value of these Latino/a concepts as resources is determined to the extent that they construct a hybrid rhetoric that is useful in our discursive dealings. At the beginning of their project, the METS group hypothesized using *respeto* and *confianza* to create a bus riding experience that provides an immigrant with a sense of belonging.

Immediately, however, the students ran into problems. The first problem was based on a perceived weakness in the existing informational infrastructure of METS itself. The students were unable to find a specific way to “map” the rhetorical resources on to the new map. The felt they didn't have enough information about what it might mean to be Latino. Interestingly, their initial failures began to emulate the “rhetoric of complaint and blame” that underscores the speech-



acts of the Needs Assessment. According to Flower, the rhetoric of complaint and blame “takes the form of a vigorous rehearsal of the wrongs by others in a context they [the speakers] do not control” (“Intercultural Knowledge Building” 250). The students blamed the Transit System itself for the problems involved with making the map which arose out of a developing sympathy with local immigrants—because if students could not figure out how to deal with the existing documents for the METS routes, how could non-native immigrants be able to navigate it. While reading through the narratives triggered an effective and productive response in Statham’s students, for Micer the reactions created a problematic that needed more community interaction to resolve. Flower suggests the development of rival hypotheses as a way to break out of the rhetoric of complaint and blame. We now realize that a critical part of the process is to provide students with the interpretive tools that will enable them to differentiate their own values from the values of the community they are entering into. This is an important prelude to preparing students for productive rhetorical work in the community.

While the research is still ongoing, the METS group ultimately created a feasibility study that challenged its initial mission. The group found the very idea of a map—particularly of the kind we were thinking about (an individualized map that could be folded and placed in pockets) to be problematic because it is a particularly Western culture-bound idea (cf. Ihde 73-102). In addition, they felt the rhetorical forms were not emerging from the everyday experience of bus riding. While a concept like *confianza* makes perfect sense in a document providing directions on how to perform a particular attention-demanding task, riding a bus should be a more comfortable experience. The students reasoned that a map was overkill because consistent bus riders would only ever need it once or twice before they figured out the route. They also cited evidence from Thatcher and Wardrope about Latin American respect for spoken word instructions over written instructions.



Micer tried a new strategy asking the students to think through rhetorical style as a kind of bodily comportment in relation to the bus-riding environment (Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus 19-28). The students responded with a working theory about how the bus itself could become humanized—the bus should itself become the bearer of *confianza*, *respeto*, and *personalismo*. The students created the following list of transformations: first, a map of the entire METS system should be created and placed on the inside of each bus, as with many metro transit systems across the country; second, the bus routes should replace local Evansville place name routes with routes identified by colors (colors should include “typical” Latin American colors in dialogue with “typical” American colors) and letters or numbers (creating *confianza*); third, all METS maps should show these changes and offer a translation of all English directions in Spanish—to be constructed in the same font type and size (offering *respeto*); fourth, METS buses should list in the front window, beside or below the route color, number and letter, all of the stops and transfer points the bus crosses instead of only the first and last stop (this is common in many Latin American countries, again creating *confianza* and *personalismo*).

For the students, the lesson they learned, and what they taught Micer, is that it is precisely the immersive context of the service-learning enterprise with its contingencies and rhetorical borderland strife that creates a successful rhetorical performance. While the response by the students did not take the particular discursive hybrid form Micer was hoping for (it’s a lot easier to put a map in a Faculty Annual Report than it is a bus), they constructed a new model of awareness, of togetherness-in-difference, and rhetorically engaged an issue to bridge cultural differences. As Mao puts it, it is extremely unlikely some form of “rhetorical creole” (149) emerges from these types of interaction. Because of this, we will likely have to keep re-visiting these kinds of inquiry seeking resources to recognize and celebrate the absolute otherness of these forms of acting in the world. These resources, combined with the insights learned over the course of the



semester, not only helped to build competencies to understand how to exist together in difference, but also become the ground on which to build other courses and continue work on some of these projects.

Hitchcock's Spanish for Business class, still in the planning stage, attempts to build on the ground that Statham's and Micer's classes helped to create. In most college programs such courses have been devoted historically to instructing students in the lexicon of forms and documents typically encountered in international trade. These types of courses do not however necessarily afford students opportunities for direct contact with companies engaged in such commerce. The traditional course's potential for *experiential learning* might have been constrained by mere geography (i.e., the absence within nearby communities of Hispanic firms or even an identifiable Latino population) but also by the faculty's inexperience with service-learning. Hitchcock's great lesson—and, for a seeker of academic innovation and social justice, a fortuitous one as well—from his initial encounter with service-learning is that one outreach project can be anticipated to generate another, in that each project contains the potential of raising the standard of how an instructor understands personal and community transformations as necessary outcomes of academic work. In offering (for the first time in his four years at USI) a professions-oriented course about which several Spanish majors had inquired, Hitchcock now perceives as both viable and necessary the incorporation of a service-learning component into the course as a means for making such an experience transformative. The customary heavy doses of translation exercises, preparation of legal documents in Spanish, and memorization of long lists of vocabulary lists—all arguably necessary tasks but too often taught in isolation from the communities supposedly being “learned” about—can be balanced by students' direct engagement with many of the Latino and Anglo shareholders Hitchcock encountered in the needs assessment project. Those shareholders represent a sizeable group and one able to speak more directly than the instructor to many of the issues that these students can be expected to confront in the



increasingly likely event that their professional direction draws them toward situations involving producers and consumers from different ethnicities than their own. These issues, in all likelihood, will replicate those that emerged as significant for the Latinos surveyed in the needs assessment. Among those participating directly as respondents in that earlier project were several officers of an outreach group called Hospitality and Outreach for Latin Americans (HOLA), comprised of members of the growing Southern Indiana Latino business community. Hence, HOLA was clearly an obvious partner needed to move the town-gown connection forward in a constructive way in the business course, enriching its content by inviting students to attend business meetings, assigning them practical tasks to be completed, advising them on the behavioral norms of Latino/a commerce.

