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#### **Publication Date**

2014

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Feeling Engaged: College Writers as Literacy Tutors

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Lance-David Bennett Langdon

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Jonathan Alexander, Chair  
Professor Julia Lupton  
Associate Professor Daniel Gross

2014

Redacted version May 21, 2018



# **DEDICATION**

To

Merilee, Kennedy, and Newbie

for good feeling

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes to my wife Merilee, without whom I would never have had the strength to survive six years of full-time graduate education. In long walks together over these years, she discussed with me every aspect of the PhD program generally and of this dissertation in particular. Her support and guidance has been essential to this project in more ways than I can say. I also thank my daughter Kennedy for the hugs and giggles, and for all the other emotional communication she directed my way. Oddly, all her yelling and squealing clarified this project at the same time that it kept its importance in perspective. And I offer thanks to my parents, whose care for Kennedy gave me the time to write, and whose common-sense questions helped to clarify what I was up to. I could not have made it to the finish line without any of them.

To those who appear in this study but who cannot be named in it – the poets, tutors, and writers of Irvine, the young students from the after-school centers and public schools, and the teachers and other educators who work there – I offer my profound thanks. If others find in this manuscript richness of experience, depth of feeling, or beauty of interpersonal connection, that is largely due to the writers whom I interviewed and observed, and to the adults who welcomed me into the spaces where this writing took place. Their choice not just to gather with me in reading and writing but also to stay with me during repeated rounds of questions deepened this investigation. This study is limited by my insights but not by their generosity or their patience.

Dissertation director Jonathan Alexander has my deep gratitude for his work on my behalf both before and during the dissertation process. Talk about emotional labor: Jonathan never turned down a meeting and never expressed any doubts about my ability to finish (even when I gave him ample reason to do either). As my professor for several classes before the

dissertation and my guide during it, he constantly informed my research with composition scholarship present and past.

Committee member Daniel Gross's imprint on this research is also obvious to anyone familiar with the intersection of emotions and rhetoric. I thank him for holding me to a disciplined and historical understanding of both those topics. I also appreciate his generous but pointed feedback throughout the writing process; he often pushed me to find a through-line in my argument and to take a stand when the evidence warranted it.

Julia Lupton's contribution to this research was essential, and not just because the Humanities Out There program she created made possible most of the literacy partnerships I describe. She responded with equanimity, kindness, and insight to my analysis of that program's virtues and shortcomings. The many "greats" Julia placed in the margins of my drafts, as well as the few well placed "have you considereds?" assured me that this writing was indeed meaningful communication for an actual audience. Without that conviction the process would have been lonely and the product stilted.

There are hundreds of others who contributed in one way or another, and I will do my best to thank them here, though the ecology of writing for even a single study like this is broader than I can acknowledge or even know.

I thank Susan Jarratt of Comparative Literature for helping me to think through the public sphere with the help of classical rhetoric, critical theory, and contemporary composition. Also, for forgiving me for spilling red wine on her rug and sofa. To Steve Mailloux I offer thanks for introducing me to the world of rhetorical studies and for providing feedback along the way. To Brad Queen I offer thanks for modeling how to conduct oneself during the job search process and for supporting my attendance at conferences where I developed this research. I thank Steve



Parks and Eli Goldblatt for giving me advice when I needed it and contributing scholarship when I asked for it, and for assuring me that the circle of community-engaged scholars extended beyond the walls of the conferences and campuses I knew. I also thank Lynda Haas for being my first mentor in composition and for saying yes to service-learning when it was just a crazy idea I had about teaching composition. I also thank Tira Palmquist for seconding that motion and for asking productive questions about my learning and writing outcomes for that course.

Of the many brilliant professors in the UCI English Department I want first to thank Jayne Lewis for observing my class and writing endless letters of recommendation on my behalf, and Elizabeth Allen for mentoring me and challenging me in my teaching of poetry. Rodrigo Lazo I thank for doing the same, and for guiding me in forming Chicano Studies on my lists. I also thank Arlene Keizer for African American studies and critical race theory. I thank Alejandro Morales for teaching me Chicano poetry and modeling the OC international life. And Richard Godden, without whom I would never have published an article on Faulkner. To him and Michael Szalay I offer thanks for pushing me into a field I love: rhetoric and composition.

Others in the English Department deserve my thanks for fulfilling duties ranging from offering job advice to finding copy codes and processing paperwork: Virginia Jackson, Kitty Roos, Jennifer Day, Robert Escalante, Malcolm Bourne, Kazumo Washizuka, Tomas Figueroa, and Christina Jung. I thank Patricia Pierson, Barry Siegel, Blake Kimsey, and Erika Hayasaki for introducing me to the wonderful world of literary journalism. To my colleagues in the fall '08 English cohort – Erin Sweeney, Ian Jensen, Samantha Cohen, Selamawit Terrefe, Brian Fonken, Anna Finn, Jenny Liou, and Rosanna Nunan – I extend thanks for their rivalry, wit, and critique. Of those a step ahead of us in '07, I single out Brian Garcia and Erin Pearson for modeling grace as scholars and camaraderie as conference-goers. Ricardo Matthews, I also thank for reminding

me that literary study can be professional and passionate without being instrumental. Also, he threw great parties and offered useful parenting advice. But of all my fellow grads I owe the deepest thanks to the Rhet-Comp Grad Collective, who made for great reading and writing partners. They are: Abraham Romney, whom I thank for advice and resources on the dissertation, for feedback on early drafts, for guidance through the job market gauntlet, and for being a great conference roommate and perpetual tech guru; Libby Catchings, my Irvine sister, to whom I give thanks for threading the composition program with me and for swapping baby tales; Elaina Taylor who set me up with a gig; and Maureen Fitzsimmons, Jens Lloyd, and Jasmine Lee, who pulled me into courses in my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year, tolerated my “democratic” leadership style during conference planning, and graciously accepted the advice I offered. Finally, I thank I-Lien Tsay for introducing me to Rhet-Comp at Irvine to begin with.

To those in the UCI School of Education I owe thanks as well. I thank Carol Booth Olson for filling me in on the history of writing research from a K-12 perspective, especially concerning students’ motivation to write. I thank Kesenia Korobkova, Viet Vu, and Diana Mullins for helping me to shape this research just as it was beginning, and especially Huy Chung, who provided guidance, expertise and statistical analysis during the survey phase of my assessment of HOT.

I thank Cristina Kirklighter of New City Community Press for permission to include Chapter Four of my dissertation, which was originally published in *Reflections*. My thanks extend as well to the UCI School of the Humanities for providing a dissertation research fellowship in the summer of 2013 and to the Humanities Out There program for doing the same in the summer of 2012.

Finally, I thank Tamara Beauchamp of the Graduate Resource Center for the literally dozens of hours she spent over the last year providing feedback on this manuscript. Having been

a writing tutor myself, I was always impressed by her careful listening, and by her ability to walk the line between offering feedback and authoring ideas. I'll be the first to admit that her contributions include not just form but content.

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“Commodifying Freedom: Horses in The Hamlet.” *The Faulkner Journal*. Volume 26.2, Fall 2012.

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Feeling Engaged: College Writers as Literacy Tutors

By

Lance-David Bennett Langdon

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2014

Professor Jonathan Alexander, Chair

*Feeling Engaged: College Writers as Literacy Tutors* brings together scholarship in the rhetoric of emotion and in civic writing to show how emotions – confidence, anger, embarrassment, pride, hope, fear, gratitude, guilt, shame, compassion, enthusiasm, and ennui – shape the roles we take on in K-16 literacy networks. This dissertation takes as a case study the community-engaged composition courses, poetry workshops, and literature classes I coordinated in 2011-2013. The undergraduates I led in this work tutored K-12 students in after-school centers and public schools in Mexican American communities, assisting with homework, writing poetry, and leading close readings of American literature. Employing participant observation, interviews, and discourse analysis, *Feeling Engaged* argues that the success or failure of such partnership hinges on the emotional labor of its participants.

Chapter 1 – Blogging Critical Literacy: Notes Toward Engaged Progressivism – offers a model of a community-engaged composition course, one in which students draw from their experiences as language learners and tutors, and from discomfiting online and in-class conversations about inequality, in orienting their research into literacy education. Chapters 2, 3

and 4 document and analyze literacy in two after-school centers with which we partnered. Chapter 2 – Genre and Emotional Roles in K-16 Poetry Workshops – shows how emotion shaped, and was shaped by, the genres employed in our poetry workshops. Chapter 3 – (Bi)Literacy Sponsorship in Latin@ After-School Spaces – demonstrates how after-school centers themselves can help bicultural, transnational students to develop ethnic pride and bilingual competence and to engage with family literacy networks. Chapter 4 – Teaching Police Discourse at Barrio Center – follows a Criminal Justice Club led by a police-officer-in-training; it both critiques police discourse and demonstrates the progressive potential the officer and his students found in it. Chapter 5 – The Emotional Labor of Outreach – turns to an 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classroom in a public school, documenting a series of literature and rhetoric lessons delivered there by undergraduates and narrating their progression through five stages of emotional labor: frustration, surprise, empathy, enthusiasm, and care. Cumulatively, the chapters argue that emotions provide essential feedback on the efficacy of K-16 literacy networks.

# INTRODUCTION

## I. Community-Engaged Learning in Composition

Lester Faigley's 1986 article "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal" provides a commonly accepted narrative of the field of composition, stating that it has passed through three trends: cognitive research in the mid-century, expressivist investigations in the 60s and 70s, and inquiries into the social circumstances of writing in the 70s and 80s. Interest in the last category has not flagged, and recently the social configurations composition investigates have come to include *activity systems* that bring the university and surrounding communities together (Deans, "Shifting").

This movement among engaged compositionists picked up momentum in the late 1990s in such journals as *Reflections*. As part of the social turn, these compositionists attempted to alter or expand the social circumstances of the college writing classroom by linking its work to that of community organizations (Bowdon 180). The move went hand in hand with a shift throughout the academy toward more engagement with off-campus groups. In the wake of Reagan-era cuts to social services, Clinton-era projects arose to fill the gap, and universities were a fertile ground for their dissemination (Adler-Kassner, Linda; Crooks, Robert; and Watters, Ann). Perhaps the leading voice in this movement across disciplines was Ernest Boyer, who pushed colleges and universities by calling for a "scholarship of application" that would return land-grant universities to their roots as research centers for local community needs.

The first wave of community-engaged writing scholarship in the mid to late 1990s most often undertook civic engagement under the banner of "service-learning," which as the name implies, brings college students to the community to perform public service, often working in an

internship for a local nonprofit and doing writing either as part of that experience or about it. Courses making use of this strategy were institutionalized in writing programs in the late 1990s and early 2000s, sometimes acquiring “SL” designations in course directories and often linking with campus-wide centers for service and civic engagement. More recently, writing scholars who engage with local communities have eschewed the problematic associations with charity that can arise from the term “service” and have signaled an ethic of reciprocity through such terms as civic writing, community writing, public rhetoric, and the rhetoric of civic engagement.<sup>1</sup>

Practitioners have long argued that civic engagement, under whatever name, benefits college students, and more recently third-party researchers have verified those claims. For example, a 1997 study by Eyster, Giles, and Braxton notes that a one-semester course incorporating service-learning positively impacted students’ “skills, values, and understanding of social issues.” And a 2008 literature review cites several other studies documenting the successes of service-learning in “producing students who are more tolerant, altruistic, and culturally aware; who have stronger leadership and communication skills; and who (albeit marginally) earn higher grade point averages and have stronger critical thinking skills than their non-service-learning counterparts” (Mitchell).

Adrian Wurr's 2002 quantitative analysis of holistic grading in a controlled study has helped to establish some of service-learning's benefits specifically for my field: the teaching of expository writing. Comparing essays written by a group of students participating in service-learning to their non-service enrolled peers, Wurr concludes, “Analytical assessments of each group's use of rhetorical appeals, logic, coherence, and mechanics show service-learning essays to be superior to comparison essays on every measure” (431).

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<sup>1</sup> For a contrasting take on charity, one that argues it can be central to a conception of social justice in religious traditions, see Morton and Wallace. For reasons I’ll explain in Chapter 1, I describe my own partnerships not as “service-learning” but as “community-engaged writing.”



Research like Wurr's is helpful in lobbying for engagement to writing program administrators who might otherwise be suspicious of its motives and results. In other words, it makes the case that getting engaged makes college writers better writers, and it thereby fulfills our responsibility to our universities as teachers of writing and administrators of writing programs. But a persistent question for the types of K-16 partnerships I research has been whether or not such partnerships actually meet the needs of that other important group: the younger students whom we “serve.”

The answer to this question in the larger subfield of civic writing have been mixed. There's a danger that university students do their time at community sites and leave feeling complacent in the service they have rendered even as community members continue to struggle, perhaps hoping for a more responsive partner the next time, perhaps cutting off future partnerships altogether. In 2002, Ellen Cushman offered a critique that still merits attention of the damage done in communities by “hit it and quit it” projects (“Sustainable”). Similarly, Paula Mathieu has drawn attention to recent studies that suggesting that the organizations truly receiving the most “service” from engagement are too often the universities whose PR machines benefit from advertising their good-neighbor policies. Citing Stoecker, Tyron, and Hilgendorf's *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning*, for instance, Mathieu notes that fully 42% of those organizations surveyed continued their relationships with universities not because of benefits they accrued but because they saw it as their duty to educate the university students with whom they partnered (Mathieu, “After” 24).

Mindful of such cautions, other community-engaged WPAs nonetheless stress their programs' potential to enact social justice by distributing the university's resources and expertise. Steve Parks – no stranger to the needs of the working-class communities surrounding

the campuses in which he has worked – speaks of his “entry into the ‘gravyland’ of the academy” as a newly hired professor, a place whose resources he strives to “pour and pass’ . . . to the working populations” surrounding his campus (*Gravyland* xxix). In the conclusion, I’ll examine Parks’s “edge politics,” which labor to enact partnerships in which local communities can speak *to* the university and thereby “disrupt[] paradigms that imagine[] the community as knowledge receivers” (ibid). For now, however, I use Parks’s title to highlight the privilege and responsibility that Parks and I both find in the academy’s gravyland: the privilege it is to spend time as a scholar who can research literacy, and the responsibility we take up to marshal the university’s resources for those not fortunate enough to have been granted a place in the ivory tower. Like Parks, I see outreach as an opportunity to channel the considerable social energy invested in our college students’ literacy skills into a new partnership, one that guides students in considering the advantages we enjoy as the beneficiaries of that energy even as it involves us in teaching younger students upon whom the same energy would not typically be invested.

## **II: K-16 Partnership: Emotions Across Activity Systems**

This dissertation makes the case that those wishing to conduct such partnerships in mutually rewarding ways must be guided throughout by what participants *feel*. We use emotions every day in teaching and learning writing but we don’t think enough about what work emotions do for us and upon us. Emotions are particularly useful in thinking through K-16 literacy partnerships because each institutional partner – the university and the K-12 school – is an activity system with its own distinct set of goals, tools, and roles (Deans). In bridging the two activity systems, we (teachers, tutors, students, and administrators) are thus written into two competing sets of *emotional roles* (Averill). Emotions can thus become a lens through which to

understand organizations' goals: their (and thus, our) social motives. Emotions are crucial to understanding these roles not as they are articulated on paper but as they play out in practice, to understanding whose goals they are we are working toward and whether or not they are being met by the activities we undertake together. Reflecting upon the causes of our emotions can even help us to assess the justice of those goals and to critique the systems that drive them. We may understand that ultimately there is no escape from one system of power or another; however, critical reflection upon our emotions, and upon the emotional communication of others, informs us of the ways in which our subjectivity is constituted by those systems, and thereby creates the distance that is necessary if we are to be driven not by impulse but by conviction. In other words, I'm arguing that reflection upon emotions gives us the opportunity to change not just how we react to a given activity system, a given set of social motives; it helps us to reform that system deliberately so that it better matches participants' needs and goals.

Worsham's "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion," a key text in critical emotion studies within composition, has been crucial to my thinking on this topic. It informs us of the harm that can be done to students in purportedly pedagogical spaces when they are forced into complicity with a social order that does not recognize their agency and subjectivity. As its title suggests, it argues that school imposes a symbolic violence on its students in the silencing of emotions linked to resistance or a dissident politics, and that it does so differentially along lines of race and class. Because, as Koziak puts it, emotions are "desires for a certain state of social relations" (Quandahl, "A Feeling" 14), Worsham suggests that when composition teachers "claim a role in producing, in the real existing world, a different way of feeling," they thereby "reclaim education as a terrain of struggle crucial to the reconstruction of a public political culture" (1005, 1003). Worsham's work has, for example, attuned me to the

potential pitfalls of a partnership that recruits college students into the demanding role of poetry tutor and asks younger students to voice a desire for poetry workshops, but it has also signaled how such partnerships can generate unique learning opportunities as they produce new social relations in which students can take up “a different way of feeling.”

