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Caryn Chaden, Roger Graves, David A. Jolliffe,
Peter Vandenberg

Confronting Clashing Discourses Writing the Space Between Classroom and Community in Service-Learning Courses

The authors argue that writing-intensive service-learning courses extend the lessons of first-year composition courses by teaching students how to understand and negotiate differences between the discourses of the academy and those of community-based organizations. While first-year writing courses lead students through successive approximations of a generalized academic discourse in the relative safety of the composition classroom, service-learning courses create conditions in which students must confront clashing discourses in action. This article presents vignettes of three different courses, one of which intentionally tapped into the discourse tensions the students faced and the other two of which encountered these tensions as impediments to successful teaching problems that could be overcome in future versions of the courses. The challenge of negotiating competing discourses will inevitably be part of any service-learning course that involves extensive writing, the authors conclude; hence this issue should be addressed explicitly in readings, class discussions, and student papers. When addressed directly, the friction between discourses can become a teachable space where teachers can help students explore options for addressing dissonance, and so provide everyone involved with an opportunity for transformation.

Why do students take composition courses in college? What are students supposed to learn in such courses? These thorny questions, as rich and generative as they are difficult to answer, represent an appropriate point of departure for the argument we put forward in this paper. Community-based service learning courses that involve extensive student writing can be seen as complements to, and extensions of, introductory composition courses. Such service-learning courses can teach students two important principles about the relation between literacy and discourse: first, that discourse is a strong formative intellectual and social force and, second, that operating in new sites where knowledge work is done, whether inside the academy or beyond it, may require students to work through tensions caused by opposing discourses and to negotiate and establish new discursive positions for themselves as writers, thinkers, and citizens.

Just as first-year composition can teach students how to understand and produce academic discourse (or perhaps how to effect the transition from the

discourse of personal, expressive writing to that of the stance-oriented, thesis-focused academic paper), so can writing-intensive service-learning courses teach students how to understand and negotiate differences between the discourses of the academy and those of community-based agencies and organizations. Service-learning courses, along with the service activities students engage in, ideally can provide entry points from which students begin to examine different discursive perspectives, different ways of seeing the world through language acts. The degree to which students explore these other discourses depends, in large measure, on their resistance to, or acceptance of, the service mission of the course. Some venture quite far into these new worlds, exploring them via their reading, writing, and fieldwork. Others hang around the gate, waiting for it to open again at the end of the class period so that they can return to the more familiar discursive worlds of their academic, personal, or work environments. In this paper, we describe how we came to understand experiences in our own students, and we explain how our collective thinking about how discourse works can help us teach our courses differently in the future.

The authors of this paper have all taught writing-intensive, community-based service-learning courses, components of DePaul University's junior-year experiential education requirement, a vital part of the University's four-year general education curriculum. Our courses were versions of the English Department's contribution to the work of DePaul's Irwin W. Steans Center for Community-Based Service Learning. CbSL, as it is known at DePaul, coordinates about 50 courses a year, each of which involves a combination of classroom learning and service work in some community agency or site. DePaul's administration sees the scope and importance of CbSL as central to the University's focus on community service in its urban, Catholic, Vincentian mission. At DePaul, such service is a focused choice on the part of faculty, staff, alumni, and students to work with all groups of people who experience health, racial and ethnic, gender, and class differences. CbSL seeks to create an intellectual and social environment . . . where students and community are empowered to become active participants in shaping a more equitable, egalitarian, and livable world (Mission Statement n. p.).

Three of the four authors taught sections of a course called Writing and Social Engagement; the fourth taught a course called Literature and Social Engagement. From the outset, we must admit that we were not fully aware that the discursive phenomena we describe below would come into play when we began teaching our courses. This document, therefore, might be read simply as an analytic narrative of our courses, one of which intentionally tapped into the discourse tensions the students faced and the other two of

which encountered them as impediments to successful teaching problems that can be overcome in future versions of the courses. More importantly, though, we hope our work can contribute both to a theoretical discussion about the types of literacy college students should study and strive to acquire and to a practical examination of what students, faculty members, and community participants should expect in terms of the rhetorical activity of service-learning courses and experiences.

Literacy, Discourse, and Composition Courses in College

Most people in composition studies would agree that one of the functions of first-year composition is to introduce students to the new literacy demands facing them. Aiming to foster a national conversation about the goals of the introductory college writing course, the Council of Writing Program Administrators has developed a cogent and compelling document, its Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. The WPA document maintains that students in first-year composition courses should acquire four categories of knowledge: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing abilities; knowledge of, and facility with, writing processes; and knowledge of conventions. Certainly no one would want to eliminate anything from this menu, but we propose that students in composition courses should develop an additional type of knowledge, a type that could either be subsumed under rhetorical knowledge or made a category of its own knowledge of the nature and power of discourse. Students in first-year composition courses could certainly be introduced to a set of elementary principles about discourse. A thorough, working knowledge of these principles would generally help students succeed as readers and writers in all their courses. In particular, we have found that the saliency and force of this knowledge come to the forefront in service-learning courses that require significant student writing.

