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Faculty Development, Service-Learning and Composition: A Communal Approach to Professional Development

This article examines the implications of service-learning educators' commitments to community literacy for professional development in higher education. It places stories of professional development in composition studies within the context of community literacy needs and of broader debates about tenure and promotion practices. The article proposes a set of questions that challenge compositionists to draw on community-based work to redefine professional development in rhetoric and composition studies.

This change [of integrated teaching, research, and scholarship] has begun.... The change regains the center of higher education and will be driven by new faculty who simply will not reflect the poor role models in their academic upbringing. Right through the undergraduate level, the professional development culture for future faculty will flourish and instill a broader notion of scholarship in the next generation. —Brian P. Coppola¹

To date, the reexamination of compositionists' professional work provoked by involvement in community-based literacy education has generally focused on classroom practices, pedagogical goals, and the challenges of creating sound University-Community partnerships. But the integration of service-learning into composition studies pushes us not only to reexamine the relationships between our theoretical groundings and our institutional practices as teachers of writing, but also to revise the relationships between theory, practice and the assumptions about professional development that have informed our personal histories, our cultural contexts, and our discipline. In a very real sense, the move toward integrating community-based service-learning into composition studies allows us to create new beginnings for ourselves, for our students, and for members of our communities whom we have not previously considered in our work as teachers of writing. A reading of stories of our discipline and its members reveals the need to identify and respond to the absent possibilities that community-based literacy education opens for our professional lives.

Stories of the Discipline

Duane Roen, Stuart Brown and Theresa Enos's *Living Rhetoric and Composition* narrates sto-

ries of professional life in Rhetoric and Composition as well as stories of the discipline, itself. One of the narrative threads found in the collection is the story of working one's way up a professional ladder from the teaching of high school or undergraduate classes to participating in the development of graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition and, later, from undergraduate teaching to teaching in those graduate programs. Another narrative strand tells the story of our profession as one filled with people who ended up there unintentionally, sometimes even by mistake, and often in response to dissatisfaction or disappointment with some aspect of their personal or professional lives. I make these observations not to flatten out the stories of the discipline told in *Living Rhetoric and Composition*, but to explore how these stories set a ground for our field's understanding of professional development and to invite us all to begin asking what sort of relationship we want and need to have with that ground. Is the relationship to be one of identification? Resistance? Some combination of the two?

One way to enter into these stories is to read them in relation to Judith Ramaley's "Embracing Civic Responsibility." Ramaley states: "It is important to find ways to bridge the

traditional barriers of disciplinary values, modes of inquiry, and standards of scholarly legitimacy. The first requires understanding the importance of faculty culture and peer pressure and the habits and values of each discipline” (13).

The stories of faculty development in the Roen, Brown and Enos collection reveal much about each of these areas. They highlight a faculty culture in English departments that has historically undervalued writing instruction, and they showcase scenes within which the process-model movement emerges as a dominating force. While they do not indicate a monologic perspective concerning modes of inquiry, these stories do suggest that strong connections between scholarly work and teaching drive this scene of writing—that is, these stories, like Sondra Perl’s *Landmark Essays: Writing Process*, indicate that pedagogy is a ‘mode of inquiry’ in our discipline. The stories also indicate that gaining scholarly legitimacy outside the field has been a struggle for many of our most distinguished disciplinary colleagues. Departmental culture was not often friendly to new members of the discipline, and peer pressure included pressure to be less interested in teaching, to take the lead in undergraduate writing programs early in one’s career—and sometimes to do both. The habits of the discipline as revealed by *Living Rhetoric and Composition* include hard work, strong connections with others doing that work, and a sense of doing the right thing as a matter of routine. Indeed, these habits are valued as critical both to the formation of the discipline and to the professional development of its members.

The Structure of Faculty Evaluation

But in the larger picture of higher education in America, stories of isolated individual achievement eclipse stories of our own discipline. By this, I mean not only that the achievements of individuals (rather than of groups or communities) are of greatest value. I also mean that, even as Composition Studies has created a distinct disciplinary culture and has valued connections between research, teaching, and service, higher education has, in general, valued achievements that have fragmented teaching, scholarship, and service over those that have taken integrated approaches. As Vicky Henley notes, the structural fragmentation of research, teaching, and service that defines the norm in higher education has been reinforced by systems of faculty evaluation that demand that we discuss each of these as a

separate category.