Micciche’s *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching* has been another guide. It also understands “emotion as a social act that shapes and is shaped by social norms, conventions, and acts of resistance” but offers more specific suggestions for how “we can sharpen students’ reading, writing, and thinking skills by *enacting* emotion in the classroom” (xiii). Micciche draws on performance studies to combat the dispassionate reading and writing practices often valued in rhetoric handbooks. She instead asks us to understand “writing as a material practice that inevitably gets mixed up with bodily activities and experiences” and outlines suggestions for embodied rhetorics that call for deep acting (54). Furthermore, she argues for emotion’s central place in this embodiment, suggesting that “inserting emotions into thought . . . gives students a chance to understand and seize upon writing’s rhetoricity anew, grasping its potential to shift, nudge, hurt, or heal” (49). Specifically, Micciche describes how students’ dramatic *performance* of class readings or of their peers’ texts can mobilize emotion to increase their understanding of the texts’, and one another’s, perspectives (56f).

However, I depart from Worsham and Micciche in that I consider a different kind of writing classroom, one set up between institutions in what Paula Mathieu, following Michel De Certeau, describes as tactical rather than strategic space—that is, not a “proper” (propertied) institution authorized and organized by a steady authority that can establish values and deliver reliable rewards, but rather an ad-hoc formation that “relies on personal relationships, mutual needs, and a shared sense of timing” (“After” 17). This dissertation illuminates how the

emotional roles of instructors and students must be rethought in the context of K-16 literacy partnerships. To do so, following the composition theorists cited above, I ask us to think of emotions as always performed, not through pre-planned dramatic scripts but in relation to the social roles available to us in the institutions we enter and the speech and writing genres we are asked to take up. But I also ask us to consider how the stakes of such performance are heightened, or the rules and expectations muddled, when new social formations are brought into being through a redirecting of existing resources.

To the best of my knowledge, mine is the first book-length study of emotions within K-16 literacy partnerships. However, several shorter essays have appeared that address emotions in civic writing, all doing so under the rubric of service-learning. One such study is “The Affective Dimensions of Service Learning,” in which William DeGenaro describes how affect shapes college students’ experience of volunteerism as “service politics,” and instructors’ orientation toward a more confrontational political stance. Many of DeGenaro's examples make the point that embodied experience – being physically present with (and against) others – inevitably provokes an affect that is narrated discursively only after the fact; accordingly, he urges instructors to allow such affect to surface, to listen for student affect without immediately attempting to redirect it. This point is similar to one made by Shari Stenberg and Darby Whealy in “Chaos Is the Poetry: From Outcomes to Inquiry in Service-Learning Pedagogy,” which argues that service-learning courses ought to aim not for measurable excellence but productive and reorienting confusion. Stenberg notes that confusion, and even failure, involves emotional reorientation, and argues that this is part of what makes service-learning a high-risk, high-yield pedagogy. Langstraat and Bowdon, on the other hand, address emotions in the service-learning composition class by emphasizing the danger that students *won't* put themselves in the position

to reorient, instead being content with mere pity. Using Nussbaum's distinction between compassion and empathy, the authors find many students involving themselves emotionally but not practically in their clients' struggles. Drawing on critical emotion studies, they point to the "perils of empathy" in reinforcing unjust social relations and power imbalances, in which those with the leisure to contemplate others' suffering and the refinement to savor it are deemed more humane for those attentions.

Each of these studies addresses important questions about what role emotions play when we require college writers to interact with people beyond the classroom. However, none addresses the particular configuration of a K-16 partnership, in which the hierarchy of tutoring conflicts with the writing classroom's emphasis on reciprocal conversation, and in which the aims of outsiders (most importantly, the younger students), are themselves shaped by educational systems with their own assigned "social roles."

Before further elaborating upon the contributions that emotions can make to our practice of civic engagement, I must spend a few pages explaining just what I mean by emotions, how I understand them as "social roles." This is a concept I draw from James Averill as well as from contemporary social psychology. Perhaps surprisingly, that social psychology is heavily influenced by investigations of the emotions first laid out over two millennia ago in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

"Anger," Aristotle writes, "is a distressed desire for conspicuous vengeance in return for a conspicuous and unjustifiable contempt of one's person or friends (*Rhetoric* 2.2). Let us compare that formulation with one offered recently in a textbook on social psychology:

The first thing to note is that emotions are related to events that happen in the world (objects and causes) . . . Second, emotion implies taking a particular perspective toward events . . . (appraisal). Third, when we are emotional, our bodies usually react in some way . . . (physiological

change). Fourth . . . we often feel strong impulses to act in certain ways when emotional (action tendencies) . . . Fifth, particular emotions often seem to be associated with distinctive muscular movements that can express what we are feeling to others (expression or display). Finally, we often try to do something about one or more of these different aspects of emotional episodes (regulation). (Parkinson, Fischer, and Manstead 4)<sup>2</sup>

To trace the commonality in their insights, I offer the following chart, which aligns the six categories laid out in the parentheses above with portions of Aristotle’s statement on anger:

<b>Social Emotion</b>	<b>Aristotelian Anger</b>
2005, Parkinson et. al	ca. 330 BCE
Objects and Causes	unjustifiable <i>contempt</i>
Appraisal	<i>unjustifiable</i> contempt
Physiological Change	<i>distressed</i> desire for conspicuous vengeance
Regulation	<i>distressed desire</i> for conspicuous vengeance <sup>3</sup>
Expression or Display	<i>distressed</i> desire for <i>conspicuous</i> vengeance
Action Tendencies	<i>distressed</i> desire for conspicuous <i>vengeance</i>

**Figure 1. Emotion in Aristotle and Social Psychology**

<sup>2</sup> I use Parkinson, Fischer, and Manstead to represent the field of contemporary social psychology, but it’s worth noting that there is disagreement in that field about the six components they present. The three authors suggest “we can at least agree that when we get emotional, some subset of the [...] processes [in the chart] is probably also operating” even though “one or more component may be seen as more central to what emotion really is” (4). Because they propose, at least initially, a few different theories of how the “components” are sequenced, in the chart I’ve taken the liberty of sequencing those components in an order that highlights Aristotle’s concerns.

<sup>3</sup> Desire/regulation is admittedly the most tenuous parallel between Aristotle and social psychology. But “desire,” like regulation, does imply an intrapersonal dimension to emotion in that it suggests the possibility that the person may not act on the emotion. Whereas I take Aristotle’s “distress” to be automatic, I argue that “desire” can vary. Depending upon the person’s appraisal of, for example, the severity of the contempt or of the likelihood of success in responding conspicuously to it, one might up-regulate or down-regulate, dampening or amplifying that desire. Thus, I would argue that desire isn’t merely felt (as a physiological change) but regulated, though what faculty acts on a person’s desire to regulate it Aristotle doesn’t explain in his formulation of anger.

As we can see, Aristotle anticipates all the key features of emotion as understood by contemporary social psychology. In so doing, the rhetorician offers an account quite different from the one that would be offered by Descartes, who saw emotions mechanical, strictly embodied. True, like the Cartesian perspective with which we are familiar, Aristotle and social psychologists admit that our bodies are essential to the ways we sense emotion—for Parkinson, in the “physiological” heartbeat, for Aristotle, in “distress,” or as discussed elsewhere in the corpus “pain and pleasure.” Contemporary science has given us tools with which to measure such distress. We now know that as we experience emotions we experience changes in “body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen saturation of the blood,” so that for example when we become angry our body temperature elevates and our blood pressure rises (Sutton, “Teachers’ Anger” 261). But with their five other categories, both Aristotle and contemporary social psychologists extend our notion of emotion beyond the body. They argue that emotions don’t reside in Descartes’ “animal spirits,” William James’ “bodily reverberation” and “feedback,” Silvan Tomkins’ “density of neural firing,” Schachter’s “autonomic arousal,” or whatever other brain-in-a-vat schematic (Descartes qtd. in D. M. Gross 23; James qtd. in Parkinson, Fischer, and Manstead 5–6; Tomkins qtd. in Sedgwick and Frank Ch 3; Schachter qtd. in Parkinson, Fischer, and Manstead 13). Rather, each thinker stresses that people experience, understand, react to, and communicate feeling *with others*. These thinkers thus help us to consider the social relations through which we constitute and communicate emotions and the ethics implied in our naming and understanding of those emotions. If one grants that a study of emotion requires not just physiology, or perhaps “affect,” but also the five additional categories granted it by Aristotle and social psychology, then one opens up an inquiry of emotion into politics. For as one investigates the social matter of emotional formations one is led to



critique those formations inasmuch as they cause distress. One remembers, as Quandahl puts it, that “dominant regimes work partly by determining the acceptable emotions” (“A Feeling” 17). One also looks into ethics. Judgment (or appraisal) concerning emotion’s causes and the appropriate responses to them leads to different patterns of behavior, different virtues. Aristotle’s work suggests this approach, for along with his *Rhetoric* it is the *Nicomachean Ethics* that offers an extended theory of emotions.

Making use of Aristotle and other ancient thinkers who followed him, James Averill in the early 1980s helped to clarify anger as a “transitory social role” (6). What’s “social” about emotion should be evident from the five categories above that exceed physiological change, but to explain why for Averill emotion involves a “role,” it may help to draw an analogy between the expression of anger and the launching of a speech act (cf. Austin). For just as a speech act is carried off if the right person says the right words in the right situation, like a groom saying “I do” at a wedding, an emotional display can impact its witnesses and respondents only if it is intelligible during the scene in which it appears. Averill says that in order to count as a social role,

[F]irst, the behavior must be meaningful in terms of social expectations or rules of conduct; second, the person must attempt (on some level, not necessarily consciously) to conform his or her behavior to those expectations; and third, persons in similar circumstances must be capable of performing the relevant (role) aspects of the behavior (9).

Translating this statement into the terms of social psychology, we would say that even our internal appraisal and regulation of emotions is heavily influenced by external social expectations for what emotions are acceptable to display in a given circumstance, and even what emotions are acceptable to feel.

This dissertation explores the very different “social roles” available to participants in literacy partnerships as they cross institutions. As mentioned, to think through the conflicts between social expectations for literacy learning in the university and in the K-12 classroom (or after-school center), I borrow from Thomas Deans the notion of “activity systems.” Deans traces the genealogy of this concept back through compositionists Russell, Bazerman, and Prior to Scandinavian researcher Engeström and finally to its origins in Soviet thought under Vygotsky and Leont’ev. Much like the discourse community, the activity system stresses the influence of social contexts on individual actions and highlights writing as a tool that establishes social bonds and forwards social goals; the activity system formulation also draws out attention to the division of labor between the members participating in it (“Shifting,” 452-4). Applying the concept to community agencies that partner with college writing programs, Deans asks us to view each as involved in different activity systems, across which there is bound to be contradiction (451). He further suggests “that researchers look to contradictions as points for launching analyses” (461).

Building on this insight, I argue that K-16 writing partnerships, because they bridge two activity systems, the university and K-12 education, ask all participants to take on conflicting social and emotional roles. If groups require conformity in the form of “unity of purpose, homogeneity of perceptions, attitudes and feelings” (Hogg, qtd. in Parkinson et. al 94), what happens when we belong to two groups? We suffer two sets of perceptions, two sets of feelings. We are pulled in two directions at once by the “social motives” of institutions (Deans 457). To the extent that we have taken on one organization’s motives as our own, when we are meeting the demands of the other organization we may feel emotions which signal that our motivations are not being realized, such as guilt or anger, depending on whether we blame ourselves or others (see Parkinson et. al, 7).

I suggest that anger, fear, hope, and so on can be guides to those who would identify such contradictions. Indeed, in its strongest form my thesis is that *only* by heeding such emotion can engagement efforts respond ethically and intelligently to the needs and wishes of all parties, including young students and their teachers, as well as college students and their instructors (i.e. us).

To support this claim, I rely on Sedgwick's understanding of affect as pioneered by Sylvan Tomkins. For Tomkins, affect is first and foremost a signal to the self. Humans learn by putting themselves into situations and finding out afterwards that they've done so for the wrong reasons. Emotion gives us that feedback. Sedgwick quotes Tomkins on the role of affect in learning: "Cognitive error, which is essential to cognitive learning, can be made only by one capable of committing motivational error, i.e. being wrong about his own wishes, their causes and outcomes" (qtd. on 107). Sedgwick notes that engineers who would develop artificial intelligence—machines that can learn—have discovered a need for a system analogous to human emotions. Specifically, they have found a need for "parallel distributed processing," a system that "thinks" about an event using two different models at once, much like humans use logic and emotion in tandem to consider the full consequences of our decisions (ibid). Following this train of thought, I argue that emotions are essential signals for those involved in K-16 partnership. Due to their tactical, emergent nature, the activities we engage in during such partnership can't be worked out ahead of time, but they can be encountered reflectively. We can't always anticipate what will bring, in Aristotle's terms, "pain or pleasure," but we can be vigilant about their manifestations in all participants and flexible enough to respond to them intelligently. Action research is about reforming a theory that reforms action as one continues it in subsequent iterations. I am asking that we pay attention to our own emotions as feedback in such work, and

also that we make allowances for others' emotional display and raise all participants' awareness of the action tendencies available to them. By explicitly addressing our emotions we address the motives that inform them. We discover something about why we do the work we're doing and how that work can be reshaped to alleviate the frustration that comes from having our motives blocked or the ennui that ensues when the activities in which we engage do not match our goals.

### **III. Humanities Out There (HOT): A History of Literacy Outreach**

As I mentioned, in my literacy partnerships I took up the role of one who could lead college writers as we tried to “pour and pass” the resources of our own university – the University of California, Irvine (i.e. UC Irvine, or UCI) – to younger students in the surrounding community. And because I wished to do so through English studies, I soon found myself involved in a longer-running activity system: the Humanities Out There (HOT) program, founded by Shakespeare professor Julia Lupton just as service-learning was surging in the late 1990s. Though not all of the literacy partnerships described in this dissertation were directly associated with HOT (my first chapter describes a stand-alone service-learning course in UCI's composition program), to a large extent they all shared HOT's “social motives.” Thus, I take a few pages here to describe HOT's origins, its history, and its motives so as to shed light on HOT as a unique activity system, one that articulated the relationship between the units that sponsored it in the university and those that welcomed it in K-12 schools. This section also gives the reader a sense of just how diverse the population of students was in UCI's gravyland, and how these literacy partnerships figured into the UCs' larger strategy for ensuring that diversity.

HOT was designed as one part of the university's response to the elimination of Affirmative Action in California in the late 1990s, first through Governor Pete Wilson's

executive order and later through Proposition 209. Given that SAT scores are directly linked to income and race both within California and nationwide (Mantsios; Geiser), and that Asian Americans and Caucasians are far more likely to graduate from secondary schools eligible for the UC than are African Americans, Native Americans, Latin@s and other disadvantaged minority groups (ibid), the dismantling of Affirmative Action threatened to skew the UCs' enrollment toward middle- and upper-income Caucasians and Asian Americans. UC Irvine responded with PACE—the Partnership to Accelerate Eligibility—of which HOT formed the Humanities wing (Center for Educational Partnerships). As onetime HOT director Robert Moeller, Professor of History, put it in a grant proposal of HOT's decision to partner a nearby school serving underrepresented students, “Targeting this particular school is also part of a strategy to ensure the continued ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the University of California system in the wake of suspension of Affirmative Action programs” (8).

The activity system of outreach places confidence in the existing K-16 educational system's capacity to promote the interests of its working-class and ethnic-minority students; it holds that college and career success is a plausible and achievable goal within that system. In this case, HOT's outreach efforts sought to ensure that the world-class education offered in the University of California system would be within reach for those that standard metrics such as the SATs judged to be the hardest working and most talented of the underclass. This is the ideology of uplift, which, for all its problems continues to animate and fund institutions ensuring income and ethnic diversity at the UCs (for examples of the problems, see Ana Ribero on Dreamer rhetoric; Martin on HOT).

Other strategies have since been implemented at the statewide level to ensure the continued diversity of all of the UCs, which include flagship schools Berkeley and UCLA as

well as eight other campuses. For instance, under a program called Eligibility in Local Context (ELC), the top 9% of the graduating class at each California public school is guaranteed admission to at least one campus in the University of California system, ensuring that high-achieving students from even the most troubled districts have a chance for a UC education (University of California Regents). Nonetheless, despite this and other policies, post-affirmative-action patterns of under-enrollment among disadvantaged minority groups persist (Associated Press). However, progress has been made at UCI and at the UCs in general in increasing the enrollment of underserved ethnic minorities, particularly Latin@s. UCI, for instance, has almost reached the 25% enrollment threshold required to make it eligible for designation as a Hispanic-serving institution.