Discourse is, of course, a trendy term, and some instructors might shy away from teaching about it because it smacks of theory-speak. However, like many critical concepts that it would help college writers to know (deconstruction is another example), discourse is not as difficult to grasp as a concept as some explications of it might suggest. Discourse can have three senses: a meaningful passage of spoken or written language; a passage that reflects the social, epistemological, and rhetorical practices of a group; and the power of language to reflect and constrain these practices (Jolliffe). The first meaning prevails in mainstream linguistics, which generally embraces an implicit definition of discourse as any stretch of language longer than a sentence that displays at least minimal organization, coher-

ence, and cohesion. The other two meanings have been developed in philosophy, literary criticism, and critical linguistics and are more germane to our work. In these fields, discourse can be a count noun or an abstract noun. As a count noun, discourse refers to passages of language that reflect the social, epistemological, and rhetorical practices of a specific group. As early as 1930, for example, the Russian linguist V. N. Volosinov maintained that village sewing circles, urban carouses, workers lunchtime chats, etc., will all have their own type [of discourse]. Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organization of audience (97). Treating discourse as a count noun allows scholars to describe and analyze, for example, the discourse of feminism, the discourse of public education, or the discourse of literary criticism.

The notion of a discourse as the linguistic manifestation of the ideologies and practices of a group is closely related to the abstraction of discourse, the sense of discourse in general: the power of language in groups to create the entities being discussed, to shape ideologies, to validate statements as being in the true (Mills 18). Echoing the work of Michel Foucault, who characterizes discourse as a collection of practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (49), Norman Fairclough describes the dialectical relation between a discourse as a linguistic manifestation and discourse in general as a socially constitutive power:

On the one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels: by class and other social relations at a societal level, by the relations specific to particular institutions such as law or education, by systems of classification, by various norms and conventions of both a discursive and non-discursive nature, and so forth. . . . On the other hand, discourse is socially constitutive. . . . Discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them. Discourse is a practice not of just representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning. (64)

In other words, social organizations such as, for example, college classrooms or community-service sites create discourses: statements embodying assumptions that underlie the organizations work, key phrases and terms that are particularly meaningful to the organizations initiates, and so on. At the same time, however, discourse creates the social organizations the issues and concepts they discuss and act upon and the personae of the people who think, write, speak, and discuss within them. To a great extent, social organizations deal in words, data, and visual images. Discourse is the power that creates and gives structure to an organization s

problems and players.

Our experiences teaching writing-intensive service learning courses lead us to believe that students in all college writing courses, beginning and advanced, need to know something about the power dynamic inherent in this dual nature of discourse. In what has become a classic article in composition studies, David Bartholomae in *Inventing the University* attributes his first-year students' problems with a paper about Bleak House to their being trapped between two discourses. The papers, Bartholomae writes, are evidence of a discourse that lies between what I might call the students' primary discourse (what the students might write about Bleak House were they not in my class or in any class and were they not imagining that they were in my class or in any class if you can imagine any such student doing any such thing) and standard, official literary criticism (which is imaginable but impossible to find) (146). Bartholomae asserts that a student's writing may be limited as much by a student's ability to imagine what might be said as it is by cognitive control strategies (146). Accordingly, Bartholomae calls for a first-year writing pedagogy that would lead students to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that determine what might be said and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community (146).

We found that service-learning courses requiring extensive writing demand a similar sensitivity to the definition and power of discourse, but faculty members and students in these courses need to be aware of at least two levels of tension beyond those Bartholomae describes. Certainly, students in our service-learning courses found themselves engaged in the same tension Bartholomae describes, between their primary discourses and those of the academy. But they also found themselves immersed in a tension between their personal primary discourses and the discourses of the community agencies they were serving and between the institutional discourses about service learning that DePaul fosters and the discourse of the community agencies. As the vignettes below about our courses make clear, service-learning courses can teach students a valuable lesson about writing by helping them understand and negotiate these tensions, certainly a real world ability that they can draw on during and after their college years.

Peter Vandenberg's Rhetoric of Graffiti Course:

Service-Learning as Ameliorative Discourse?

Should composition instruction be designed to teach students about, and equip them in the use of, the discourses of the academic disciplines repre-

sented at their universities? Should it be designed to teach students about, and equip them in the use of, the discourses that educated, enlightened citizens encounter in their lives beyond the university walls? Should it be some combination of both? No matter which discourses writing instruction is designed to illuminate and promote, writing courses are nearly always situated in classrooms. And, in a maddening fashion, the pedagogies imagined for innovative composition instruction often dissolve in the face of practical classroom constraints. Consider trying to teach public discourse in a composition class. For most people, the university defines the real world by its absence from it, and teachers of rhetoric who would emphasize public discourse struggle against a cluster of restrictions, including their role as evaluator, that together serve as a mighty prophylaxis (Vandenberg). Such teachers routinely contrive rhetorical situations and posture as members of audiences they can only vaguely imagine; in place of a living debate, they too frequently offer students textbook Frankenstein's anthologies composed of context-free excerpts, the dismembered limbs of other people's situated expression of value and commitment. An unforgiving master trope, irony appears to govern the teaching of rhetoric effective public discourse in an institution seemingly designed to frustrate contact with a wider public.