Like many of my Composition colleagues, my tenure narrative and supporting documentation posed problems for such a system, and perhaps my own experience can prove instructive. Most of the projects I am engaged in cross the traditional categories—in fact they are designed to do so. Editing *Composition Chronicle*, for example, means I continually research the field, writing and reading about the publishing, teaching, graduate education and political trends informing our profession. Simultaneously, it has meant teaching copy-editing, production design, and review writing to undergraduate students who assist with the publication, which itself produces a service to our profession.

The Summer Seminar in Rhetoric and Composition creates similar connections among teaching, research, scholarship and service to University and profession. And my community-based approach to the teaching of first-year writing crosses these same boundaries, expanding the scope of my interests in and commitments to literacy. When it came time to put the tenure file together, my dean and I had serious conversations about how to deal with all of this. We decided that it was important to present a packet that both avoided looking like I was trying to ‘double dip’ (a term usually reserved for undergraduate students trying to get one course to fulfill two requirements) and at the same time illustrated the importance and significance of that boundary-crossing.

As Ramaley notes, my experience is hardly unique. The structure of faculty evaluation is a serious issue for disciplines, faculty, and institutions these days—and changes in faculty evaluation practices ARE taking place. Ramaley states:

During its examination of this nation’s state and land-grant institutions, the Kellogg Commission... reframed the classic triad of research, teaching, and service into a new framework of discovery, learning, and engagement. The reason for doing this was that the new terms describe shared activities, usually led by faculty, that have mutual consequences. The older terms tend to connote a one-way activity, generally conducted by experts. The new triad works well for

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describing the range of ways in which a...university can incorporate good citizenship into its traditional work (10).

She continues: "Discovery can encompass community-based scholarship and the development of new knowledge through collaboration with community participants... In some cases, it is possible to blend all three forms of intellectual activity into a distinctive whole by continuing professional education, research, and professional development in a community site" (10).

While all of this is true—the new categories CAN include these things—I would argue that, like the old categories, they may not. The history of our profession as it is told by practitioners, in books like *Living Rhetoric and Composition* and *Landmark Essays on Process*, and in the lives of Mina Shaunnese, Shirley Brice Heath and others, instantiates that even the old categories could accommodate some of this boundary-crossing if pushed, stretched, and persuaded. In fact, our discipline has never constituted itself solely through identification with the status quo of dominant faculty development paradigms.

At the same time, I want to warn us that communal forms of professional development require an even more significant shift—one connecting the development of faculty and community in substantive ways. I say this because, as you have probably already noticed, even in new schemas like "discovery, learning and engagement," the trend has been to maintain definitions of professional development that assume faculty are the primary people under development. It is true: "In some cases, it is possible to blend all three forms of intellectual activity into a distinctive whole by continuing professional education, research, and professional development in a community site." But it is also possible that this process, though located in a community site, can be (and too often is) done in such a way that only faculty have access to integration of these forms of intellectual activity. Successful community literacy approaches to composition require models of development that recognize that all community members have the need and capacity for 'integrated intellectual activity.'

We must make understanding the processes of exploration and response that place our

development as individuals and as a profession in relation to that recognition *critical* in two senses. First, we must make the commitment to inclusive understandings of development fundamental to our understanding of what we are up to when we create community-based literacy pedagogies. Second, we must not constrict those processes of exploration and response to identification of (or with) the narratives of individual professional development that have given shape to our own and our profession's past, present, or future.

Community Literacy and Composition Studies

How, then, are we to understand our community literacy work? A starting place is the recognition that illiteracy rates continue to rise, schools have become sites of increased violence, and high school drop-out rates continue to determine the demographics of the populations we see—and do not see—in our classrooms. And, because I continue to believe that we must define literacy not as we traditionally have—as an individual achievement—but instead as a web of beliefs, practices and relationships operating within the communities in which we live, I continue to believe that we must position the following questions as critical to the professional development of ourselves, one other, and our discipline more generally:

- What does it mean for us to put our professional development in relation to the literacy of our communities?
- What does it mean to view our professional life in relation to the people who have been ignored or failed by traditional educational systems rather than only in relation to those who are able to make their ways to us through that system?
- What does it mean to say that the parts of us failed by school, discipline, and institution demand that we reconfigure professional development at least in part as a response to the realities of illiteracy in our communities?