Concerning our university's class diversity, the picture is also promising, though constantly shifting. UC Irvine is a selective, four-year, research-intensive, public university. Stanley Aronowitz's analysis of class structures in schooling maintains that "only about a quarter" of working-class youths achieve post-secondary credentials, and that the majority of them do not enter highly competitive universities like UC Irvine (109). Similarly, in his 2013 Address at the CCCC, Chris Anson suggested that as few as 3% of students at elite universities grow up in working-class households ("2013 Chair's Address"). However, my research into the demographics at UCI revealed more working-class students than Aronowitz's and Anson's figures might lead us to expect. Recent efforts by the UCs to recruit Pacific Rim students who can pay out-of-state fees (i.e. tuition) are changing our school's demographics again, but at the time of this writing, most of UCI's students (61%) receive need-based grants and scholarships, and two-fifths of them (40%) receive Pell Grants (Office of Institutional Research). Given that most Pell funding "goes to students with a total family income below \$20,000," and that the

grants cap out at \$50,000 family income, a significant minority of the UC's students are, in fact, low-income ("Pell Grant Eligibility").<sup>4</sup> This despite the near doubling of fees that UC undergraduates from within the state of California suffered in the Great Recession.<sup>5</sup>

The success we have had in promoting racial and class diversity on campus I attribute in large part to the Center for Educational Partnerships (CFEP). The CFEP provided much of HOT's initial support, but eventually it refocused on other means of reaching K-12 students, leaving HOT to solicit funds from the Dean's office and the Departments of English and History. Though the CFEP suffered through the recession along with HOT and continues to scramble for funding, it has maintained partnerships with a number of underserved schools in the area, supporting their efforts to enroll students in classes that render them eligible for the UCs and assisting their students in the college application process.

HOT, on the other hand, found it impossible to maintain the scale of its efforts with such schools.<sup>6</sup> In the end, the La Mesita Unified School District, with which HOT had been working, declared HOT a "boutique" program, unable to accomplish the heavy lifting

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<sup>4</sup> Anecdotally, I've gathered recently, perhaps because of the rise in fees, that more of my students are fulfilling work responsibilities, perhaps in part to avoid the \$16,000 average debt-load listed carried by our average graduating senior (and that figure doesn't count whatever debt their parents incur on their behalf in coming up with the \$30,000 in total annual expenses for a UC education).

<sup>5</sup> It is common sense that higher UC fees will drive away working-class students, and that idea has been borne out by research at other universities. For instance, a recent study suggests that working-class youths decline to take on student debt to finance higher education (Hardeep). Indeed, to help address this new squeeze on the middle class, whose representation at the UC has been shrinking of late, flagship school Berkeley implemented a new policy for the 2012-2013 school year that specifically targeted students with parents in the \$80-140,000 range (Gordon). The rise in fees at UCI was accompanied by increased financial aid, but to the best of my knowledge the school has no such policy for upper-middle class students. One wonders if our middle-income enrollment is also shrinking.

<sup>6</sup> HOT was initially able to fund the graduates who served as workshop coordinators with a small stipend that supplemented their salaries as teaching assistants within more traditional parts of the English program (i.e. English and writing classes for undergraduates). However, it was determined that such supplemental work for supplemental pay violated graduate students' maximum appointment to 50% time, meaning that the HOT shifted to a model in which graduates like myself who served as workshop coordinators took this on as their primary position, earning fee (i.e. tuition) remissions and undertaking a set of readings associated with civic engagement. The cost to support those working in my coordinator position grew along with tuition even as its initial grants expired and HOT's support from the CFEP shrunk.

to boost the test scores or graduation rates of large numbers of district students, the vast majority of whom are Hispanic English learners receiving free or reduced price lunch.<sup>7</sup> In 2008 HOT partnered with a new district on a smaller scale, but it continued to understand outreach as one of the program's principal goals and a college-preparatory curriculum as the principal means to accomplish it. Thus, when I turned from the composition program to the literature program in seeking to build a literacy network that could "pour and pass" university resources, I connected with HOT founder Julia Lupton and began talks about sponsoring a series of poetry workshops in local after-school centers.

#### **IV. Overview of the Chapters**

*Feeling Engaged: College Writers as Literacy Tutors* is an analysis of the connections made not just in those poetry workshops, but in the other attempts at K-16 language education in which I involved myself at UC Irvine. Employing participant observation, interviews, surveys, and discourse analysis, *Feeling Engaged* takes as a case study the community-engaged composition courses, poetry workshops, and literature classes I coordinated in 2011-2013. The undergraduates I led in this work tutored K-12 students in after-school centers and public schools in Mexican American communities, assisting with homework, writing poetry, and leading close readings of American literature. This study brings together scholarship in the rhetoric of emotion and in civic writing to show how emotions – confidence, anger, embarrassment, pride, hope, fear, gratitude, guilt, shame, compassion, enthusiasm, and ennui – shape the roles we take on in

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of the La Mesita school district and La Mesita High, I continue to use pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.



K-16 literacy networks, and it argues that the success or failure of such networks hinges on the emotional labor of those who participate in them.

My first chapter – Blogging Critical Literacy: Notes Toward Engaged Progressivism – addresses a community-engaged research and argument course I created in UCI’s composition program. The course requires composition students to do research on educational policy not just by searching databases and libraries but also by serving as tutors to K-12 students in Mexican American communities. I trace how the college writers respond to course readings on critical literacy, the idea that public education reproduces and naturalizes inequality between mainstream and underrepresented groups. I argue that a composition course with progressive political aims runs the risk of silencing multiple perspectives and short circuiting critical thinking, but it need not do so if students are able to bring their past experiences, fieldwork, and bibliographic research to bear as they gather the courage to tell their truths. Responding to scholarship that debates the uses of critical literacy in composition classrooms, and drawing on the theories of bell hooks and Michel Foucault, I argue for what I call “engaged progressivism.” This practice requires emotionally attuned educators to manage discomforting, generative conversations in which college writers reflect together upon their diversity as language learners and, in the case of this community-engaged course, discuss their experiences as literacy tutors. Engaged progressivism also enables educators to guide college writers in pursuing research as a mode of orientation, an authentic inquiry into their own unsettled questions.

Chapter 2 – Genre and Emotional Roles in K-16 Poetry Workshops – shows how emotion shaped, and was shaped by, the genres through which the university established relationships with two after-school centers. In understanding genre, the chapter draws on Anis Bawarshi’s investigation into writers’ invention. In illuminating emotions as social roles, Chapter 2 draws on

Aristotle, Heidegger, James Averill, and Sara Ahmed, as well as contemporary scholarship in social and educational psychology. In the chapter, I demonstrate how participants used course proposals to convey confidence, flyers to advertise desire, private emails to confess fear, friendly letters to generate enthusiasm, lyric poetry to sustain wonder, and spoken-word poetry to overcome embarrassment. Writing in these genres, the poets, teachers, learners, and administrators who brought this partnership into being managed historical and rhetorical constraints on their emotional communication; they also exerted agency by tapping emotions to move their readers.

The following two chapters explore literacy development in the after-school agencies with which we partnered: Dios Center and Barrio Center.<sup>8</sup> These centers are at once American public institutions and Mexican@ cultural centers, and as such they offer a rare opportunity for Mexican American youth to develop ethnic pride and biliterate competence. Teens at such centers can draw on the funds of knowledge of diverse sponsors: families, mentors, tutors, and university researchers. However, this opportunity is often lost. Mexican American teachers, shamed for their use of Spanish, shy away from teaching it; university partners, angry at student indifference to Anglo-American curricula, refuse to yield authority and learn from those they teach. Chapter 3 – (Bi) Literacy Sponsorship in Latin@ After-School Spaces – draws on Deborah Brandt’s notion of “sponsorship” in demonstrating how such emotions can bog down literacy educators. However, it also sheds light on the work of sponsors who respect students’ ethnic identities and develop their biliterate competence: a Mejjicali-born supervisor who engages in a playful affirmation of Brown pride, a bilingual educator who teaches biliteracy as a path to college success, and parents and siblings who care for and support students’ bilingual language

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<sup>8</sup> Barrio and Dios are pseudonyms I created, “Barrio” to reflect that center’s class and ethnic identity and “Dios” to reflect that center’s Christian affiliation. See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of these centers and a more detailed rationale for these pseudonyms.

acquisition in order to maintain transnational family networks. Such examples prompt us to reconsider the Anglocentric and monolingual education being delivered in writing classrooms, and to envision how language education might be reconceived to match the transnational discourse communities in which writers participate.

Even as universities support such progressive, bicultural education, they must also cooperate with partners who push for student success within conservative, monolingual institutions. Toward that end, Chapter 4 – Teaching Police Discourse at Barrio Center – follows a police-officer-in-training as he guides Mexican American youth in one after-school center in taking up the “institutional identity” of the police officer (Gee, “Identity”). Mike, who grew up in the neighborhood, teaches the young people how to read, write, speak, act, perceive, and value as police officers. Yet he reveals in interviews that he experiences double consciousness as a result of this discourse, that being pressed into the emotional role of the suspicious policeman causes him conflict with his identity as an indignant member of this racialized Mexican@community. Through observations of his workshop and analysis of its curriculum, I explain how Mike, as he puts it, “see[s] it both ways,” reconciling these dual perspectives and encouraging students to do the same. I also suggest how university partners can build on, supplement, and even challenge the institutional discourses developed by community agencies with which we work.

My fifth and final chapter – The Emotional Labor of Outreach – describes the work of undergraduate tutors in the HOT program, which partnered UCI’s English Department with an 11<sup>th</sup> grade classroom at City High School for the last time in 2012-2013. Educated in honors programs during high school and in a literature curriculum during college, the majority of the tutors were not prepared to teach the students served by HOT: English-language learners in a non-honors classroom. Having conducted a discourse analysis of the tutors’ online discussions

and of my follow-up interviews with them, I narrate the tutors' progression through various kinds of "emotional labor" (Hochschild; Sutton, "Goals"). I explain how the tutors used the online discussions to share their sense of frustration at their students' initial disinterest and to express support for their peers. As the term progressed, the tutors lessened their frustrations by opening themselves up to being surprised by students' goals and by re-appraising their students' abilities and effort. Finally, the tutors found ways to motivate the students by paying attention to their interests and responding to their ideas—that is, by showing care for them as people. The students reciprocated this care and thus confirmed the tutors' emergent identities as teachers. In this partnership, as in all of the literacy partnerships analyzed in this dissertation, emotional communication proved indispensable to students' growth as learners and teachers, readers and writers.

Without further delay, here are those chapters.

# CHAPTER 1: BLOGGING CRITICAL LITERACY: NOTES TOWARD ENGAGED PROGRESSIVISM

## I. Introduction

### A. Course Setup and Philosophy

Billy, a student in my community-engaged first-year composition course, reflected upon his first few weeks of tutoring at Dios Community Center as follows:

The Latinos here seem really content with their lives as opposed to the oppression and doubtful attitudes littering the pages of Kozol's article [*Shame of the Nation*]. They live in a mostly Hispanic community as I once lived in a mostly Asian community. The outside world was fascinating to me as a child, with its multitude of diversity and changing ideals, so I never really felt "segregated", only interested. It appears by the joyful attitudes and carefree demeanor of the children that it's the same for them.

Sires (pronounced "Series"), another student in the course, responded to Billy's blog:

Your comment about the complicity of the local Latino community got me thinking about my own life. I'm pretty sure they're not happy with the life they live . . . They simply want what's promised to them: the American dream. Never assume they've settled for less. Always help those less fortunate than you.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter investigates a course I teach that requires composition students like Billy and Sires to research educational policies not just by searching databases in libraries but also by reading critical literacy essays, reflecting on their own education, interviewing educators, and, most importantly, serving and observing K-12 students in schools and after-school programs in low-income Mexican@ communities.<sup>10</sup> Students shared their perspectives on each "text"—essays, personal experience, and fieldwork—not just in class discussions but also in online forums and blogs like those above. In keeping with others in experiential education, I maintain that such a class setup engages composition students in research as a learning process, one that

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<sup>9</sup> Blogs and forums have been edited and the names of students and community partners have been changed. See Ch. 2 for explanation of these decisions.

<sup>10</sup> Summer 39C Course Director Lynda Haas first authorized me to attempt this engaged composition course, and Fall Quarter Course Director Tira Palmquist allowed me to make a second pass at it. I am in their debt.

calls for students to develop a perspective by integrating knowledge with experience. Simultaneously, it provokes them to understand how the knowledge we instantiate through academic discourse speaks to issues that affect real people in a tangible manner—in this case, that the educational policies they’re researching affect the children they tutor and the educators with whom they work.

Just as community rhetoric was taking off in the late 1990s, Thomas Deans categorized civic writing programs into three types: Writing about the Community, Writing for the Community, and Writing with the Community. Deans's description of a typical writing *about* the community program fits my course, which involved “tutoring children and bringing that experience back to the classroom as a text to be analyzed alongside other texts” (*Writing Partnerships* 97). Accordingly, I am most concerned with what my students had to say *about* the after-school programs in which they worked, and particularly with how my students depicted the education received by the children they tutored. The genres of writing required in my course demonstrated those goals; whereas a writing *for* the community course often requires students to write public relations materials on behalf of NGOs, and Flower's writing *with* the community model produces alternative texts such as “community problem-solving dialogues” from and for “vernacular local publics,” my course educated students in *academic* discourse by requiring observations, reflections, and extensive bibliographic research that culminate in an expository essay.

Traditionally, such a course would be described as “service-learning,” and I first designated the course as such, but I have since found that “community-engaged learning” more accurately describes the methodology that I undertook along with my students. In this characterization I take my inspiration from Eli Goldblatt, who has named Temple University’s

engagement programs a “Community Learning Network.” In doing so, he speaks of a desire to “get away from the idea of service” (Anthony, Kerr, and Scanlon). “Service” implies that the middle-class students are giving their working-class recipients something they need; in particular, the tutoring relationship posits that tutees will benefit from learning tutors' skills. Early work in the field critiques the “service to the needy” model of service learning (Crooks and Stroud, qtd. in Herzberg 58), and that critique has developed with the years. Linda Flower, for example, has characterized work like tutoring as the teaching of “technical expertise,” and placed it second from the bottom of a four-part hierarchy of service-learning paradigms (“Partners”).

Yet my eight years as a secondary educator led me to conclude that such technical expertise is often undervalued in the critical literacy model, especially given that literacy is a prerequisite for participation in many sectors of the job market and in many forms of public debate, not to mention academia. One concern, then, was how to reconcile two competing claims: one was that my college writers could serve as tutors and perhaps even role models to tutees who would benefit from acquiring academic literacy; the other was how to open up my students to the possibility that they would learn from the tutees, and, going further, that one lesson they would learn was that the tutees were not likely ever to occupy their own privileged positions as full-time university students, and not because of their individual personalities and choices (as the neoliberal rationale would have it), or because of some cultural practices or values unique to the Latin@ communities in which we tutored (as some students maintained), but because of our society's abiding systemic racism and socioeconomic inequality. Thus the question of how to inform an outreach project with critical literacy's critique of school-based literacy was central.

Goldblatt offers “community-based learning” as a resolution to this dilemma, with a focus on connecting people from on and off campus (“Community Learning Network”). Goldblatt’s focus on connection and relationship-building allows his version of community-based learning to focus equally on the campus’s impact on the community and on the community’s impact on the campus. That is, his frame allows university students to continue to count, with the measurement of their learning forming a large part of the assessment of the success of an engagement program. Currently for Goldblatt, this means seeing community-based learning as a way to educate university students on Philadelphia’s persistent class and racial divisions, issues that I also address in my dissertation with respect to the divide between many Irvine students and the working class, transnational Mexican@ and Mexican American communities with which we partnered. One inflection of “community-based learning,” then, is that it describes how *undergraduate* learning is “based” in the community; as mentioned, for Goldblatt’s and my projects, this often means that tutoring experiences in communities serve as the text that promotes reflection. Because Goldblatt’s notion of “community-based learning” allows a focus on what college students can learn from the community, this focus suits a project like mine, authorized and funded by the university. However, because my partnerships arise in *classes* that would guide the learning process – by offering texts, by requiring peer-to-peer and student-teacher discussion – I continue to emphasize the classroom space as central and thus name the work not “community-based,” but “community-engaged.”

This work is different in key respects from that of Linda Flower, arguably the field’s leading practitioner and theorist. Flower takes a position outside the university. She writes, for example, that “the ‘community’ stand in sharp relief to the ‘university’ arriving with its vanload of white, middle-class, educated outsiders” (*Engagement* 23). The goal of this “load” of university



mentors who work with Flower in Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center isn't so much to help students succeed in K-12 schools – Flower criticizes those schools' narrow vocational goals and stifling disciplinary procedures – as it is to amplify the voices of community youth, to listen and record as they convey their perspectives on school and community problems.

In the course I describe in this chapter we were not, as Linda Flower would have it, engaged in intercultural inquiry. We conducted inquiry, of course. We brought questions about why the younger students' education took the shape it did, about the policies behind it. The staff members who supervised our work at the after-school centers and in the high school were kind enough to consent to interviews about what they saw as right and wrong with the education their students were receiving, so their *professional* culture was an aspect of our inquiry. But we weren't in the position to ask too many questions of the young students themselves about their opinions on the matter. And we weren't being asked to have them critique their own education, as Flower has her high school students do. Nor did we require the younger students to ask questions of us, though they did ask a few. After all, we had been invited there as tutors, not writers. Yet this one-sided relationship was, oddly, our form of reciprocity, our means of fulfilling what the after-school centers and high school demanded of us. We were welcomed in the after-school centers and the schools because, the after-school centers and I agreed, we had acquired cultural capital to distribute to the working-class youth they tutored.