Service-learning, therefore, appears doubly attractive to teachers of composition and rhetoric who hope their students can learn something about public discourse. Such courses surely engage the impulse to serve that is fostered by the study of rhetoric, and many are personally motivated to bring together social and institutional responsibilities. The payoff for teachers is great, however, because it also allows them to better encourage their students to compose themselves as citizen-rhetors, real participants situated in real rhetorical situations with real stakes (Ervin, *Encouraging*). If literacy means what it does for James Paul Gee facility in discourses other than those into which one is born then achieving literacy demands work beyond the classroom, it requires exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings (8). Service-learning promotes literacy in ways that the classroom simply cannot by placing students at a broad intersection of discourses. But these out-of-classroom experiences come with an obligation to explore along with students the implications of a service-related education, and these implications often entangle students in tensions between discourses.

Peter Vandenberg's Writing and Social Engagement course, *The Rhetoric of Graffiti*, immediately thrusts students into the space between discourses where identity is tested, where values are adjudicated, where meanings are altered. The term graffiti marks the contested ground into

which the course inquires. A graffiti can mean crime to one reader and art to another; business to someone who profits from its removal and work to a public employee who is charged with erasing it; threat to a homeowner in one neighborhood and beautification to a marginal shopkeeper with no budget for exterior paint.

Multiple public discourses have a stake in the production, maintenance, and eradication of graffiti, and *The Rhetoric of Graffiti* offers students the chance to engage these discourses where they live. Vandenberg invited a range of guests to the classroom: a detective with the Chicago Police Department's Gang Unit, whose reading of alley walls and viaducts constitutes gathering intelligence; employees of the city's Streets and Sanitation Department, one of whom timidly expressed ambivalence in front of his superiors about occasionally erasing something he admired; a convicted graffiti writer, who described graffiti as a politically motivated challenge to institutionalized neglect in some of Chicago's South Side neighborhoods. While logistics made it difficult to bring these folks into contact with each other, students were given the task of engaging each guest with the claims and warrants of others.

The class spent nearly as many contact hours outside the classroom as well: at an Islamic community center on the far-south lakefront, whose outdoor mural needed a top-coat of anti-graffiti sealant; at a struggling private middle school in one of the city's most depressed neighborhoods, where parents and administration wanted graffiti painted over; in a Hispanic area on the city's West Side where community members regularly patrolled the alleys with buckets and rollers.

One crisp April Saturday, members of the class accompanied a pair of West Side community leaders into the Hermosa neighborhood to cover gang graffiti. Armed with paint provided by the mayor's Graffiti Blasters program and brushes donated by the local alderman and thoroughly introduced to the discourse about gangs and graffiti that dominates city government in Chicago—the students were prepared to work, apparently, in service of the homeowners. While most students had become fairly open to studying graffiti as symbolic exchange rather than static art or mindless vandalism, gang graffiti for many continued to signify no more than the threat of violence and they were happy to eradicate it. Quickly, however, students came to see firsthand that the rhetoric of middle-class property rights inherent in the discourse of the mayor's office and the community leaders didn't necessarily prevail here. As students began to knock on doors to politely ask homeowners if they'd like graffiti on their structures covered, the community leaders moved down the alley ahead, painting over tags and assorted other images

at their own discretion. As they explained, city ordinance subjected property owners to fines for not erasing graffiti if they asked permission and a property owner refused, they would simply report the matter to Streets and Sanitation. Why bother asking?

Some students responded to this logic by joining the community leaders, others continued to knock on doors before painting, and some students troubled by the ambiguity and feeling out of place turned in their brushes and just followed along. While students covered graffiti in the breezeway between a couple of two-flats, a man emerged from one of the buildings and began bagging trash that had accumulated along his fence line. Some students gathered around a police cruiser that shadowed the entourage most of the morning, engaging the officers in a critique of the gang members work. At about the same time, across the alley, a woman angrily ordered the two community leaders and other students away from her garage. Someone had left one very small, gang-related image near the center of her door. Take it away, she said, and they ll be back with something bigger, or something worse.

Those West Side alleys were contact zones in a way no classroom could have pretended to be; here students experienced the clash and grapple of discourses, of competing values and perspectives of making and unmaking meaning in a living context. In his final Service Reflection paper, a student named Mike described the day this way:

[T]hat woman in Hermosa . . . appeared not to be in favor of the gang graffiti we were painting over, but her reasoning was simply different from ours as to how to deal with it. . . . I also thought that the timing of her tirade was kind of funny, and really rather poignant. It was just after that one guy had sought us out and asked us to take care of all the graffiti that covered (and I mean covered!) the building he lived in. In that situation, we were instantly exposed to both sides of the coin.

The class worked up and down a three block area that morning, and by the time the day s work had finished it was clear that editing-as-service was far more complicated than many students had imagined. And this complexity was inscribed along the alleys through which the class walked. When graffiti is painted over it isn t exactly eradicated; one set of signifiers is replaced with another. Asked to think about graffiti as symbolic action rather than just art or just vandalism, students were also growing increasingly adept at reading the implications of the stark, white squares they had haphazardly composed. They were coming to realize that these squares were visible products of a discourse in their own right.