Hitchcock's Business Spanish students will produce two principal products: an individually generated portfolio of the imaginary company and a group-produced white paper profiling area Latino/a business. These projects will function as resources to develop greater empathy with the community being researched and to increase understanding of the practical application of the linguistic tools students will acquire. Also, not insignificantly, the products will stimulate students to continue to master the language. Again, however, an understanding of transformation of the undergraduate can be extended to the potential each holds of altering the communities in which the graduate may choose to reside. Like Micer's students, it can be surmised that those enrolled in Spanish for Business will be more likely as young professionals to adopt a more proactive approach to resolving conflict and facilitating engagement in the intercultural situations that inevitably await them.

The same rhetorical forces recognized as constructive in reimagining a city bus map can be doubly employed when the architects of new models of commercial relationships are also empowered by their linguistic mastery—the historically identified, primary outcome of



language programs—and have been aided in pursuing their objectives by the service-learning partner already possessing the heritage tool of the Spanish language. The partnerships developed in the academic course become self-perpetuating and self-multiplying in the post-graduate's "real" business environment, to the extent to which a scenario can be imagined in which a rich network of ethnically diverse players possess a level of mutual awareness and respect that increases the potential for a level business playing field. Certainly, particular conclusions drawn from the needs assessment project about the absence of community media and health services aimed at the Latino population have served as catalysts for faculty reassessment of the entire slate of Spanish offerings offered in the university, highlighting the potential for integrating service-learning components in some courses, such as advanced conversation, and the need for creating others, such as Spanish for the medical and legal professions, respectively. Hitchcock can imagine, for example, a service-learning endeavor involving advanced conversation students creating and participating in a Spanish-language community affairs program, partnering with a local radio station, or another classroom situation in which future health care professionals, working with a local hospital, produce a DVD about basic first aid. Above all, Hitchcock recognizes now that concrete service-learning can result in increasing faculty and student sensitivity to the meaningfulness of interdisciplinary work and its potential for effecting genuine social change—an immeasurably important lesson for all members of a growing university.

#### IV. Conclusions

Our interdisciplinary effort shows the strengths – and issues – that can arise by working across academic borders. None of these projects would have been possible without input from the other disciplines represented here. Hitchcock's earlier community work, within his disciplinary framework, looking at Spanish culture, set the stage for Statham's Sociology class project. Also, the students in Statham's



class benefited greatly from the insights Hitchcock could offer them about Latino/a culture and experience, as they were conducting the focus groups and analyzing the data. His students benefited a good deal from their involvement in this project, as transcribers, facilitators and translators. Micer might have also found it useful if Hitchcock had interacted with his class.

Micer's project took off from the needs assessment accomplished by Statham's students. While the project began as an attempt to bridge cultural difference through the analysis and production of hybrid discourses for the sake of easing the local Latino community's restriction on movement—it developed its own transformative potentiality. The students, while looking for resources to hybridize cultural forms pushed past the conceptual to deal with the average Spanish-speaking person on the ground in their capacity for everyday movement. While the professor was trying to get them to recognize all semester the material force of rhetorical affects, the students turned it around to show how the rhetorical force emerged from the embodied interaction. It is arguable—and we do argue here—that only service-learning enterprises have the capacity to create the immersive and immanent environment for students to be able to work with the contingencies of everyday life to better understand the everyday and also the transformative potential of thought and action within the everyday.

Hitchcock's anticipated projects were influenced by the Hispanic Needs Assessment in the first place, and then also by the opportunity to observe the project as it moved across courses and disciplines. In turn, Hitchcock's connections in the Latino/a community facilitated important partnerships for the Micer's and Statham's projects.

We hope we have provided models for others about how to manage the tension between our own research processes, our students' engagement with difference, and everyday people's efforts to bridge cultural differences. Through a reexamination of competencies through





differing resources, we have learned how to listen to the input of other cultures and languages, and how to reconcile diverse voices for the purpose of proposed community change. In the end, the strong bonds between the southwestern Indiana region and the university have reflected the belief that we educate leaders for a specific place and a specific historical moment. The greatest possible outcome of the service-learning experience is the liberation of its learners from the racial and ethnic stereotyping that, while not always overt, constitutes an obstacle to “doing business” in ways that forward *all* community interests without diminishing the uniqueness of the various cultures within the general community.

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## Disrupting Discourse: Introducing Mexicano Immigrant Success Stories

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The goal of this article is to disrupt and challenge the negative discourses often associated with Mexican immigrants by introducing Mexicano concepts of success, including buena gente, buen trabajador, and bien educado. These concepts emerged within a Mexicano immigrant community in California that I have been a part of for more than ten years. In collecting data for this project, I conducted a qualitative study, using ethnographic methods, over a two-year period. This article focuses on two individuals: Luis and Armando.

*Caught between the Indio-Mexicano rural uncles  
 who stacked hundred pound sacks of pinto beans  
 on boxcars all day, and worked the railroad tracks  
 behind the Sturgis sheds, who sang Apache songs  
 with accordions, and Chávez uncles and aunts  
 who vacationed and followed the Hollywood model  
 of My Three Sons for their own families,  
 sweeping the kitchen before everyone came to visit,  
 looking at photo albums in the parlor.  
 (Jimmy Santiago Baca, 17)*

**W**ho am I? Definitely not Mexican American. Not really Chicano. *Yo soy Mexicano*. Growing up in a migrant community where most of us were first generation Mexicano, I always identified myself as one. Much different than