In keeping with the goals of the traditional research and argument course from which mine was adapted, my students didn't just “read” their tutoring experiences; they also read academic texts on critical literacy, namely Jonathan Kozol's 2005 *Shame of the Nation* on segregation, Patricia Gandara's *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*, and a selection from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The principal

genres in which my students wrote were also academic, at least inasmuch as their audience was their peers and instructor; they composed reflective blogs in which they discussed their experiences working with the K-12 after-school programs, participated in discussion forums in which they addressed course readings and tracked their research, and wrote a final research paper in which they outlined the causes of a contemporary problem in K-12 education. While much engagement stresses collaborative writing *with* communities, my *about* course seizes upon the opportunities for sustained rumination and investigation that academic research provides. It is true that more immediately efficacious genres—public service announcements, correspondence with those who hold the levers of power—have a key place in politics and in civic writing projects that engage politically. My chapters on poetry (2 and 3) should make it clear that I understand how that genre can incorporate local vernacular, often in ways that are more immediate, somatic, musical, and imaginative than the essay. I would never dismiss the value of our students’ participation *with* community members in collaborative and hybrid discourses that make knowledge and put it to work outside of the academy (Flower, “Partners”; Flower, *Engagement*; Cushman, “Public Intellectual”; Parks, *Gravyland*). However, this course is premised on the equally valid claim that the distance provided by the academy and its discourse – and the time allowed in this space for sustained inquiry – remain as indispensable for responsible citizenship as the action required of us following upon that inquiry. (For another version of this argument, see Deans, *Writing Partnerships*.) As will become more clear when I discuss emotions in this chapter’s case studies, I understand research and discussion as practices through which we refashion our orientations. Sustained inquiry, in this case into history, when that inquiry is understood as a careful listening to divergent perspectives, allows our students to go beyond easy explanations and to consider how they can position themselves with and against

others who address the same common controversies and concerns. And it does the same for us as instructors.

For practical reasons, I focus this chapter on the Fall 2011 version of the class, though I have taught the class three times (most recently in Spring 2013) with slight changes each time.<sup>11</sup> At the time I taught this course, the standard research and argument course at our university required that undergraduates research a “problem” in society, describe the history of that problem, and find the appropriate public policy solution to it. The course I analyze in this chapter took the same basic approach, looking at problems in the field of K-16 education, but requiring students to substitute for some of the online research their own observations in the field during 24 hours of tutoring I required that they complete in after-school centers run by nonprofits in K-12 education. (This course, 39C, typically requires that students research using forty online sources; my students were required to use twenty.) I pitched this service as first-person research; that is, I expected that my students would keep an eye out for problems their tutees faced within the after-school programs and, based on their observations of their tutees' skills and homework assignments, problems in the K-12 schools. As part of the field research, my course required that students conduct a personal interview with a professional educator and write up a transcript of that interview. (In practice, they usually interviewed supervisors onsite or former teachers.) The series of reflective blogs I have mentioned were meant to serve as vehicles through which students would process course readings and reconcile them with field observations and were, along with the discussion forums, intended to build toward the course's main research paper. One option for that paper was the standard course essay requiring students to draw on a 20-

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<sup>11</sup> I received approval from the IRB to review student work from both my initial iteration of the course in Summer Quarter 2011 and the second one in Fall Quarter 2011, but aside from a few comments upon the summer course I have focused in this chapter on the fall course, for I asked the individuals in that class for permission to discuss their work just after the quarter ended and grades were submitted, and thus received a far greater response rate (16/23 vs. 7/19).

source bibliography in analyzing the causes of a contemporary problem; a second option allowed students to incorporate, along with the online research, information they gathered from their field-notes, mixing fieldwork and bibliographic material together in a “Community-Based Research Paper” (adapted from Deans, *Community Action* 7).

### *B. Engaged Progressivism as Critical Literacy*

I take up this “about” model from a stance one might call, in a turn on Russel Durst’s “reflective instrumentalism,” “engaged progressivism,” where progressivism refers to my political stance and “engaged” to my approach to students’ political orientations. Why progressivism? Along with others practicing community-engaged composition and civic writing—Linda Flower, Paula Matthieu, Steve Parks, and Tom Deans come to mind, though there are countless more—I am committed to writing instruction as a practice of fostering literate citizenship in a pluralistic democracy. And like many of those writers I find that democracy hobbled by the neoliberalism that has in the last half-century confined far too much of our society’s vast wealth in the hands of the powerful even while castigating the powerless and under-resourced for their “gaps” and failings. Today’s dominant narrative, that we live in a postracial, meritocratic society, would erase knowledge of our identities as racialized, gendered, classed subjects and ill equip us for a world structured by these binaries to the detriment of the majority and the privilege of the few.

Composition offers an alternative to such magical thinking. Our university’s research and argument course calls for extended, research-based investigation of the history of a contemporary problem, and for a policy that would address that problem.<sup>12</sup> As such, it asks students to imagine themselves not in an individualistic competitive sphere in which they only

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<sup>12</sup> To fit this class, with its expanded field research requirements, into the same 10-week quarter, the policy paper had to be jettisoned.

achieve agency by virtue of mastering the skills required of them by the economy as it has been arranged. Instead, it calls upon them to fulfill their roles as citizens and decision makers, as participants in ongoing negotiations over the just allocation of resources—including their own labor. And, in my community-engaged version of this course, the composition students work with and learn from those who most stand to benefit from social justice, with those whom Mae Ngai has termed “impossible subjects”: racialized members of our nation’s perennial underclass who grow and thrive as they can in the parched terminus of trickle-down economics.

This chapter focuses on the extent to which blogs and forums allow students to engage intellectually and emotionally with the course’s critical literacy perspective and to take on authority of their own as they make an argument in relation to it. As I define it, critical literacy acknowledges the role of race, class, and English-language hegemony in shaping students’ educational opportunities. It understands class- and race-based inequality as the result of power struggles and suggests that language (and language education) perpetuates this inequality.<sup>13</sup> Thus, critical literacy investigates how racial and socioeconomic injustice is perpetuated through literacy education. Another way of putting it is as follows. First, critical literacy suggests that the current socioeconomic system and the educational system that grows out of it detract from the full human development of all members of our society; hence the term “critical.”<sup>14</sup> Second, critical literacy argues (as Durst sums it up) that “language and other cultural tools” shape our roles “as actors in history” with particular attention to the differential access to dominant

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<sup>13</sup> Certainly, by privileging race and class I ignore gender, sexuality, and ability. This perspective is not uncommon but is by no means universal among critical literacy theorists. For a notable exception, see hooks, who critiques Freire’s androcentrism even while pointing to the liberatory possibilities of his philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> For an extended critique of neoliberalism’s interference with the full human development of the oppressed, see Freire’s *Pedagogy of Indignation*.

discourses offered in schooling (3).<sup>15</sup> Educational policies that exacerbate class inequalities are the principal “problem” in K-12 education from this perspective.

Another, more capacious way of putting those points is Knoblauch’s definition of critical literacy, which states that it would “identify reading and writing abilities with a critical consciousness of the social conditions in which people find themselves.” That definition goes on to address a more reflexive aspect of critical literacy, one that arose inevitably as we described the younger students’ literacy education: “recognizing the extent to which language practices objectify and rationalize these [social] conditions and the extent to which people with authority to name the world dominate others whose voices they have been able to suppress” (qtd. in Anson, “On Reflection” 172). The last part of this last definition allows for a discussion of the rhetorical power exerted by the terms with which we refer to the education of the younger learners, for instance “education gap” versus “achievement gap,” and to the learners themselves, whether “underprepared,” “oppressed,” “non-dominant,” or what we will. That is, it explains how our descriptions of education are, if not already forms of intervention in it, at least maps for how such interventions can be understood and executed; in that students trace their own education in relation to the policy topics they analyze, their research and naming of the “problems” in education are also interventions in our own educational and life trajectories (see in particular Hannah’s and Pilar’s case studies, later in this chapter). To those who ask what critical literacy does for university students, I would answer that this reorientation has profound

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<sup>15</sup> Durst goes on to include in “critical literacy” other politically neutral skills that I would rather include under the term “critical thinking.” He traces critical literacy’s roots to both Frankfurt School Marxism and continental critical theory and suggests that the political concerns pertinent to my use of the term have arisen only more recently; more central to the concept of critical literacy, he argues, are “self-reflection, multi-perspectival thinking . . . rigorous development of ideas, and questioning of established ways of thinking” (3). It would be foolish to argue that my writing course did not push students toward these goals, which are nearly universally valued by literacy educators. However, I prefer to describe such skills as “critical thinking” and to reserve “critical literacy” for more explicitly political considerations.

implications for how students approach their everyday schoolwork, let alone the decisions they make at the ballot box or in other arenas of political engagement.

However it is defined and whatever it does or does not accomplish, critical literacy is contentious and political, a topic about which students brought strong convictions. *My* conviction (my orientation) is that first-year composition offers a unique opportunity for students to reflect upon critical literacy, to consider how, as Goldblatt puts it, “some people get privileges and others do not based on how they interact with texts and the social agencies those texts represent” (“Van Rides” 90). Furthermore, I believe that an engaged course that requires students to step off campus and witness this divide even as they participate in bridging it is worth creating. The emphasis on inequality, injustice, and oppression above serves to alert readers that I draw more heavily on Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* than Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, but both are in play in this course and in the broader civic engagement projects of which this composition course is one key part. Following Dewey, this course calls upon students to take up the identity of informed and active citizens; following Freire, it calls upon them to listen and respond to the moral injunction that they be willing to think and act in support of the dispossessed, to act as members of a public even as that concept is assailed by multinational capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

That dispossession from what Sires names as “the American Dream” is just as much a reality in the impoverished and segregated schools of Orange County in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was seventy years ago, when *Mendez v. Westminster* overturned *de jure* segregation here. Nationwide, following a brief period of mandated integration, our educational system has grown more segregated over the last forty years (Kozol). Thus, most first-year

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<sup>16</sup> For a description of this assault, see Giroux.

students arrive from high schools that are not as diverse in terms of income and ethnicity as are our public universities, which have in greater measure come to reflect the people of our nation.

As with most selective universities, even public ones, UC Irvine educates primarily students of privilege, students on the better-resourced side of the education gap.<sup>17</sup> For these reasons, I understood UCI students as middle-class and the students whom I required them to tutor to be working-class. However, the actual demographics of the class I study here, happily, proved more difficult to sum up than simply “middle class.” It did prove difficult to pin down my students’ class status. I did not request permission to view my students’ college records, nor did I ask them systematically about their home languages, ethnicity, or family income, so my description of my students’ demographics relies upon what I gathered from what they chose to share about those topics in their writing. But even these sources provided crucial information. As I’ll discuss in more detail during the case studies, many students, perhaps even most of those who commented on the topic, self-identified their homes as language minority households; several described their secondary schools as lackluster or struggling; finally, while only one student mentioned his family’s economic struggles specifically, several more offered comments – describing moves to less wealthy neighborhoods, for instance – that were consistent with families experiencing economic stress.

I did not know all of this when I selected the readings, which I understood would address the differences my students’ privilege and the younger students’ disadvantage and would guide our discussions of whether or not those differences were just or inevitable, and of what caused them. As I developed in the introduction, I hoped the tutoring would in some small way address injustice by directing resources to underserved K-12 students. Equally important, I wanted the writing that grew out of it to encourage my students to understand themselves as citizens

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<sup>17</sup> See Introduction for more discussion of Irvine’s demographics.



responsible for making decisions on policies that address not just their own interests but also the welfare of others in a shared democratic society.

By adapting our “Research and Argument” course, the second of two courses required of non-humanities majors to fulfill their lower-division writing requirements at UCI, I moved to realize such ambitions; this chapter describes how the course played out in reality and isolates the role of technology, emotions, and authority in that realization. In doing so, it contributes to our field’s ongoing conversations about how best to conceive of and implement civic writing, arguing that the traditional genre of the research essay continues to offer students – perhaps now more than ever in our culture of distraction – a unique opportunity to recast local and immediate experience (in this case their own education and their fieldwork) in light of larger histories and public policies. In other words, it argues that creating research-based essays offer undergraduates an apprenticeship in genealogical thought.

### *C. Scholarly Debate on Critical Literacy Pedagogy in College Composition*

In 1994, Herzberg wrote, “I don’t believe that questions about social structures, ideology, and social justice are automatically raised by community service. From my own experience, I am quite sure they are not” (46). The article in which that statement appears has since been circulated in a few composition anthologies, probably because Herzberg identified with gritty particulars a crucial difficulty that has stuck with service-learning: how to move students beyond a notion of service as charity.

Yet can writing teachers get students to grapple with issues of social justice and ideology? And should they? Even as critiques like Kozol’s have become a staple of English departments—much to the dismay of traditionalists like Stanley Fish—such “critical literacy” scholarship has itself undergone critique, oftentimes by practitioners sympathetic to its claim that

college composition can be a site to raise critical consciousness. This long-running conversation within composition generally, and civic writing in particular, gets at the very purpose of first-year composition and, indeed, of higher education.

In what follows I limit my literature review to the ways in which this conversation, which was reinvigorated in the late 90s community-engaged-writing movement by Herzberg's essay, has subsequently been taken up by compositionists Russel Durst and David Seitz and community-engaged compositionists Kara Kozma and Paul Feigenbaum. On one side, here represented by Durst and Seitz, are those who value critical literacy but who are ultimately skeptical that it can be effectively taught in college writing classes. On the other, represented here by Feigenbaum and Kozma, are those who are aware of the pitfalls that teachers of critical literacy encounter, but who believe that such teachers can responsibly encourage student engagement with critical literacy themes by being responsive to students' perspectives. My goal in focusing on these authors is to draw into sharp relief how opposition to the teaching of critical literacy within composition has shaped the work we do in progressive classrooms.

Durst, a critical literacy skeptic, bases his argument in *Collision Course* on a pair of first-year composition classes he observed at the University of Cincinnati, a city whose milieu he describes as conservative. He suggests that college writing instructors who would teach the complex thinking and radical politics he identifies with critical literacy will encounter what he terms a "twin resistance" to both these goals. He argues that effective composition instructors must learn to work with students' pragmatic, careerist reasons for taking their classes if they are to motivate those students. This compromise he terms "reflective instrumentalism." While the "reflective" aspect of this concept allows instructors with critical literacy approaches some wiggle room in encouraging students to question the uses to which their literacy is put, Durst's

emphasis on instrumentalism is ultimately conservative, urging students to accept the institutional and social configurations that shape their reading and writing.

In *Who can afford critical consciousness?* Seitz adopts a similar skepticism of the practicality of teaching critical literacy, though he puts the experiences of working-class and immigrant college students center stage. Through close readings of his own students' writing and conversations with his students and with those taught by other instructors, he comes to the conclusion that disadvantaged students resist middle-class instructors' attempts to inculcate values of cultural critique for well-founded, practical reasons pertaining to their own understanding of their tenuous purchase on the upward mobility promised by university education. As Seitz puts it, their "instrumentalist view of their education may be part of a working strategy to sidestep recognized discrimination and limited opportunity in the dominant society" (58). In Seitz's terms, they "bullshit" their way through assignments that call for students to voice a radical politics, or avoid politics altogether.

In "Traps, Tricksters and the Long Haul: Negotiating the Progressive Teacher's Challenge in Literacy Education" Feigenbaum responds to such critiques. Though the article does not address Durst's reflective instrumentalism directly, it critiques similar versions of critical literacy such as those practiced by Gallagher and Jacobs, theorists who argue that instructors ought not to engage in explicitly activist pedagogy but ought instead to assist students in locating themselves *individually* with respect to institutional literacies. Similarly, he critiques Graff and Lynch for arguing that the instructor ought to aim for ideological neutrality by playing the devil's advocate. Feigenbaum understands such practices as privatized, and argues, "[A]bsent an explicit grappling with the teacher's social vision, institutional literacy will become a practice used to advance private interests to the exclusion of working collectively for societal change"

(16). That is, if we don't present politics, then the classroom is a purely instrumental space: students getting their money's worth in skills to enable their individual success. Such an understanding of teaching and learning enacts a neoliberal political view without marking it as such.

I agree with Feigenbaum that progressive literacy instructors ought to seek ways to avoid this fate; for instead, "[L]iteracy education should enable everyone to participate actively in a just and democratic society" (29). Indeed, the ambition of the Service-39C course was to make students aware of the unequal delivery of literacy education in our local communities even as I enlisted them, in whatever small way, with an organization whose mission included the delivery of such education to nondominant youth. Yet Feigenbaum is aware, as are Durst and Seitz, that it is students' uptake of critical literacy ideas rather than the instructor's that ultimately concerns the progressive educator. He thus outlines how such teachers might bring their passions and beliefs concerning social justice to the classroom even as they seek out students' perspectives and speak in response to them. Feigenbaum argues that teachers must ground their progressive pedagogy in students' existing perceptions. Quoting Myles Horton's *The Long Haul*, Feigenbaum states that instructors must "build a proper 'tension between where people are and where they can be.'" Horton notes that, "If you lose track of where people are in the process then you have no relationship to them and there's nothing you can do." Instead, Horton speaks of "making people uncomfortable" by "pushing them, trying to help them grow" (qtd. in 26). As I will illuminate in the case studies, scholarship in the emotions of composition pedagogy has helped me to understand how not just students but I as the instructor could grow via the discomfort produced as we discussed critical literacy together in a process I call *engaged progressivism*.