What the Chicago mayor s office refers to as a war against graffiti is a war of signs, a clash of discourses, at every level. As students began to see

their own painting as a rhetorical act, they began to balk at the course's service requirements. Echoing Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer, they demanded a detailed discussion of the question, In the service of what? So that they might understand a notion of service that did not simply project middle-class values as determinants of need (see Cushman, Herzberg), Vandenberg asked the class to read and discuss Lorie Goodman's Just Serving/Just Writing. In a tempered response to the idealism of service learning, Goodman points out that those engaged in service must consistently ask of themselves, Why are you doing this? One student, Mario, later reflected on Goodman's piece this way:

After reading the Goodman article, I began to question the motives of the class and of the people in the communities we were to help. Both have the common goal of erasing graffiti from residential homes or establishments. I knew that graffiti contained messages but I did not view it as rhetoric, nor did I acknowledge our act of painting over graffiti as another rhetoric. . . . Once we established in class discussions that rhetoric is the means by which we persuade, my notion of graffiti's purpose was strengthened. The purpose of graffiti is to undermine the control and constraints that society has imposed on individuals who lack the resources to adequately sustain their message.

Mario extends Goodman by critiquing the discourse of service written into the syllabus and the University's curricular requirements. By drawing on the work of sociologist Jeff Ferrell, who explores graffiti as a resistance to the control of youthful behavior by the regulation of public space, Mario exhibits the beginnings of what Gee calls powerful literacy, control of a secondary use of language used in a secondary discourse that can serve as a meta-discourse to critique . . . other secondary discourses (8).

Like Mario, other students found the course an opportunity to engage in such acts of powerful literacy by working across discourse boundaries. A large contingent of art and art history students, trained in the discourse of aesthetics and committed to judging graffiti in terms of its artistic rather than communicative value, productively disrupted Vandenberg's own goals for the course with their own expressivist commitments. Michael, for example, tended to divide graffiti writers into two groups: 1) those who produced works of beauty motivated by passion[,] . . . the motivating element that all serious artists feel and respond to, and 2) all the rest. Some of these students, however, by term's end were able to use their newly acquired rhetorical knowledge to critique the aesthetic binary and find significance in the semiotic value of less visually pleasing graffiti. I held in my mind a stereotypical view of a gang member that tags in order to vandalize and claim territory, Patria wrote near the end of the course. What The Rhetoric of Graffiti has allowed me to do is find writing other than what is in books to be useful and pertinent.

It is a difficult transition to think of what was merely vandalism before as a rhetorical statement now.

Of course, this sort of budding powerful literacy can come at a heavy cost if it is not compensated by a developing self-reflexivity. Mario, a student who expressed greater commitment than most to our service activities, consistently reminded us that the goals of service learning in his words, to generate critical thought, decrease alienation, and show concern for others risk self-service: By lending our services, we may achieve these goals to a certain degree, but the class rhetoric is the focus not the actual communities we enter. Like thoughtful writing tutors, many of the students worried along with Goodman that service-learning can have less to do with the well-being of those served and much more to do with educational outcomes in those serving (60).

Mario points out a tension in service learning that can be neither resolved nor ignored. Situated learning, when it stimulates powerful literacy, is designed in some measure to extend the privilege successful college students already enjoy. To recognize this certainty and account for it is not cynical but critical, and the implications ought to be a focus of such a course. And so at the top of the working syllabus for the service-learning course Vandenberg is now designing are the words of two Rhetoric of Graffiti students: As members of the community of the city of Chicago we must see ourselves as important and helpful if only to avoid the temptation to be indifferent (Brendan). We just have to be careful to not walk away feeling better than we should (Sona).

Caryn Chaden's Literature and Social Engagement Course

The idea for Literature and Social Engagement, a literature and ChSL course for third-year non-majors looking to satisfy a general education requirement in experiential learning, came from Robert Coles' description of his course, *The Literature of Social Reflection*, in *The Call of Service*. In Coles' course, students read literature focused on social issues, work three hours a week at a service site, and reflect on both sets of experiences in class discussion and in writing. In so doing, as Coles explains, students connect the intellectual and moral issues posed by the readings to their everyday struggles to figure out what they are trying to do and to what effect; how they are to learn about the people who are different from themselves; and, not least, how those people regard them and their purposes (148).

Literature and Social Engagement focused specifically on the question of point of view. One of the most important gifts literature can offer, many scholars and teachers of literature would argue, is the opportunity to walk

around in someone else's shoes for a while. Likewise, work in the community can offer students at least a glimpse into the lives of people they otherwise might not meet. And so the course syllabus invited students to think in more concrete ways about the power of point of view, both in terms of how literary works are set up, and in terms of [their] own experience as readers of texts and of situations. The course posed these central questions: What factors go into creating someone's point of view? Which are specific to an individual and which reflect one's position in a society? How does one's perspective shape the way a person tells a story and what makes that story important? To what extent can we ever fully understand someone else's point of view?