After I presented a version of this paper at the 2000 CCCC, many members of the audience thanked me for creating an approach to service-learning and composition that refused to ignore the issues faced by basic writing teachers. Still others wanted to remind us that service-learning can take many forms. Both types of comments help us remember Jim Berlin's assertions about the necessarily political nature of the

teaching of writing. Feminist approaches remind us that there is not only writing for, about, and with as Tom Deans so smartly configures service learning and composition, but there is also writing around, writing against, writing in spite of, writing in resistance to, etc. We must ask ourselves if we want to support or suppress these alternatives—often suppressed in the dominant pedagogies of the last forty years—and what the results of suppressing them will be—as we create community-literacy based approaches to first-year composition. Furthermore, we must view recent arguments about abolishing the first-year writing requirement in light of the communities of literacy from which our students emerge and within which they will decide whether or not to be contributing members who understand the literacy of their communities as a vital concern. Acknowledging the realities of the literacy and illiteracy of the communities in which our institutions are situated is a vital part of this process that enriches our deliberations about university institutional practices as well.

Here are some illustrations. The people I work with in my community literacy partnerships did not gladly leave school behind in any sense. In fact, they left either out of economic necessity, because they had done something that warranted kicking them out, or because their *Life in School* (Jane Tompkins aside) was so unengaging or horrific that they couldn't live with themselves if they agreed to abide by the notions of self required of them in those settings.

The varied perspectives of the people I work with through Project Read offer multiple elaborations on this story. Our GED class is made up of people from eighteen to sixty-something. One of the older members of the class has a hearing problem and was forced to sit where the first initial of her last name placed her in elementary classrooms—even though she could only hear if she sat at the front of the room. She was soon lost in school and there was absolutely no reason for her to continue attending—she couldn't hear anything that happened. Other students left school because they had to work to help support their families when fathers or mothers died or lost their jobs. Others were harassed—sexually and in other ways—and they left school to hold onto their dignity. In fact, many of the students I see in our GED classes left school not because of self-esteem problems, but because they refused to let go of their ideas of themselves as people who did not deserve to be treated in the ways

they were treated in school.

Students in our class for low-level adult readers (people over 21 with reading levels of 3rd grade or below) also come for a variety of reasons. One man, in his late 60s or early 70s, worked as a custodian his whole life, supporting a wife and family, and believes he must learn how to read the Bible before he dies to have a chance to enter through the pearly gates of heaven. He says that this is the most important professional goal of his (or anybody's) life: to be able to understand that one has done good in this life and in preparation for the next. Many of the others in this class want to be able to help children or grandchildren with homework and/or have a dream about earning their GED eventually, imagining a different life for themselves and their families. Our ESL class is filled with people who need to learn English for a variety of reasons—to be able to talk with their grandchildren, to get the credentials they need to practice the professions they practiced in Mexico, China, Thailand, and Korea. Some were medical doctors, others waitresses, still others did manual labor or held managerial positions. The students in all of these classes show a great deal of courage, hope, and trust that our classes will be a place where they can learn with dignity.

What does it mean for us to put our own development and the development of our profession in relation to theirs? What does it mean to formulate a notion of 'discourse community' that is inclusive rather than prescriptive, invitational rather than definitional? What does it mean to say that the parts of us failed by school are the parts we must use to understand professional development in relationship to illiteracy in our communities?

More and more I believe that we must struggle to understand the theoretical, pedagogical, and institutional implications of a world view in which any one of us can only be understood to be as literate as the communities in which we live. Writing teachers engaged in community-based work have already begun to explore what this understanding might mean for the less literate members of our communities. Now we must ask, what does it mean to apply this insight to the professional development of those traditionally considered the most literate individuals in a

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community? These are the questions and possibilities that community-based literacy education poses for Composition Studies.

Note

¹ In Vicky Hendley, "30 Years of Higher Education." *AAHE Bulletin* 52.7 (March 2000): 8.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my father, Robert William DeJoy Sr., who taught me much about how important it is to think of our work lives as opportunities to include those who were not invited in before we entered.

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