Indeed, though I find myself in agreement with many of Feigenbaum's major claims, like Gallagher and Jacobs whom he critiques I deemphasize "collective action." I do so because I note that UCI students are not gathered as political collectives when fulfilling their lower-division writing requirement, and that they are not typically in the same position as Horton's students in the citizenship schools, who were often excluded by mainstream institutions and deprived of access to cultural capital, and who therefore could be led to adopt the perspective of the progressive educator who outlined a plan of action that would benefit them personally and collectively. On the contrary, by receiving an education at an elite institution my students have "won" the high-stakes competition of college entry and stand to benefit individually from their degrees in the existing economy, whatever the costs for those who are excluded. In short, I do not anticipate, as Feigenbaum does, successfully encouraging my students to act as a collective on behalf of the dispossessed. Instead, I urge them to understand privilege and disadvantage in more immediate terms: through reflecting upon their own educational experiences; participating in, analyzing, and researching the problems that disadvantaged younger students grapple with in their own education (hence, the fieldwork); and discussing their findings and their perspectives with other class members.

However, whereas Feigenbaum's article would make claims applicable to any college composition classroom, this chapter addresses a particular strategy: community-engagement. In this approach I follow the lead of the engaged compositionists I have cited – Flower, Goldblatt, and the like – those who develop engagements that link working-class and middle-class students across institutional and geographic boundaries. One recent example of such work, particularly germane to the increasingly diverse student body served by our university and others across the county is Kara Kozma's 2010 *Thinking Globally, Writing Locally: Re-Visioning Critical And*

*Service Learning Pedagogies With Globalization Theory*. Like my study, Kozma's addresses diverse students' resistance to critical literacy in a service-learning context. Her globalization frame enables her attention to the national origins and career aspirations of her transnational students, factors that play a role in their understanding of their work in the service-learning placements she facilitates. As did students in my course, her students spent a semester "writing about the community" during which they described their work as tutors to Hispanic elementary students. Reflecting upon this course along with a "writing with" course she led, Kozma suggests that "a combination of critical pedagogy, service learning, and globalization studies offers a revised pedagogical approach that can effect less student resistance" (31). Specifically, Kozma finds these approaches enable her students to engage emotionally and politically, make connections between their lives and the course material, and use and develop their own multiliteracy skills in cooperation with community partners.

As I noted in the opening paragraph of this chapter, my course also netted these positive results. Working in the field rather than researching online helps students not just to learn more about the content of the writing course (in my case, K-12 education, with a special emphasis on class), but also to find motivation and authority as writers. Meeting and interacting with people in the flesh brings home to students the notion that policy research addresses ethical concerns. Such research can be (and must be) a practice of ethics, for policies affect people, and it is easier for students to fully understand social justice as *social*, involving their fellow human beings, when they meet face to face.<sup>18</sup> In the terms of a rhetorical tradition stretching from Aristotle to Heidegger and Arendt, this course and others like it wager that rhetorical inquiry in a classroom space broadened to include those from disparate social classes urges inquiry from the perspective

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<sup>18</sup> For another version of the argument for face-to-face engagement, see Anthony, Kerr, and Scanlon's interview with Goldblatt.

of *being with*. Indeed, as I have noted, my class sought nothing less than the reconstitution of my students as citizen-subjects, subjects with a responsibility to the underclass.<sup>19</sup> To even begin to realize this goal, it is not enough to have students simply read about critical literacy as a concept. Instead, they must, inasmuch as it is possible, *experience* literacy acquisition as it is lived for working-class students. Hence, the turn toward community-engaged, experiential learning.

#### *D. Data and Methods, Student Demographics, Research Questions*

The question that I would illuminate in the case studies that follow becomes not whether or not students can repeat the critical literacy perspectives they find in the readings, but how they reconcile them with their existing worldviews, and how the instructor can effectively and progressively respond to students' developing perspectives. That question can be broken down into three related categories: emotion, technology, and authority.

The first category concerns the role of emotions in forming beliefs about critical literacy, both in students' personal reflections about their schooling and the fieldwork and in the discussions that grow out of these reflections. What does it mean that critical literacy provoked compassion in one student, shame in another, and anger in a third? Or that the students' compassion and shame provoked my guilt, and the students' anger my own? From whence derives the "pride" a fourth student feels about his research paper on critical literacy, and what does that pride suggest about the course setup? Altogether, how did these emotions enable or constrain class members' perspectives on critical literacy?

The second category gets at the affordances of our class's online, text-based communications (blogs and forums) for shaping class conversations. This category includes such questions as:

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<sup>19</sup> For a philosophical rumination on subject formation within discourse/power, see the introduction to Ian Hacking's *Historical Ontology*.

- Which students were more likely to speak in the forums, and which perspectives more likely to be voiced?
- Did informal writing allow students to engage with the class readings on critical literacy, making connections between them and the fieldwork? Particularly, given that blogs often include strong opinion, how did this genre shape my students' approach to critical literacy theories?
- Did reading their peers' forums and blogs push students to understand the social forces that had shaped their own education? Could such conversations help students to understand their experiences not as universal, but instead as linked to social configurations that include race and class? That is, could the diversity of the class become a resource, bringing home issues of privilege and disadvantage as they arose in others' educational experiences?
- When students blogged on their fieldwork and read others' blogs on the same, did it shift their perspectives? Were they willing to challenge one another? And if so, was their evidence that such critique could itself shift their orientations?

Third, I question students' stance and power vis-à-vis authority. Do students have the freedom to develop their *own* stance on critical literacy, and how does the instructor's guidance both allow for and limit that freedom? For that, I consider Foucault's concept of parrhesia, speaking truth to power, in light of Freire's reflection on the proper role of authority.

In practice, each of the three frames—emotions, technological affordances, parrhesia—was operating simultaneously, and the answers to one set of questions affected the answers to the others. Thus, I haven't grouped the case studies by research question. Instead, I have emphasized the dialogic nature of the students' developing knowledge by grouping the case



studies into two conversational clusters. The first involves Hannah, Alex, and Pilar; the second, Billy and Sires.

In building these case studies, I first analyzed all consenting students' blogs and forums in the Fall 2011 course, the interviews they conducted, and their final papers, all of which I read hermeneutically to draw out themes. I then narrowed my focus to the five students whose work took up the themes of critical literacy most frequently. This small sample includes working-class and middle-class students of both underrepresented and culturally dominant ethnicities (i.e. Latin@ and Asian American students), and it simultaneously includes two foreign-born students, two "Generation 1.5" students (Roberge), and one native English speaker. These students embody the ethnic and linguistic diversity typically found in lower-division composition classes at UC Irvine and in many writing programs across the country. To better understand these students' perspectives, I conducted in-person follow-up interviews with two of them and solicited clarification via email from two more students on the contents of their forums and blogs.

## **II. Hannah's Compassion**

Hannah's summed up her compassionate perspective in her third fieldwork blog:

I realized that I have to be a good example to the kids because I can represent coming from a low socioeconomic background immigrant family yet having the privilege and opportunity to attend college and even fulfilling my goal. I was able to empathize with the students more because I have been in the same position at one point in my life and I knew how it was to have no help or assistance offered to me.

Evidently, Hannah's personal experience with poverty and second-language learning contributed significantly to her orientation on critical literacy. The way she processed that experience helps us understand my first research question: how emotion constrains and enables critical thinking

about critical literacy. In the first section below, I analyze the causes and consequences of Hannah's compassion for Hispanic students, whom she understood to be suffering from the same problems that plagued her K-12 education. In the second section, I reflect upon my *own* discomfort and embarrassment when Hannah communicated that compassion in a whole-class discussion, for those feelings prompted me to question whether the course was reinforcing the very racism I hoped to challenge.

#### *A. Compassion and Critical Literacy*

With few exceptions (Langstraat and Bowdon), civic writing scholars have neglected to theorize compassion even as the broader field of service learning has pushed it as a key emotional component of civic partnerships (Astin et al.; Boss). Writing partnerships make more urgent the question of compassion's proper place and its politics, for the primary purpose of many such partnerships is to promote dialogue between people from different walks of life. In such situations, empathy can engage us, provoking us to imagine ourselves facing the same problems as others and to act on others' behalf. Yet even as it does so, it can allow ideology to remain intact, ideology that obscures others' expressed wishes from view, when we ignore how differences in the circumstances of those whom we meet shape their unique possibilities for action. Given that compassion, which I use here synonymously with empathy and sympathy, writes over differences between people even as it establishes commonalities between them (see Leake; Woodward), is the college students' compassion in literacy networks to be cultivated or eschewed? When does empathy allow one to inhabit another's subjectivity without also erasing it? What role does compassionate *rhetoric* play in mediating such considerations? What role should it play?

Lauren Berlant addresses similar questions in her 2004 book *Compassion*, noting that we extend compassion to those whom we consider part of our community and withhold it from those

whom we exclude, often because we understand the excluded as operating in an ethical system or political sphere separate from, and sometimes even opposed to, our own. The ethical system of “compassionate conservatism,” Berlant argues, insists “that society’s poorest members can achieve the good life through work” and thus “rephrase[s] the embodied dignities of structural inequalities as opportunities for individuals to reach out to each other, to build concrete human relations” (3-4). What do we make of this claim in the community-engaged classroom I established, one of whose primary genres is the reflective journal turned outward into a public blog? The comments my students posted in these blogs showed that many of them understood the genre to be amenable to their expression of compassion for the younger students from underserved groups with whom they worked. However, they sometimes understood the younger students as competitors; that is, the college tutors saw these struggling students as possible “losers” in the high-stakes game of college preparation through which they had won admission to our selective university, where they were earning the higher-education credentials that could perhaps provide a comfortable life (one that would, presumably, elude these younger students). At other times, they imagined the younger students as “others”—people separated by class, education, or culture from their own sphere of ambition and failure—people whose situations they could neither sympathize with nor understand.

Hannah took neither route. Instead, she communicated compassion regarding students’ difficulties with second-language acquisition and lack of parental support, challenges she saw as similar to her own. Nonetheless, when I first read her first blog, I interpreted her acknowledgement of these difficulties as a move to establish difference, not commonality—partly because Hannah, whose parents were Korean, focused on the students’ Hispanic ethnicity in pointing out their challenges. She wrote:

I visited and volunteered at Dios this past Friday. It was filled with young Hispanic children. Most of them seemed to come from a low-income family, judging by how they dressed. I was involved with five 1st grade children and assisted them in reading “The Cat in the Hat.” Compared to other children I’ve taught in the 1st grade, they seemed to struggle more with reading . . . Kozol argues that the heavily segregated areas and facilities seem to discourage the students because they are distinguished from the more well-off people. Although Dios is not specifically made for the Hispanic community, I believe that the segregation and special care for this type of low-income Hispanics is necessary and actually encourages the students that they have aid and assistance outside their homes and schools. Because they cannot receive as much parental care as children whose parents don’t have to work hours to make a living. They have to be able to rely and depend on adults apart from their parents for their educational needs and sometimes even security.

Children struggling with language, dressed in shabby clothes, segregated, discouraged, unsupported by family, in need of special care, and possibly in physical danger. Who could fail to feel for such students? Not I.

However, though what Hannah said about the students’ reading difficulties and their parents’ work needs was borne out by my experience as well, I worried over the consistency with which she focused on students’ deficiencies. I worried that compassion would sink to pity, with the contempt and distancing that the later emotion entails. (Kimball’s “A Plea for Pity” notes that while “pity” is for writers from Aristotle to Nussbaum synonymous with compassion, it has in the last few centuries developed the connotation of contempt for another’s suffering coupled with the tendency not to act to relieve that suffering. It is this I would discourage.) I took Hannah’s rhetoric to indicate that, in Berlant’s terms, she saw these students as members of a different society, one that left them with profound deficits.

In a move that anticipated my later redesign of the course (see the conclusion to this chapter), I asked Hannah to consider what the kids might be learning at home that they could not learn at the after-school center; that is, I asked what *strengths* their home lives gave them, suggesting that bilingualism might be one of those. By the third blog, Hannah had apparently

submitted to my authority and accepted these suggestions; she became, in her words, “encouraged by the potential that [she] saw in each of the children” and “surprised [by] how eager they were to answer the questions.” However, pursuing the truth or falsity of my noble sentiments about code-switching proved impractical, an eventuality that should hardly be surprising given that Hannah was fluent in Korean and English but not Spanish. Indeed, I had fastened onto the wrong aspect of Hannah’s experience in asking her to relate to the students, for it wasn’t their shared abilities as bilingual speakers but their shared challenges that ultimately determined Hannah’s perspective.

Forums required students to build connections between course readings, their research topics, and their own experiences learning to read and write. The forum I touch upon in this chapter, “Experience is the Seed of Research,” asked specifically about the college writers’ own K-12 educational experiences, including problems in their schools. I gave students the option of addressing critical literacy questions (i.e. “What impact might your socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation have had on your education? And how might this impact have been unjust to you or to others?”) but also allowed them to ignore those questions and address other problems in K-12 education, such as teacher tenure (Appendix A).<sup>20</sup> In Hannah’s case this forum invited compassion almost precisely for the reasons Aristotle elaborates in his definition of pity (what we would call compassion), which he describes as “a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours” (*Rhetoric* 2.8). Later in the same section, Aristotle adds that “remembering that similar misfortunes have happened to us or

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<sup>20</sup> I adapted this “Experience is the Seed of Research” forum from one in another UCI instructor’s course, regrettably one whose name I have not been able to track down. Several students used this forum to find a topic for the culminating research paper. For example, though none of my course readings bore on teacher tenure, two students (one of them Billy, discussed below) used their own experience with horrible, tenured teachers to critique the tenure process.

ours” can also excite pity. As Hannah understood things she had experienced precisely the misfortunes that these students were facing, and like them she had suffered through no fault of her own. Specifically, in “Experience is the Seed of Research” Hannah had written about the “negative effects” of her home language and economic situation on her own K-12 education:

One of the biggest issues, especially in my childhood life, was the lack of parental care in my education, not because they were indifferent but because they had to invest their lives in working 3 part-time jobs from dawn to night in order to provide for our financial needs. Therefore they were unable to be involved in how I was doing, what I was learning. Nor did they teach me to study effectively . . . Another issue of my experiences in K-12 education comes from the language barrier between my parents and me. Since I immigrated at a young age, I was able to quickly adapt and learn the English language, yet because my parents were born and raised in Korea, even basic English was difficult for them. As I started to progress in school, my English improved while my Korean worsened, creating a language barrier and gap between my parents and me, making it even more difficult to be involved in my education.

These experiences shaped how Hannah saw herself *and* the students with whom she was working. She wrote:

Some questions that I’ve started to think about seeing [the tutored student] was how are the children affected by their parents not being home emotionally and does that have any impact on the child’s education? Like in [student]’s case, neither her nor her parents had an opportunity to choose to be in those circumstances or that financial situation. Her parents were born in Mexico and they immigrated to America searching for better opportunities for their family yet ended up in the same place. According to [student], her parents also spoke no English so she said that she doesn’t ask and can’t ask her parents for help with her homework.

In these blogs, empathy focuses Hannah’s attention not on the differences between her and her students as Asian and Latino, but on the common challenges they faced as second-language learners.

I would term this recognition of common challenges a nascent critical consciousness, and suggest that a course such as this which leads students to pursue that recognition through policy research offers a suggestion for how such thinking translates first into research on a political

plane, and later—albeit beyond the confines of the term—into the citizenship I have articulated as a course goal. Like Lisa Langstraat and Melody Bowdon, who also address sympathy in the service-learning context, in making such claims I draw upon Martha Nussbaum’s distinction between compassion and empathy. This perspective maintains that compassion begins with feeling but also involves one in actions to bring about justice on behalf of those for whom and with whom one feels; conversely, empathy stops at simply imagining another’s experience as one’s own. Langstraat’s and Bowdon’s essay thus highlights “the perils of empathy,” namely that those with the leisure to contemplate others’ suffering and the “refinement” to savor it are deemed more humane for those attentions even while no benefits accrue to those who suffer. Their questioning of the politics of representation of another’s experience, particularly another’s suffering, gets at a troubling dynamic of my course, which asks my college students to write *about* off-campus students and the difficulties they face in their education. Boler’s questions, cited on page 11, are germane: “Who benefits from the production of empathy in what circumstances? . . . If no change can be measured as a result of the production of empathy, what has been gained other than a ‘good brotherly feeling’ on the part of the universal reader.” To what degree, these questions lead us to ask, must a “service-learning” or “community-engaged” course be *for others*, in this case, for the benefit of younger off-campus students whom my own students tutored and supervised. Is it enough that my students tutor? Is it useful that they develop a critical consciousness that orients them to act on others’ behalf in *future* situations?