In order to circumscribe such a broad topic, the class studied texts that focused on people's life and work in urban communities: Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron-Mills*, James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, Edit Vallaarreal's *My Visits with MGM (My Grandmother Marta)*, and stories from Toni Cade Bambara's collection, *Sea Birds are Still Alive*, along with Robert Coles' *The Call of Service*. The ten students enrolled in the class worked at one of three settlement houses on the northwest side of Chicago. Some worked in after-school activities programs for elementary-school children, others helped adults prepare for the GED, one supervised a computer lab, and one helped immigrants prepare for the citizenship test. Writing assignments included weekly reflection papers and a more traditional literary analysis at the end of the course.

By providing students with the opportunity to work in the community and reflect on that experience, this course, like many service-learning courses, sparked students to examine their own preconceptions, and their own views of their relationship to the people served by these settlement houses. That is, the course tacitly invited to students to examine the multiple discourses that shaped those preconceptions and to seek alternatives. More specifically, the course was designed so that the work in the community would help students become more engaged, observant, and compassionate readers, both of texts and of situations. The experience of teaching the course eventually demonstrated that including a service component in a literature course can, indeed, help students become more engaged readers by making them more aware of the power of people's stories, the importance of the details within those stories, and the historical context in which they occur. Yet teaching the course also revealed the limitations of traditional literary analyses, characterized by a detached narrative stance irreconcilable for most students with the more personal discourse of their reflective writing, for enabling students to demonstrate what they learn when they engage in community

service while reading a related set of literary texts

The most powerful writing that came out of the course occurred in the students weekly reflection papers. In these papers, students were asked to write about their work in the community, provide analysis of particularly illuminating passages from the week s reading, and attempt to draw connections between the two sets of experiences not necessarily all in the same piece of writing, but all at some point in the term. Consider the challenging expectations for discourse here: These assignments called for students to be narrative and reflective about their own service experiences, select passages from the literature that resonated with their own service work, and bridge the two worlds of service and literature. Not surprisingly, students were most adept at telling the stories of their experiences in the community: their hesitation and nervousness as they began their positions, their initial judgments and later reconsiderations as they learned more about their community partners, their frustrations at feeling useless in some situations, their moments of real connection with their partners. Making connections between the reading and their work in the community proved more difficult. The readings were chosen because they explicitly addressed many of the issues faced by our community partners: poverty, discrimination, and the desires for education, meaningful work, and a better life for one s family. Still, at least one student lamented, A great majority of the novels that we read in class were not related to the issues I was addressing at my site and it was difficult to draw strings that connected the two. The unspoken proposition here is that this student could not, for whatever reason, bridge the two worlds of discourse.

Other students, however, did make connections. After reading about Mr. Gradgrind s insistence in *Hard Times* that his students learn only Facts! Facts! a student working as a teaching assistant in a GED math class wrote, If Mr. Gradgrind were to ever teach [the GED] class I think he would be in for a hard time. The students are tough and come from a life Mr. Gradgrind would not understand or even bother to comprehend. In his next paper, as the student continued reading and watched Gradgrind reluctantly realize that he was wrong . . . to be so strict in establishing fact and demolishing the notion of fancy, he connected Gradgrind s redemption with his own students efforts to change their lives: Half of life is f**king up, the other half is dealing with it. (quote by Henry Rollins, musician) . . . I see this in both Dickens *Hard Times* and with the students that I help teach at Association House -the roles of redemption, and making right what was wrong, about making the right decisions when you made the wrong ones before. For this student, the memorable quotation from Rollins provides a

bridge between the novel and the discourse of his community partners. With that bridge in place, he uses a kind of literary analysis to consider both the changes that Dickens describes in Gradgrind and those his students describe in their own lives. At the same time, hearing his students' stories gives credence to the possibility that people can indeed set about making the right decisions when [they] made the wrong ones before, and so gives Gradgrind's story more resonance.

Finding the language to articulate such connections between fact and fiction not only can help students untangle some of the complexities in the stories of people's lives, but can also give them a greater appreciation for the complexity itself. In thinking about John Grimes, the 14-year-old protagonist in Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain* whose hatred for his emotionally abusive father extended to the church where the father was pastor, a student providing after-school day care wrote, "I think it is because of his intelligence that his hatred is so articulate and real . . . I wonder as I look around at the children that I care for at the day care center, if they could end up like John. The next week, after she finished the novel, she wrote about a frightened new boy in the day care program whom another child comforted and helped become part of the group, and concluded:

It was amazing how durable children are. They can overcome such traumatic moments. John Grimes seems to have this durability as well. With all of his inner conflict and all of his rage, he finds himself. In the end of the novel John seems to have found a sense of peace. The new boy at the day care center eventually felt a sense of peace. Each of these boys had to endure a period of distress, John in the church and the new boy on the carpet. And each one had someone to guide them. John had Elisha [a young man who worked at the church] and the new boy had Josh. Both cases show how durable children are when in this world. But they do need help in navigating it.

Once this student found a common way to describe both the boy in the novel and the boy in her group (durable), she could tease out a number of common threads in their stories and draw conclusions that helped her see not only how such traits might play out over time, but also the conditions necessary for a positive outcome: the presence of help in navigating the world...