I would argue yes, with each of these outcomes (tutoring and understanding critical literacy) supplementing each other as social achievements. Furthermore, like Langstraat and Bowdon and the overwhelming majority of compositionists concerned with civic writing, I do not view my teaching as successful if students finally understand what they do as charity on

behalf of deficient individuals. That orientation to action leaves structural inequality in place, ameliorating suffering, perhaps, but not making it less likely to recur. Even though I would wish them to feel for students who face challenges and hardships, I require that they take seriously the suggestion that such hardships are not a necessary aspect of human life, but are consequent to social institutions that generate inequality, neglect, disrespect, and so on. What I am asking for, in Nussbaum's terms, isn't simply empathy but compassion, and compassion directed toward social concerns.

As some of the other case studies will show, I'm not suggesting that this course always realized these goals. However, I am arguing that in a class like this, research itself is the first productive intervention invited by compassion. In Hannah's case, her emergent understanding of critical literacy may have begun with empathy, but it would carry her into an investigation of the causes of the problems she both witnessed and experienced, and a search for possible solutions that included not just individuals but also institutions. In beginning this investigation of the relationships between parents' economic hardships, language difficulties, and schooling, Hannah returned to her own experience, conducting an interview with an educational professional whom she revealed in a later email was her own father.<sup>21</sup> Interviewing her father allowed Hannah to draw out the parallels between her own and her tutees' educational situations. The interview basically provided Hannah's thesis for the final paper, which communicated a dual perspective, involving both the home and the system in the miseducation of children—torn, even, between the two irreconcilable explanations for where to lay blame. The interview, which Hannah translated

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<sup>21</sup> Hannah explained that she had chosen to interview her father because as her parent “he would be able to share more deep, honest, and rich information.” Furthermore, “[T]he assignment focused on issues in education which I knew my father had critically analyzed and formed a firm, stable opinion on through his knowledge and experience as an educator himself.” Based on the guilt he expresses in the interview, I speculate that it also allowed both her and her father to work out unresolved issues in her own upbringing—certainly *not* a course goal, but one facilitated by the personal affordances of the blog.



from Korean to English as her father spoke, includes a rather dispiriting description of the downward spiral of anxiety and depression experienced by kids in households with overworked parents. It concludes with three separate suggestions for how such a cycle might be averted:

I think there should be an increase in the educational budget to implement more programs for the underprivileged. Also, the most effective solution would be to have parents become involved in the child's education despite their lack of time at home. Parents can no longer use their lack of time as an excuse to be indifferent towards the child's education. Also, the student needs to be counseled to be given a vision and motivation to achieve that goal or vision to the point where they could be able to push themselves alone.

Who is to save the floundering student: the economic system, the uninvolved parent, or the student "alone?" The answer provided by the interviewee is, complicatedly, "all of the above."

Unfortunately, in developing this thesis, Hannah paired the interview with some less authoritative sources such as "about.com." In a few other respects, too, Hannah's term paper did not meet the expectations I provided on the rubric. Her conclusion, for instance, simply repeated her previous points, ignoring the models I had provided that framed the local issues in larger contexts and included calls for action and predictions of consequences. However, as might be expected from a student engaging with a topic of such importance to her personally and emotionally, Hannah's essay was on balance quite strong. Unlike another paper from this course that attempted to cover the same general topic of racial and economic achievement/education gaps, Hannah's paper was tightly focused on a particular proximate cause of such gaps: parents' time with kids. The paper also dealt substantively with the readings on critical literacy when it linked parents' schedules to their working-class status, and it successfully incorporated what Hannah had observed of the struggling bilingual students in the fieldsite. The paper's strengths, I'm arguing, were in large part attributable to Hannah's empathetic identification with those students whom she was writing about. By engaging her heart, she engaged her mind.

But did Hannah, as this chapter asks, shift her orientations? Did she leave the course believing that America's race and class divides could be described as injustice? The evidence from Hannah's blogs and research paper isn't definitive, but it leans toward the affirmative. The problems she saw herself as sharing with the students—second-language learning as well as their parents' economic struggles and their consequent inability to support their children academically—could be read as structural or individual, the deficits of particular families or the symptoms of a socioeconomic system. By tying her father's economic difficulties to those of the students she tutored, however, Hannah hedges toward the latter explanation. And by identifying herself with Hispanic students also learning English as a second language, she does the same. Empathy in Hannah's case is a move not to understand the students as individuals struggling from personal deficits, but as members of a common society having trouble adjusting to that society, members who might benefit not just from increased parental efforts in spite of the odds (though, following her father, that did form part of her thesis) but also from policies that would direct public resources toward the students who most needed them. In Hannah's case, empathy prompted critical literacy thinking.

Yet even as it prompted Hannah to form that sort of coalitional thinking, empathy may have dissuaded her from recognizing aspects of the Hispanic students' experiences. Did she, as a Korean immigrant in a state with a history that includes Chinese exclusion laws, and as a legal entrant to the country, find herself in a distinct economic position from those students she tutored? What led those kids at her church to read more proficiently than the kids at the center? These were not questions that complete empathy would lead one to ponder. Instead, their answers would have to be provided by someone with a knowledge of the history and current circumstances of the students at the center, someone with a view of this state's racialized funding

priorities and exclusionary laws, of our continued inability to provide an education that capitalizes on the talents and skills of those from underserved groups. In other words, to set her experiences in context Hannah needed the guidance of either knowledgeable community members or an informed instructor. As became clear when Hannah linked students' difficulties to their race, such questions were on Hannah's mind, even if, unfortunately, she did not find anyone to answer them in public that quarter.

*B. Pedagogy of Discomfort: Engaging with Compassion*

I turn now to my own uncomfortable reaction to that empathy and the critical consciousness it sparked as Hannah conveyed these in a whole-class discussion. For I first misunderstood Hannah's empathy as pity, with a racist undertone. My discomfort caused me to reconsider the course setup, and it suggests that instructors who would address the topics of class and race must have a certain amount of courage if they are to guide students successfully through a confrontation with these issues.

Hannah was unusually blunt in linking the younger students' academic shortcomings with their Hispanic ethnicity, not just in her blogs (as we have seen) but in one of our whole-class discussions. In that discussion she repeated verbally what she had said in her blog: the students she was tutoring at the after-school center, whom she identified two or three times as Hispanic, had lower reading skills than the students she tutored in church, who were the same age. Perhaps she detected my discomfort or that of the other students, for by the end of the explanation she shrank back in the chair. That was all, but it was enough to make me deeply uncomfortable. The course had led Hannah to see Hispanics as poor readers and writers. Had I designed a racist course?

In addressing the emotional aspects of the difficult topics of race and class privilege, I

have been informed by the specific pedagogical strategies suggested by other compositionists who have approached the writing classroom using theories of emotions. Felman, for example, argues that instructors who allow emotions to surface in class conversation, and who pay attention not just to the arguments students make but to the emotions they communicate, can better promote debate that includes the "crisis . . . vulnerability . . . [and] explosiveness" that are necessary for teaching to realize itself as more than the passing along of facts (qtd. in Ryden 90). Stenberg also suggests that a "pedagogy of discomfort" concerning social injustice benefits from an understanding of emotion, and she outlines a method that would make "emotional inquiry a regular component of rhetorical analysis" ("Chaos" 361). That is to say that she would have students not just analyze how writers use pathos but also reflect upon why they, as readers, are responding to texts with their own pathos. Similarly, Quandahl uses Aristotle's hexis (habit) and pathos (experience/emotion) and Burke's "piety" to argue that emotion orients us in ethics, that our dispositions are emotional. Because curricula can't anticipate the emotional reactions that are central to our own and our students' interpretations of class texts, instructors who would generate conversations in which students can challenge and develop their belief-systems must possess the ability to explain their own dispositions and reactions, and afford students opportunities to do the same.

In my case, I was acutely uncomfortable at hearing Hannah repeat the word "Hispanic" as she described the younger students' academic deficits, mortified (I realize in retrospect) that I had led Hannah and others in the class to think of these students as inherently inferior because of their race. In the moment, I was only conscious of embarrassment on Hannah's behalf. I wanted her to stop talking before she said something that would make other students scorn her. I wanted to interrupt, explaining that it of course wasn't simply *because* the students were Hispanic that

they were scoring low. Many were learning English as a second language or were being educated in overcrowded classrooms that stretched teachers to the breaking point, among other challenges. Given Hannah's blogs, I realize now that regarding ESL difficulties, at least, Hannah would have been in agreement with me, even if it wasn't coming across in what she said. But her blogs were not on my mind as I listened. Instead, as she continued to speak, I worried that Pilar (whose work I discuss later in this chapter) or other students in my class would see Hannah's comments as further evidence of condescension toward the neighborhood's kids. In the end, I simply nodded, telling myself that I was allowing Hannah to link class readings to the fieldwork and that my *students* would take up any issues they had with what she said. Of course, they did not, but after a brief pause someone brought up another topic and we went on with the conversation.

I highlight this situation as an example of an "explosive" moment, a "teachable moment," as they say, passed by. In class, I had certainly suggested that race figures into the education that children receive. The week in which we held this discussion, I'd lectured on our country's education gap, citing studies of African-American and Hispanic versus Caucasian and Asian test scores. That day's reading, Gandara's *Forbidden Tongue*, was about the trouble that English Language learners were having in high schools, with lower graduation rates than their native-speaking peers and lower scores on state tests. Given the readings, Hannah can be excused for thinking that her comments on Hispanic students' low achievement would be innocuous. Indeed, those readings made it hard for her to see anything *other* than low achievement. However, as I have shown, as Hannah talked I shied away in discomfort from the very issues my class was designed to address, and as a result whatever racism did or did not lurk in Hannah's comments remained unexamined both by me and by the other students in the class. As I'll show in my section on Pilar's blogs, this did not mean that students were not wrestling with questions of

race, poverty, and shame in their own thinking. However, it did mean we lost the opportunity to develop these ideas in an open forum where I as the instructor could have proven useful as a moderator and guide. This is unfortunate given the democratic ambitions of my course, which aimed to raise awareness of plight without recourse to pity. I had wanted my students to map the readings onto the younger students' experiences as representatives of the "problems" in K-12 education, but I didn't want them to see the race or culture of those students as creating those problems. In short, I wanted them to read the text of the fieldwork experience, if not through the lens of progressive politics, then at least in conversation with what such politics. I wanted them to consider a progressive perspective on the inequality faced by working-class Mexicano students. However, by staying silent as Hannah spoke, by being, frankly, afraid that what she said might have racist implications, I lost an opportunity for the class to engage with Hannah's way of understanding that fieldwork, which may have been different from my own. I hadn't, in Horton's words, met the people "where they were." As my next section on Alex's work will show, my silence here and at other key points allowed the students to read the fieldwork in their own way, but that did not always bring them into conversation with the critical literacy perspective, as I had hoped. A more courageous teacher could have provoked students' fuller engagement. In the conclusion to this chapter, I highlight some possibilities for what such engagement might look like.

### **III. Alex's Authority: Professional Interview as Support for a Cultural-Deficit Orientation**

For now, however, I turn to Alex, who wasn't so shy about addressing ethnicity. Even as Hannah was having this conversation with me and other class members, she was having another one with Alex in the blogspace. We'll recall that Hannah summed up her compassionate perspective in her

third fieldwork blog: “I was able to empathize with the students more because I have been in the same position at one point in my life and I knew how it was to have no help or assistance offered to me.” Alex picked up on this last comment, having no assistance, but turned it, responding with a concise and pointed cultural explanation of the Latin@-Asian achievement gap:

My family immigrated too from Taiwan and so did many other family families. However, we don't see many Asian communities in need of help like those of other minority groups. I wonder why is that? Is it because of the culture differences or what? Not sure if I know the answer.

By framing the theory as a question and emphasizing his uncertainty, we might say that Alex deferred to authority. Still, as was appropriate to these student-to-student conversations, he was working from opinion, from his own orientation. While at this point, he really couldn't be “sure” because he had no assigned readings to back up this opinion, the challenge to the course readings was clear: struggling minority students didn't need “help” to succeed; they simply needed to take up the right cultural practices.

This type of exchange, one that allowed students to speak directly and forcefully about their perspectives on K-12 education, was typical in the blogs and forums. In this section on Alex and in others that follow on Pilar, Billy and Sires, I illuminate how the affordances of those blogs and forums for voicing such forceful opinions shaped students' intellectual journeys. In Alex's case, they offered the opportunity to state his views quickly and clearly, and thereby to firm up a perspective that he would then pursue in the more extended argument that this course required as its culminating project.

Before delving into Alex's blog in particular, I'll spend a few moments tracing the genealogy of the blog itself to the reflective journal, a genre that continues to play a crucial role in experiential education. Experiential education, which I draw upon heavily in both my own

action-research and in the education of college writers, understands experience and emotion as critical to our development as thinkers and citizens.

John Dewey, a pragmatist in the generation following that of William James, helped to organize American education, both secondary and post-secondary, around the principle that learners must integrate action and reflection in developing their thinking; he also held faith with the principle that education makes possible a participatory democracy (Dewey, *Democracy and Education*). My community-engaged pedagogy, like that of others in the service-learning field and in the broader field of community-based learning, owes much to his vision of education.

Dewey theorizes learning as context-driven and pragmatic. To oversimplify, he defines thought by opposing it to belief. Beliefs “cannot hold themselves up as something that the mind should accept, assert, and be willing to act upon” with “intellectual commitment” (*How We Think* 7, emphasis in original). Here, Dewey finds common ground with Freire, who contrasts a language rooted in praxis with empty words. Freire writes, “When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter” (qtd. in Kolb 30). Given these philosophical underpinnings, it should be evident that the blogs students wrote for my course were not only, or even primarily, a forum for political debate, though that is what I have focused on in this chapter. Instead, they drew from a long tradition of reflective writing that understands reflection as contributing toward praxis. This is in keeping with the practical strain of many of those engaged in Community Writing. Deans, for instance, notes that “a service-learning pedagogy demands not only contemplation but also action” (*Writing Partnerships* 13) and suggests that “the ultimate goal is to fully integrate action and reflection, folding each into the other” (*Community Action* 253–4).



In this course, students developed such practical thought, such “intellectual commitment,” by writing through their service experiences. An axiom often repeated is that “[i]t is the reflection process which turns experience into experiential education” (qtd. in Hubbs and Brand 63). Hence the title of the field’s major journal: *Reflections*. When I stated at the outset that my course setup would provoke students to understand research as a learning process, I meant something quite particular by “learning,” a term I use in keeping with David Kolb’s usage in his experiential learning cycle (itself a synthesis of John Dewey’s, Jean Piaget’s, and Kurt Lewin’s explorations). I take learning to be, in Kolb’s terms “the process whereby knowledge is created through *transformation* of experience” (38, emphasis mine). In a move that bears on my concern with students’ uptake of critical literacy, Kolb suggests that resistance is inherent to the development of thought. He writes, “all learning is relearning” because “one’s job as an educator is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones” (28). Thus the importance of the “preconceptions” and “assumptions” blog questions (Appendix B, #2b, 3b3, 4b), which ask students to articulate how the perspectives through which they entered the community sites might have misled them.

These particular blog prompts, which I adapted from Kolb’s 4-part structure, are similar to those used by other practitioners of experiential learning for reflective journals. Like those journals, these blogs require observation, reflection, analysis, and planning (see Appendix B). However, students’ ability to read and comment upon one another’s reflections differentiates these blogs and the forums from the journal genre. These require them to register their understanding of the fieldwork in the dialogic space of an online conversation. Footnoting the question of whether or not the assignments in which my students reflected on their fieldwork

fulfilled all genre characteristics of “blogs,”<sup>22</sup> the circulation of these writings does mean that like many blogs they blur public and more private speech, a genre characteristic noted by other composition scholars (Tougaw; Miller and Shepherd). In this line of thought, blogs can be said to promote student engagement because they bridge social-constructivist and expressive paradigms of writing instruction, offering discussions in which students bring their own interests and experiences to bear (expressivist) in ongoing public discussions (social-constructivist).<sup>23</sup>

Fernheimer and Nelson also emphasize the private, expressivist nature of the journal-like blogs used in my course (blogs that reflect on personal experience) even as they suggest that jointly authored blogs can better promote an engaging, agonistic, proto-public sphere. They concede to expressivists that frequent writing in a private format may, like Elbow’s free writing, strengthen students’ ability to translate their scattered thoughts into clear and sustained investigations and ruminations. Yet they argue that unless students are pushed to think not just by writing themselves but also by reading the writing of their instructors and peers, they will lapse into solipsism, not fully developing critical thinking skills. Outside of composition, Lovink has leveled this accusation against blogging generally, noting that “zero comments” blogs – blogs that are posted and receive no reply – fragment discourse into a smattering of neglected

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<sup>22</sup> The blogs for this class shared features with more typical extracurricular blogs: they were single-authored and semi-public (public to the proto-community of the classroom); they were logged in reverse chronological order (i.e. most recent first) on a webpage that contained a brief description of the author and a date range for the blogs; and they called for personal perspective on an experience that was to some extent held in common with other class members, in this case tutoring in after-school settings. However, whereas the blogs with which students expressed familiarity tended to be self-sponsored, and often recorded social events for a tight circle of friends or a wider circle of followers, the blogs for my course were obviously assigned. Furthermore, by responding to the first of them I ensured that the power dynamic and the degree of formality expected was much different than for students’ personal blogs. To appreciate just how different an assigned blog can be from a self-sponsored one, see Liew, who discusses a blog in which a student “flames” a teacher for his shortcomings.

<sup>23</sup> On the public/private nature of these blogs and forums: all were more public than they would have been had they been turned in by hand, for they were posted on the Studio site where any member of our class could see them. For several assignments, I was the only one to reply (these comments, too, were visible to other students who cared to look). However, for two of the forums “The Goals of Education” and “Experience Is the Seed of Research,” and for the final two blogs, which were scheduled to follow students’ third and fourth weeks in the field, I required students to comment on one another’s work in the small groups they had formed.

monologues rather than inaugurate the participatory, democratic culture envisioned by Web 2.0's early proselytizers. Similarly, Pena-Shaff and Nicholls find that blogs produce "more reflective monologues than dialogical interactions" (abstract).

In my own case, the degree of students' interaction with one another's blogs varied widely. Many students' comments met the bare minimum requirement for word count and echoed the comments of their peers (despite my explicit directions to the contrary). Other students engaged in thoughtful and extended commentary that made use of their fieldwork, the class readings, and even their own online research. Alex fell somewhere in between these extremes, and I would argue that his blogs ride the line between monologic and dialogic thinking. This is apparent in the Hannah example that began this section, in which Alex used Hannah's comment as a springboard for his own opinions. This stance will be familiar to anyone who has invested time in navigating the rich detritus of the comments section of opinion pieces in major media outlets, in which the responses are less often careful considerations of the arguments made in the original posts than opportunities for respondents to elaborate on previously held theories, sometimes wittily, sometimes crassly, and almost always curtly. Considering this generic tendency of such discussion spaces, one mimicked by the low-word count responses required in the discussion space I sponsored, it should not be surprising that Alex's cultural deficit perspective came through most clearly in these early weeks not in his own blogs but in the comments he made on others' blogs. I surmised at that point that Alex had judged my critical literacy perspective to be hostile to his views and was communicating a cultural deficit perspective in his peers' blogs, as opposed to his own, on the theory that he would be less likely to be penalized for them there. However, considering that Alex's essay

included in its thesis the idea that “Mexican students in California do not value education,” he was clearly comfortable with conveying that perspective in a high-stakes assignment.

In retrospect, I do not believe the paper deserved the B+ I awarded it (I overcompensated in my attempt to be fair to a student with whom I disagreed so strongly). However, its first five pages did use research to support its contention that Latino parents contribute to their children’s school failures, and it effectively deployed information from the educational professional whom Alex had interviewed: a high school chemistry teacher with twenty-three years of experience. Thus, the paper does display another important source of students’ authority in my course: the field interview.

The chemistry teacher provided what would become the thesis of Alex’s paper in the following comment:

When I attended the parent conference at [High School 1], the parents were asking me what I was doing wrong because their children were not doing so well. However, when I came to [High School 2], it was the other way around. The parents there were asking me where they could find tutoring for their children, or how what they could do as parents to help. The majority of the parents at School 1 were Hispanic and Latino, and at [School 2] it was more Asian. Education is highly valued in Asian culture, but it is not valued as much in the Hispanic or Latino culture.

Alex was not the only student of mine to be strongly influenced by the opinions of the professional educators whom I required them to interview; a brief analysis of those dynamics may prove useful to others who would ask students to incorporate personal interviews into papers on public policy. I had added the interview assignment to the standard class syllabus, which required only bibliographic research, because I knew that students would be working with knowledgeable people in their field placements, and I wanted them to draw on that knowledge. I also believe interview skills are valuable in themselves, preparing students to take the initiative and ask difficult questions when they’re seeking information. More importantly for the stated

goals of a research and argument class, I wanted students to increase students' engagement with the course topics by getting them to understand how their policies affected educational practitioners in the real world. Finally, I wanted them to see their own opinions on a topic as part of a conversation in which multiple parties had perspectives; by having them talk to a real person in developing their essays, I hoped to suggest that such perspectives weren't infallible, but context-dependent, in this case in the context of the after-school programs with whom we partnered.

It turned out that for many students the last goal was unrealistic, for they had a hard time challenging the authority of those they interviewed, even when the interviewee's perspective did not match that of the other sources they found in their research. This indicated to me that they did feel empowered as researchers bringing unique perspectives to the topics they studied, but that the perspectives they brought were often not, as I had hoped, their own interpretations of problems in K-12 education, but the interpretations made by their interviewees.

Though many of my students interviewed administrators or volunteers, for the most part they chose to interview teachers, often those in their community sites but sometimes their own favorite teachers from high school. And, having heeded teachers' advice for most of their lives on their way to my college classroom, they often agreed with those perspectives. This led to a dynamic with respect to authority and truth-telling that I hadn't expected: my students used their teacher's authority to support their own when they challenged the critical literacy claims advanced by Kozol and Gándara.

Alex was such a student. In one sense, his ability to develop a cultural-deficit perspective on his topic is a victory. In *Bootstraps*, Victor Villanueva suggests that one cannot urge democratic thinking that would question existing injustice through totalitarian instructional

methods. Similarly, Freire suggests that authority lapses into authoritarianism when teachers enforce political perspectives on their students (qtd. in Feigenbaum 5; see also *Pedagogy of Indignation*). Along the same lines, Lu and Horner argue that teachers do not “unveil” the reality of injustice but engage in a reciprocal process of learning with their students. They write, “We need to involve the student as well as the teacher in politicizing the students' experience. And we need to explore as well how to use the teacher's own and others' lived experience to problematize the teacher's knowledge” (267).

Taking up these claims, I could be reassured that the structure of the course allowed Alex to develop his own perspective in relation to critical literacy. After all, the research that I required my students to do allowed for that perspective-building. For their final papers, students were responsible for finding twenty resources on their topic, and for the Community-Based Research (CBR) option that Alex chose, they were allowed to use their own high school experiences and required to use their own fieldwork observations; use of the assigned readings was not required, though I encouraged it. All told, the students had substantial leeway to establish their own authority on the topic they studied. And indeed if they did their jobs properly then their research would lead them by the end of the quarter to know far more than I did about the particular subcategory of educational policy their final papers addressed.

It was inevitable, then, that just as students like Hannah used their prior experiences to understand educational policies, students like Alex would use their existing cultural models to do the same. Granted, I take heed of Freire's and Villanueva's caution that an instructor not impose critical politics on students, either for the ethical reason that students ought to preserve their own autonomy or the practical one that such a “conversion” wouldn't be genuine. However, I also believe, that a service-learning class properly implemented can shift students' attention from

individual and cultural explanations of education gaps, deepening their understanding of the impact of economic status on educational opportunity. This argument has been made most clearly in ““Blaming You, Blaming Me: Assessing Service-Learning and Participants’ Tendency to Blame the Victim,” (Hollis). In Alex’s case I’d suggest that I did not structure the course properly to encourage critical literacy. Instead, in his blogs and final paper, Alex did “blame the victim,” or at least the victims’ families, positing an unabashed cultural explanation for students’ success or failure in school. One can read Alex’s paper, then, as my failure as a critical literacy teacher to, as Freire’s term is typically translated, conscientize my students to structural causes of inequality (though as we will see in my discussion of Billy, the instructor can’t accomplish such a recalibration simply by voicing his own critical literacy opinions).

Nor was Alex was not alone in representing the problems of his tutees not just as individual (“lack of motivation”) or familial (“lack of parent involvement”), but cultural (“Asians value schooling more than Latinos”), though he was the only one to make an extended argument from that perspective in his final research paper. A recent study in the Education Department here at UCI has noted the persistence of such explanations even in the face of class readings that adopt a critical literacy stance (Matchuniak). Yet unlike that study’s author, I do not reject student’s cultural explanations as factual errors, or even as ideology in any sense in which ideology explains to students a world other than the one in which they live. In fact, it was evident that students found such concepts persuasive in light of their emerging experiences as tutors. However, neither can I accept wholesale their private and cultural explanations of race- and class-based “achievement gaps” (or, as critical literacy practitioners prefer, “education gaps”).

Clearly for Alex, no shift in perspective occurred. Why? One reason, I would argue, is that I did not make *deep reading* of either the class texts or his peers’ blogs a requirement of the

course. (In the conclusion, I suggest some ways one might do so.) When students like Alex – transnational students from well-off families – use their own experience as the principal reference for understanding the education of the working-class students they tutor, it’s unlikely that they’ll consider the perspectives of critical literacy. The following section should help to make clear how Alex might have used the online conversations with his peers not simply to reinforce his cultural-deficit perspective on inequality but rather to more fully understand how inequality is lived in K-12 education. It does so partly by illuminating how his instructor did just that.

#### **IV. Pilar’s Critique: Blog and Forum Affordances for Indignation**

Pilar’s forums and blogs created an opportunity I had not foreseen when I imagined my students as uniformly middle-class: the chance for my students to tap each other for working-class perspectives on local education, and for me to do the same.

If anyone involved in my course was an authority on the neighborhood served by Dios Community Center, where half of my students completed their tutoring, it was Pilar. She was one of a few students in the course who grew up in Dios City, and the only one to identify explicitly with this particular neighborhood. She wrote that not only had she attended the school in which she volunteered to tutor, so had her “entire family,” including nieces and nephews who were currently students there. Obviously, Pilar’s perspective immediately complicated the preconception I discussed above that my students and those they served would consist of two unique groups. It was thus fitting that Pilar’s comments directly challenged the authority, not of the class readings or of me as instructor (at least not directly) but of an unexpected text: the



recruitment video brought by the volunteer coordinator at Dios, a video that spoke of the organization's commitment to bringing hope to a hopeless community.

In response to that video, Pilar wrote a forum entry she titled "Sheltered from Reality," which included the following:

I was sheltered from reality because my childhood and adolescent life was never as negative as the media and organizations portray it . . . I become frustrated when people undermine [my city] and think it's only a poverty stricken city with dangerous neighborhoods and gangsters dominating every block. My frustration and anger comes from the fact [that] people just look at the negative aspects and treat this community like it is an incurable disease. I would like the students to be able to have organizations that care but I would not like young students, or any student, to feel as they come from a poor neighborhood that everyone feels the need to rescue.

Later, I followed up with Pilar via email, and she critiqued again the Dios Center recruitment video, which the volunteer coordinator had shown us on the day she visited our class and which had prompted this outburst:

I recall that only the "shabby-looking" parts of Dios City were demonstrated but in reality there are pretty places in Dios City too. Instead of organizations trying to empower this community and make this community self-sufficient, organizations make the residents feel a bit ashamed of where they come from (or at least that is how I felt) because all the negative dimensions are what [are] being represented to the "outsiders."

To address how the blog format shaped these comments and their reception, I first examine the emotions raised in them. Let's consider what Pilar said about the video making her feel "frustrated," and "ang[ry]," as well as what she said in our later, private correspondence about it making her feel "ashamed." As I mentioned in discussing my own discomfort over Hannah's compassion, a pedagogy of discomfort views emotion as a classroom resource. It draws attention to the role of emotions in signaling to us and others our ethical commitments and values, and if we pay attention it can help us to reconsider those values. In this case, Pilar's emotions helped me to reconsider the deficit-oriented narrative of the class. Like Hannah, Pilar was emotionally

impacted by this narrative, but unlike Hannah she did not see the students she tutored as needing compassion. Instead, she responded first with shame and then with anger at those who had insulted her by belittling the community where she grew up. Aristotle teaches us that anger is aroused when one is offended by “demeaning offenses against me and mine” (qtd. in Sutton “Teachers’ Anger”). Here, Pilar makes it clear that “mine” includes her community, whose shaming is an “offense” she responds to. Anger has roused her to critique the video’s deficit narrative and to explain what was missing from the texts I presented and those offered by the nonprofits with whom we worked.

These emotions prompted me to respond with guilt (why had I invited guests to denigrate the community we intended to benefit?) and, when it came time to write up a first draft of this manuscript, a request for guidance from Pilar. She obliged, pointing me in the direction of an education professor at our university who stresses the repertoires of practice and funds of knowledge that students from nondominant communities like these bring to the classroom. Today, I can say that I plan to include readings on these topics in subsequent iterations of the course. Following up once again on Lu and Horner’s dictum that the student’s experience ought to complicate the teacher’s knowledge, I take as a point of pride that I was receptive to how Pilar’s experience problematized both my knowledge and the readings (and videos) I provided the class. This was a clear example of *engaged* progressivism: I was informed by listening to a student from this community and learning both from her and from the professor whom she respected (and who had respected her home culture).

My main question, however, was whether or not the blogs offered the *students* the opportunity to learn from one another about race, class, and justice – about critical literacy. How did the blogging genre impact students’ patterns of engagement, specifically their willingness to

weigh in on conversations and to challenge opinions expressed by their peers, the class readings, and their instructor. Had these conversations been held in a traditional classroom, would their content have been different?

Researchers in composition have suggested the answer is yes, noting the usefulness of online communication, or even simply of the written word, in promoting critical thinking and forwarding the participation of *all* class members, particularly those who are likely to remain silent in whole-class discussions. For instance, in the “Persuasion, Politics, and Writing Instruction” chapter of *Collision Course*, Durst observes that many students fall silent during discussion of political topics in the classroom he studies, so much so that the instructor he observes, Sherry Stanforth, finds it difficult to keep any sort of discussion going. In discussing gay rights, for example, one student implies that her uncle, who lost his battle with AIDS, deserved to die because of his homosexual lifestyle. Though many students express affiliation with gay family and friends in their journals, the student’s denigrating remark goes unchallenged verbally. Yet later, when a few students read those supportive journals aloud, they hear no disagreement from their peers. This is part of a pattern; Durst suggests that “students had made an implicit pact not to argue with one another during class discussion” (146). However, he argues, they were comfortable voicing their views in the private vehicle of the journals, and some who were unwilling to hazard extemporaneous argument were, occasionally, willing to lean on these written scripts in presenting controversial opinions to the class. Online discussion formats can serve the same function, enabling students to voice opinions in writing that they are hesitant to say face-to-face.

Faigley suggests that students from disempowered groups are particularly liable to fall silent during political debates in classrooms, and like other early analysts of networked

discussions, he suggests that such discussions help to remedy this imbalance. As proof, he details discussion threads he ran in his composition classroom on the topic of gender norms (see Chapter 6, *Fragments of Rationality*). Faigley notes that the format of the discussion broke the mold of typical classroom "discussions" in which teachers introduce topics and comment on students' responses to them rather than allow student-to-student exchanges. Thus, "Faigley"—the avatar he used for his interactions in one online chatroom—was pressed to become a student in his own classroom, which took a format now familiar to those discussing in Facebook and other chat forums, with various comments being taken up or ignored in the flow of conversation. In this case, students ignored some of his comments and instead announced their own topic threads, and they passed judgment on Faigley's comments just as they did on those of their peers. Using this format Faigley reported increased participation from students who might have been silenced in verbal discussions: women and non-native speakers. Further empirical study has confirmed that online classroom discussions promote women's participation when compared to face-to-face discussion (Caspi, Chajut, and Saporta).<sup>24</sup>

Following up on these points, the first observation I would make about the online discussions in this course is self-congratulatory: the forum gave Pilar a place (a "forum," if you will) in which to voice the anger and frustration that the video elicited (as we shall see, these forums allowed other emotional responses as well: Billy's hope and enthusiasm, Sires's scorn). Though Pilar saved the more vulnerable emotion, shame, for email – writing to me that "organizations make the residents feel a bit ashamed of where they come from (or at least that is how I felt)" – she did write something similar in a reply to another student's comment about this post, saying that the media make "the residents feel bad about their community." This comment

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<sup>24</sup> Faigley also notes that this empowerment "also allows students to use discourses forbidden in many classrooms such as the discourses of racism, sexism, and homophobia," and suggests that "the issue of "empowerment" thus becomes problematic in the networked classroom" (24).

and the other public comments I already noted found Pilar presenting her knowledge about the city to others in the class. Considering that she was writing the blog as an assignment for an instructor who had invited to class the organization that showed the video, it's not surprising that Pilar voiced her critique with considerable tact; her title and opening lines indicate that she takes the blame for being "sheltered" from the harsh "reality" depicted in the video, thus granting that the city depicted in the video might exist. Nonetheless, peers who read the blog might be expected to correct their misconceptions of the city where they too are serving, not just to imagine it as a place of need and hopelessness.