For these students, the process of reading and watching characters evolve paralleled their experience of making initial assessments of people and situations at their service sites, and then changing their views as those situations evolved and their own understandings deepened. In a final reflection paper, a third student, one who established himself as the first-base coach in an after-school sports program, summed up the process this way:

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Observing everything that is going on can be trying at times. There is usually so much activity that focusing in on one particular area can be difficult. I slowly began to realize that the idea of service work is a process that is constantly going on. It involves a change within the person doing the work. At times the process gets slowed down and there is not as much learning going on, but you are still part of the process. The process that I speak of can rightly be applied to reading because it too is a process of closer observation. The service work and the discussions in class widened my perception of reading things. Authors, just like the kids at Christopher House, try to say more than they actually do. They say one thing, but there is always something that is hidden beneath their original idea. I've learned that it is a process of deciphering and asking the question: What is he/she really trying to say in this passage? , just like at the Christopher House where I ask: What is he/she trying to express to me? There is always more to what one sees.

The change within the person doing the work that this student describes involves a change in his relationship to the people and situations he confronts, a new appreciation for complexities that are not at first apparent, but that he now recognizes are always present. This idea that there is always more to what one sees both in literature and in life appeared in every student's weekly writing in one way or another during the term, and as the student who helped to supervise a computer lab concluded, This is a lesson that I don't think I can afford to forget! In this respect, weekly reflection papers were crucial to the course's success: they gave students an arena for telling their own stories and drawing their own connections in a document that could go in a number of different directions.

Indeed, the degree to which students' experience at their sites led them to look for the complexity in people's stories made the final writing assignment for the course a literary analysis asking students to compare and contrast the way two of the authors we had read addressed the theme they had found most compelling during the term both more difficult and less relevant. Students dutifully wrote papers on such topics as the role of the father in *Hard Times* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, and aspirations in *Go Tell it on the Mountain* and *My Visits with MGM (My Grandmother Marta)*. They garnered evidence and presented views with varying degrees of detail and insight, but in most cases, the spark was gone. Back in the discourse of the English classroom, they reverted to lifeless patterns that they thought the instructor wanted to see. The same student who wrote so powerfully about similarities between the process of observing and the process of reading, for example, concluded his discussion of aspirations in Baldwin and Vallarreal with a mundane summary: Edit Vallarreal's *My Visits with MGM* and James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain* handle aspirations in different ways . . . Both sto-

ries show many different aspirations, what is done to obtain them, and that the desire to better one's life has to come from within the individual. True enough, but the detachment in this conclusion belies the meaning that aspirations came to hold for this student through his work and his reading.

Clearly, the final assignment for this course should have allowed students to build on the discourse they had been developing in their weekly writing to bridge the world of the novels with the world of the community organizations. But the concern that a service-learning course in literature ought to enhance students' learning of disciplinary knowledge, including the knowledge of how to write a traditional literary analysis, led the instructor to revert to a familiar assignment one successful in other contexts. The experience of teaching this course suggests the need for alternative assignments that require the same level of analysis, but that invite students to engage literature in the context of various audiences to whom it is addressed, the social issues it confronts, and its power to help them articulate some of their own struggles in grappling with these complex issues. In *Literature and Service-Learning: Thinking through Subject Positions*, Ann E. Green describes several interesting options, including a contemporary revision of a portion of a text written in an earlier century, a lesson plan for teaching an assigned novel to a particular audience, and a final essay asking students to relate the depiction of a particular theme from the course in this instance, justice and injustice to their experience of service (15). A variation on this last alternative might be to ask students, at the start of the term, to write about their current views regarding a particular social issue of concern both at their service site and in the literature for the course. At the end of course, students would be asked to explain some of the different perspectives that the texts and the service have contributed to their understanding of that issue and to draw some conclusions based on what they have learned.¹ Whether directly or indirectly, all of these assignments call on students to draw connections between the literature and their experience of community service. In doing so, they expand the range of the assignments available to students of literature, and so invite these students to bring a broader range of experience to discussions of the very issues that originally compel many poets, novelists, and dramatists to write at all.

Novices in an Exigent World of Discourse:

Roger Graves Writing for Social Service Agencies Course

Most scholars and teachers of composition do not perceive technical writing as a source of transformation involving discourse. If anything, the discourse of technical writing has been regarded as relatively straightforward even

conservative, some might say, owing to the conventions of much organizational writing. Consequently, the teaching of professional writing has sometimes been seen as the care and cleaning of the memo rather than a rhetoric of action. But technical and professional writing outside of classrooms does not mirror this reductive image. Instead, technical and professional writing presents many challenges in the terrain of discourse: For a student accustomed to traditional college writing, technical and professional writing re-situates the author (as plural, as corporate, rather than individual), the purpose of texts (as instrumental, as scientific, rather than expository or literary), the context (within organizations, not individuals), and the audience (as real, not teacherly). In short, technical writing can have a bias towards action, or what Freedman and Medway call writing used to achieve some purpose within a social situation (2).

Roger Graves service-learning course, Writing for Social Service Agencies, works from the view of technical communication as action-oriented by engaging students in a discourse focused on the production of purposeful, authentic, professional documents. Students are placed in situations where they must write to achieve very specific purposes for example, to obtain funding for a service agency, distribute information about an agency to the public, or create identification within a community. To learn how to complete these writing tasks, students needed to bridge the space between several kinds of discourse: their personal discourse, the academic discourse they are familiar with as upper-division undergraduates, the discourse of proposal writing as a professional genre, and the discourse of the community organizations with whom they worked. The conflicts between these discourses personal journal writing, for example, and academic essay writing were productive in that they opened discussions into the situatedness of all writing, and particularly what makes writing good in any particular context. Students were able to use this perspective on writing to bridge the gap between academic writing and professional writing: professional writing became, at first, just another form of discourse, and for some students it ultimately became a powerful discourse, something they could wield critically, reflectively, and effectively. Through their interviews, visits, and work with agencies to produce documents, the students were initiated into the context and culture of the agencies, and came, in a small and perhaps fleeting way, familiar with the discourse of their partner agencies.

Students in the course are often initially attracted by the passion and intense personal commitment they sense in the discourse of the social-service agencies administrators and staff. At the start of one recent course, for example, representatives of six agencies came to the classroom to describe

their work: what they did, who the clients were, what documents students might help to create. The agencies sponsored welfare-to-work programs, an employment center, pre-school programming, an autistic children's support group, a residence for women recently released from prison, a neighborhood organization, and a public interest research group. Following these presentations, one student, Eileen Monroe, wrote that she was really touched by Chauncey's Place [a special-needs children's support group]. I wanted to work for her just because of her cause.

The students, working in groups, eventually collaborated with five of the six agencies. The five groups succeeded in creating the documents that they set out to write, but only after learning how to get around some problems raised by the different discourses they encountered. Two groups wrote and produced newsletters for agencies, but first had to distinguish the conventions of academic discourse both from the generic properties of newsletters and from discourses of the agencies that the newsletters embodied. Other students followed a similar process. Three groups of students wrote applications for funding for their agencies. These funding proposals required students to engage in various activities reading, interviewing, and writing that helped them learn both the genre of proposal writing and the discourses of the agencies with which they worked. The last group drafted a 40-page document describing and promoting a pre-school daycare facility, but ultimately they were put off by the agency, even though they continued to contact the agency after the course ended in an effort to finalize the document. This example of a failed attempt to create a bridge to the discourse of this agency resulted from the complexity of the document: there was too little time in the course for students to connect with the discourse of the agency, which was both rich (imbued with the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia and Maria Montessori schooling systems) and difficult to enter as non-stakeholders in the child-care center.

The journal entries of a particular student in one of the groups show clearly the grappling with discourse that the course entailed. Elizabeth Collins belonged to the group that was collaborating with the Office of Applied Innovations (OAI), an independent agency housed at DePaul University but not related to its academic programs. With nearly all of its funding coming from external grants, OAI designs and delivers adult education and training, focusing particularly on workforce training and development for the unemployed. Two of its most visible activities are the Bright Futures Welfare-to-Work Collaborative and the Hospitality Occupational Skills Training and Placement program. At OAI, Elizabeth and three other students worked with a senior administrator to identify and pursue grant opportunities.

Initially, the students simply had to be immersed in the discourse of grant-writing for not-for-profit agencies. At the first meeting, each student was presented with a three-inch binder of worksheets from *The Grantseeker's Toolkit: A Comprehensive Guide to Finding Funding* (New and Quick). The meeting took place on the 20th floor of an office building in a conference room overlooking Lake Michigan. Seated in plush chairs, the students were clearly taken out of the classroom context and placed into another environment altogether. The strange background matched the equally disorienting discourse of grant-writing.

Elizabeth began her work with excitement and dedication. As she wrote in her journal:

I am very much looking forward to doing grant writing for a few reasons. I think this is a great opportunity to help a community organization . . . while learning at the same time. It is my understanding that our group will be involved in, if not responsible for, the choice of the donor to solicit. In my mind, this is what sets this particular service project apart from the other service projects made available to our class. It will be exciting and challenging to get involved in the grant-writing process at such a significant level . . . I think that grant-writing itself is a good skill to have. Not only can it be applied to this specific project, but I think I will also be able to apply the skill to other parts of my life. For example, my mom works with the Illinois Chapter of the Lupus Foundation of America, which is an organization that is very much in need of funding. I am hoping that with what I learn from this experience I will be able to help my mom and the LFA.

But as the work of the group really got underway, the enthusiasm or at least optimism of the early journal entries faded. Instead, the journal entries reflect the growing frustration of the students as they realize what novices they are in the world of grant-writing and how little time OAI has to bring them up to speed in this arena of discourse. As Elizabeth wrote, We are now in the sixth week of class and I don't feel like I've accomplished much in the way of grant writing for OAI . . . [The contact] has met with us several times and only in the last minutes of our last meeting did he finally tell us WHAT we were going to be writing about.

At this point, the group sought the advice of Graves, who suggested that they decide what project they wanted to seek funding for and then ask their contact for specific pieces of information. In other words, the plan was simply for students to immerse themselves in the discourse of grant-writing, guidance or no. The group decided to focus on asking for transportation costs for a group of unemployed men involved in the Developing Employment Opportunities (DEO) program. However, at the next meeting with OAI, they learned that agency was thinking of dismantling this program altogether. As Elizabeth wrote,

When we told him [the senior administrator] of our plans to write for the Advisory Board he told us that . . . the higher-ups in the organization might be doing away with the DEO program. . . . We have been struggling with this project for so long, and just when we finally decide what to write for and to whom we are going to send our proposal, we learn that the program we are trying to get funded may never exist. This was quite frustrating. This also made me realize how frustrating it must be for the people actually working at OAI.

Despite these setbacks, this group did complete a grant proposal for OAI that showed both a reasonable familiarity with the format of grant proposals as well as a reasonable familiarity with the discourse of OAI.

Other students in other groups displayed a range of achievements in the development of powerful new discursive positions. One student, Stephen Sittler, wrote journal entries at the end of the course that shows his ability to engage in Gee's powerful literacy and critique other discourses. Stephen's group worked on a grant proposal for Leslie's Place, a home for women just released from prison. As a young white, male he spent time learning the discourse of this agency, a discourse steeped in the words of middle-aged and young black women just released from prison. When Stephen interviewed them, one woman asked him: What was I doing? Was I getting paid? Why not? Why Leslie's Place? I looked like a nice kid; did I have any relatives in stir that might have motivated me to champion their cause in this way? . . . Why would DePaul care? This woman turned a critical eye on Stephen's reasons for engaging in service, forcing him to think and write about his motivations. His interviews at Leslie's Place also forced him to confront stereotypes of ex-offenders:

Should one portray them [in the grant proposal] as repentant young women, determined young mothers, or as blameless victims of circumstance? Meeting them was a surprise. I don't know what I was expecting, but the gaggle of welcoming, soft-spoken females who I encountered at Leslie's Place did not fit the preconceived image I held. I was imagining that most of Leslie's clients would be in their late twenties/early thirties, outspoken, brassy, and defiant.

Out of encounters with these women, Stephen concludes his journal writing somewhat ironically: I've learned to boldly go where whitefolks fear to tread. I've learned that Prison don't mean bad. Ultimately, he uses these encounters with the women at Leslie's Place to create a new discursive space, realized both in the way his grant proposal depicts these women and in the way he writes about them. This bridging discourse leads him to frame Leslie's Place as a location where women must undergo a metamorphosis to regain their subjectivity as full adults, something that was lost in prison. He views this process as similar to the one he is undergoing as a college stu-

dent: He has re-entered college after a couple of years away time taken outside of the system, just like the ex-offenders from what he sees as society's Orwellian plan for manufacturing self-sufficient adults. Stephen's experience with the women at Leslie's Place, and his encounter with the discourse of the agency and the genre of grantwriting, are synthesized in his own critique of his situation.

Other students in subsequent sections of this course have been empowered by the combination of the discourse of grant funding with the discourse of the agencies with which they worked. Several have heard about the course from advisors or other students and have come to the course already having set up relationships with community service agencies. Two students in a recent section wrote grants for the Young Women's Empowerment Project, a group that seeks to provide a safe space for young prostitutes to gather off the street. The grant they wrote is currently being reviewed by one foundation that has scheduled a site visit preliminary to funding the project. Other grants they have written (outside of the course requirement but during the time the course took place) have been funded. The work of the course has contributed to the development in these students of powerful literacy, discursive positions that enable them to change the world for the better.

Conclusion: Service Learning as Discourse Education

Bartholomae's goal for first-year writing is to lead students through successive approximations of a generalized academic discourse in the relative safety of the composition classroom. Service-learning courses, on the other hand, create conditions in which students must confront clashing discourses in action. Our experience designing, teaching, and reflecting upon these courses suggests to us that the challenge of negotiating competing discourses will inevitably be part of any service-learning course that involves extensive writing, and therefore this issue should be addressed explicitly in readings, class discussions, and student projects. As the work of service learning carries us out of the classroom, it refigures teaching as boundary work. We've come to recognize the friction between discourses as teachable space where we can help students explore options for addressing dissonance. This is where transformation can take place, both in our students as they grow into citizen-rhetors, and in ourselves, as we move outside the academic discourses where we are most comfortable.

Notes

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The authors are on the faculty at DePaul University in Chicago. As Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Associate Professor of English, Caryn Chaden oversees the college's academic programs that involve experiential learning. She has published articles on eighteenth-century British fiction and poetry. Roger Graves is an Associate Professor of English, teaching courses in technical and professional writing, service-learning, and composition. His recent work examines writing in the context of service-learning; his articles have appeared in *Business Communication Quarterly*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, and *Written Communication*. David Jolliffe is Professor of English; he has also served as Director of Writing Programs, Director of Writing Centers, and Director of the First-Year Program. His most recent book is *Inquiry and Genre: Writing to Learn in College* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999). Associate Professor of English Peter Vandenberg teaches courses in writing and rhetoric. He is the editor of *Composition Studies*, and his recent publications include essays in *JAC* and *Writing Center Journal*, and the Afterword to Thomas West's *Signs of Struggle: The Rhetorical Politics of Cultural Difference*.