But that correction would depend on the degree to which her peers listened to Pilar's experiences, the degree to which they took her as an authority on the city in which they worked. Did that correction happen in this case? Perhaps, perhaps not.

Aria, who replied first to Pilar's forum, ignored those portions of the forum I have highlighted and instead focused on an issue that she and Pilar had in common: budget cuts to sports and arts programs. Though I had *not* required authors to reply to their peers' comments (that is, I simply required that peers respond to the initial posts), Pilar, in a move that would prove characteristic of her work on the forums, did so, responding to Aria sympathetically: "Thank you for commenting Aria, and I would like to say I share the same feelings about art as you." Thus, they both ignored the potentially discomfoting topic of Pilar's neighborhood and the video that mischaracterized it and stressed affiliation over disagreement.

Alex, who replied not directly to Aria's post but to another independent thread in which *I* had thanked Pilar for her willingness to reexamine her own neighborhood, did pay attention to inequality, though not, at first glance, quite in the way I would have hoped: "Wow, you actually

grew up and went to school in [Dios City],” he wrote. “This class must be perfect for you.” He went on:

After reading your post, I realized that there are problems in the education system. I graduated from a high school that was very diverse. We weren't rich but we had enough to get by. The budget cut didn't really affect my school as much as yours. In my school the only effects were that we had to donate some paper. That was it. Sports and other activities were kept. It seems like your school or schools in [Dios City] suffered the most, which is very unjust.

Needless to say, these remarks were encouraging for an instructor looking to promote critical literacy through cross-class and cross-cultural interaction. But Pilar, I think correctly, picks up on Alex's surprise in his opening sentence as an exoticizing of her experience, even as she responds to the substance of Alex's comments about budgeting:

Hey Alex, I do not know what you meant by "Wow, you actually grew up and went to school in Dios City. Like I said I perceive this city better than what the media and other people portray it as. But, yes unfortunately this community is not financially stable to help each other out, much less the local schools.

Pilar, a woman of color and an otherwise shy student, has been empowered by the blog format to say her piece. But would she be heard?

More recent research into online discussions that evolve out of face-to face communities like that of this classroom suggests that the answer might partly depend on Pilar's race (and, I would add, class). Anderson, for instance, draws on social science approaches that echo postmodern theory in suggesting that power is not an individual achievement but a property of group dynamics; he suggests that gender and race as groupings continue to matter in online discussions. Taylor, who conducts face-to-face classes in which students gather in a room and communicate over a local area network, argues that “extralinguistic cues such as body language, tone of voice, and oral dialect” remain salient in the interpersonal interactions that accompany

students' online engagement, and that African Americans remain marked by "*non-negotiable difference*" (emphasis his, 223).

Whether this "non-negotiable" difference adhered to Pilar in this situation and colored Alex's impression of her must remain an open question, for unfortunately, with Pilar's above response her conversation with Alex ended. I say unfortunately because the point in my course two students discussed income and opportunity quite personally, yet it remains unclear whether or not either Alex or Pilar fully took in what the other had to say. Certainly, this exchange has, if not the "explosiveness" of which Ryden speaks, then at least the sparks of a conflict. As such it enacts what hooks speaks of when she writes, "there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches" (42). But I worry that the pain only occurs on Pilar's side as a response to Alex's surprise over her background. Does Alex realize that Pilar does not see herself as having suffered at her school? It doesn't seem so. Yet we might also ask: Does Pilar realize that Alex has (in my reading) expressed admiration for her ability to reach our competitive university having grown up in a challenging environment? I doubt it, and perhaps that points to a shortcoming of these sorts of online discussions, or at least to a point of potential intervention by the instructor, who must be as attuned to them as he or she is to in-person conversations, if not more-so, ready to step in and direct students' attention to one another, to push students to build new models during these moments of wonder and disorientation (wow!), rather than revert to tired explanations. A simple bit of effective pedagogy here would have found me privately meeting with Alex or Pilar before the next class and asking if either would be comfortable discussing the topic further before others. Or I could have exercised my teacherly prerogative and written back to either or both of them asking them to discuss further.

I pick up such ideas once again in outlining a rhetoric of listening in this chapter's conclusion, but for now I suggest that this brief exchange between Pilar and Alex, even without such teacherly moves, seems to have raised the issue of injustice more effectively for Alex than did the class readings (though neither the readings nor the forum made a discernible impact on his research paper). Students remain the progressive educator's greatest resource.

### **V. Billy's Parrhesia: The Blogger's Authority versus the Instructor's Authority**

The concessions of politeness always contain political concessions.  
– Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (qtd. in Ryden 81).

Pilar was not the only one to say in the blogs that she was angered by the video; Billy did the same, but for different reasons. One of the “outsiders” to the city whom Pilar mentions, Billy came to regret how the video had swayed him. In one blog, he described how it had “been rigged to wrench out the pity and anguish in [his] heart,” and in a comment to another student he complained about this manipulation: “Seriously, that video. Ugh. How dare it toy with my emotions?”

Perhaps the most idealistic of my students, Billy encountered Dios City as something of a new experience, one mapped by the recruitment video which cast him in the role of savior to the downtrodden. Given that he was a criminology/law major who, as he put it in his profile, was “hoping to save some lives in the future,” it is perhaps not surprising that he first approached the fieldwork with a missionary zeal. He saw Dios Community Center students as beset by bad role models, and hoped to be a different kind of mentor, writing, “They are who they are, and we are their influences and their guides for a future not shrouded in doubt and ignorance.” He had high hopes for his potential to fulfill that mission, writing in his first blog, with no discernible trace of irony, “I will be here to make learning a life-enjoying splendor.” This enthusiasm seemed to



carry over into his writing as well, or perhaps like many idealists Billy simply enjoyed writing, for the total word count of his blogs and comments was the third highest of the class, behind only Mikhaela, who wrote over one thousand words more than anyone else in the course (not, primarily, on critical literacy as I am describing it, but on disability) and Pilar, who we have seen was quite responsive to her peers.

Yet as became clear in his forums and blogs, Billy's ideals did not coincide with those of critical literacy. Billy was, admittedly, the kind of student I had expected after reading Herzberg's essay, explicitly arguing against the notion that race or class determined any part of the kids' future. He wrote, "[C]hildren are not Latino, Black, Asian, or anything of that sort" and repeatedly stressed that regardless of social pressures each individual pilots his or her own destiny, writing for instance, "[T]he future is how you shape it yourself, and not how society shapes it for you."

At first, in these and other comments, Billy enthusiastically engaged with the critical literacy ideas as Kozol conveyed them, disagreeing with them strongly and directly in comments like these: "I will not mention Kozol because his article is true factually, but not emotionally. Latinos mostly live in Latino majority areas. Deal with it. They're still happy and have just as much potential to learn as everyone else."

"Deal with it." Following Megan Boler, I would characterize this response as "defensive anger," anger that derives from one's "investments in the values of the dominant culture" (qtd. in Stenberg 360). Billy, I would argue, felt this anger because he along with all of us in the dominant culture, was being shamed by Kozol (hence, Kozol's title: *Shame of the Nation*). Billy was being called to account for the ways in which our society fails to serve the interests of all its members. Given that Billy chose to deliver this anger through the blog to an audience (rather

than modulating his language to render it more analytical), we might also consider to whom this anger was addressed. His use of the imperative, “deal with it,” suggests he is addressing Latinos who attended segregated schools and lived in segregated neighborhoods? Liberals who criticized that situation? Billy’s peers and his instructor, who’d be reading his blog? Because Billy knew that I’d be reading the blogs, at least, I cannot resist characterizing his stance, its insolence, its fidelity to its own vision of the world, as that of the parrhesiastes.

Foucault’s concept of parrhesia (or *parrēsia*)—frank speaking--reveals the risk to students in speaking truth to power. Though the general drift of Foucault’s thought on knowledge/power is well known, I take this particular concept from *The Government of Self and Others*, in which Foucault stipulates a speaker engages in parrhesia partly by making a pact with himself that what he says is true, not a version of the truth, or a truth situated to the listener, but true, in and of itself. He writes that this pact is one of three defining features of parrēsia as speech-act, the other two being the actual vocalization of the truth and the unpredictability of the consequences of that vocalization (Lecture 4). Foucault provides many variations on scenes of parrēsia in which philosophers speak truth to the power of the tyrant, but perhaps the most memorable is that with which he starts: Plato tells Dionysius the elder, tyrant of Syracuse, that he is less than perfect, and Dionysius secretly arranges to have Plato killed in retribution.

In applying such a concept to the composition classroom I draw an extended analogy between Foucault's philosopher-ruler relationship and the composition classroom's student-instructor relationship. There are a number of parallels between the two: both relationships provide for deliberative conversations that take place before others, conversations on sensitive subjects. The relation of speaker to audiences is also similar: the philosopher addresses the prince before the court, and the blog addresses the instructor in a space where other class

members might read it. So both are, in a sense, private conversations held in public. And both offer those with less authority and power the privilege to speak honestly to those with greater authority and power. Just as the philosopher's words to the ruler might make the ruler change the goals and terms of government, the ideas students communicate in their blogs can alter the shape of the service-learning project (rather than lead to their own demise). In analyzing the blogs and forums students wrote in this community-engaged writing class, I'm attracted by Foucault's notion that an uncomfortable but generative truth can appear if one has the courage to speak it. In the above scheme, one might notice, the student takes on the wiser role, speaking truth to the power of the instructor.<sup>25</sup>

“Parrhesia” is a concept I will apply both to Billy’s work and to that of Sires, who, as we will see, responded to Billy quite forcefully. One could apply this concept to Alex and Pilar, who also challenged course ideas—critical literacy and cultural-deficits, respectively. However, as I have shown, they did so deferentially and directed their comments primarily to one another. Billy and Sires, on the other hand, either voice strong objections directly to the reader (in Billy’s case) or voice them in such a way that the challenge to the course itself is unmistakable (as is the case

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<sup>25</sup> In applying Foucault in the rhetoric and composition field, one must reconcile his notion of parrēsia with Carlos Lévy's 2010 correction of that notion. Lévy’s schema substitutes Greek rhetoric for Foucault's absolute truth, putting the *gesture* of speaking truth in place of the authentic speech-act (that is, the trope, “I will tell you the hard truth” is rhetorically useful). In Lévy’s account of the Greek term, truth speakers stand in relation not to the truth but to authority, so that for Plato parrēsia becomes a form of drunkenness, one that ought to be controlled by “the divine fear, incomparably handsome and just, which we call decency and shame” (qtd. in Lévy, 320). Foucault attempts to extricate authority from the Greek notion of parrēsia and locate it only in the later Christian adaptation of that notion by the philosopher Philo, wherein the parrēsiastes speaks truth with God in confession. Lévy, on the other hand, suggests that for the Greeks too, truth exists in relation to others, so that even Foucault's premiere parresias, Socrates, “is not exactly the parrēsiastes, but the one who is worthy of hearing speeches made with parrēsia” (321). In applying Foucault’s take on parrēsia to my students’ blogs, I keep in mind Lévy's correction that parrēsia establishes a student’s relation to worldly authority, not simply objective truth. This allows me to better understand what stakes are involved as my students invoke their own fieldwork and research to defend their claims, possibly against our texts' claims of critical literacy. Using Lévy to correct Foucault, one might view parresia as a pact with oneself to present one’s own convictions to authority. Yet rather than view “truth-speaking” as a canny rhetorical gesture, I understand it primarily as Foucault did: as risk, self-exposure.

with Sires). As such, they better embody the character of one who speaks truth heedless of the personal consequences of such speech.

To illustrate what such a concept might reveal about the negotiation of authority and the development of knowledge in an engaged writing class, let's first examine Billy's comments and my response: "Deal with it," Billy says. Get over it; the world is segregated, but it's not unequal. This was speaking truth to power, in this case the authority of the readings I'd assigned. So of course I did not let the comment go unchallenged. I wrote back to Billy with this message:

I think you dismiss Kozol's arguments without providing a counterargument. If lackluster classrooms don't account for Latinos' low scores when compared to their white and Asian counterparts, then something else must. If opportunity is equal, as you assert, then what's driving the achievement gap?

A leading question, I suppose. Billy didn't bite. His take on Kozol the next week was equally brief, more polite, and less interesting: "If there are any segregation issues as Kozol stated, it would be that the program consists mostly of Hispanics." In this statement, not only did Billy retreat from a confrontation with the authority of Kozol or a direct engagement with my question - "what's driving the achievement gap?" - but he also rescinded his earlier claim that segregation did exist. "Latinos mostly live in Latino majority areas," he'd said. Now, he said, "*If* there are any segregation issues." Nor did he pursue the topic; this was the blog's only sentence on Kozol or segregation.

My interactions with Billy serve critical educators as a cautionary tale about how authority is weighted in the instructor's favor and thus how instructors ought to wield that authority lightly and conscientiously lest they slip into authoritarianism. This finding echoes a point made by Chris Anson in an early discussion of service-learning's reflective journals: that there are delicate moments in journaling when "even gentle contestation may be inappropriate" ("On Reflection" 178). My insistence on a power-conflict, critical literacy perspective in which

race and privilege shaped the world Billy was observing cowed him into temporary silence on those topics in the blogs; that meant that if Billy was doing any more thinking using Kozol or against Kozol, which seemed increasingly unlikely, it wasn't showing up in the blogs. If blogs and forums can become, as Fermeiner and Nelson put it, an agonistic space that allows students "to speak, to vacillate, to change their mind based on the better argument," then my use of authority as the instructor had prevented such a change from developing. Even if Billy had been willing to open the argument as a *parresiastes*, my response led him to close it as a deferential student.

This is not to say that Billy's thinking did not shift concerning the literacy education the young students were receiving and his role in it, nor that this shift didn't affect his peers' understanding of the service-work. Instead, Billy's understanding of what he was going as a tutor changed quite a bit in a few short weeks. From the minute he arrived onsite at Dios Center, he'd begun to see that world was not as the video had helped him to imagine it: "I seriously thought that the video in class depicting [the city] was exaggerating the slum that it seemed to be. A lot. It's a middle-class suburb."<sup>26</sup> By just the second week, Billy had begun to argue for a more tentative role for himself, writing that he would "hopefully" be helpful as a volunteer. And by the final blog he saw his role at the after-school center more in keeping with what the center needed:

My idea of service has changed in that sometimes you have to guide people from an indirect, passive role, rather than an active direct role. I was assisting most of the time, and the teachers do such a good job, sometimes it's just better for me to watch how they work and adapt.

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<sup>26</sup> The very success of the NGO in fundraising and serving its students often proved an impediment to my goal of raising students' consciousness regarding poverty; how could kids using iPads be in any way disadvantaged? I doubt many of my students ever saw the housing projects many of the younger kids returned to when the center closed for the afternoon.

And:

I won't expect them [the kids] to need my guidance much. They seem happy and I feel like they expect me to just make learning funny for them, but I'm okay with that.

Yet as a progressive educator I hesitate to call Billy's maturation progress, for the primary theme to emerge from Billy's writing is one that has been suggested by Herzberg and others: for many students the service experience serves to cement rather than undermine their sense of the justice of the existing social order. Billy, like Alex, was one of these students. For instance, when, instead of finding the hopeless downtrodden, he saw that the children at the community center where he served were, for the most part, already happy with the iPads and tutors the after-school center supplied them, Billy concluded that they did not wish for more than they had: "The Latinos here seem really content with their lives as opposed to the oppression and doubtful attitudes littering the pages of Kozol's article . . ." Since this is the comment with which I began this chapter, the reader is already familiar with not just the uncritical conclusion Billy reaches (the kids don't mind being segregated), but also the scathing response of Billy's fellow parresias, Sires. However, I include here the rather personal attack that accompanied Sires's political critique:

In my experience, you always wanted to do more with these kids than was necessary. You really wanted to teach these kids something, but they, for the most part, already knew enough to give you the run around. At least your heart was in the right place. Your comment about the complicity of the local Latino community got me thinking about my own life. I'm pretty sure they're not happy with the life they live.

## **VI. Sires's Long View: Writing the "Star Wars" of Critical Literacy Essays**

Research suggests that the confrontational manner of discussion that Sires engages in above is more common online than off. A study by Chen and Chiu, for

instance, found that participants were more willing to disagree online than face-to-face, and indeed that “online discussion messages that disagreed with an earlier message were more likely to elicit responses” (abstract). That is, disagreements attracted increased participation. In *Blog Theory*, Jodi Dean makes a similar point about cranks and trolls in online discussions. She notes that such discussions can amplify extreme opinions because those who voice them don’t necessarily receive negative, as happens in face-to-face group conversations; thus, the equilibrium that is natural to face-to-face group conversations is not as frequently established online (4–6). Following a pedagogy of discomfort, I argue that online discussion’s tendencies toward disagreement and extremism can be an asset in getting students to engage with stimulating and reorienting discussions of topics like race and class, at least provided that the disagreements stay within bounds of respect that allow for continued conversation. Indeed, I’m arguing that we might reconceive of such disagreements, at least within the classroom, as a form of parrhesia, a willingness to forego the pleasures of politeness and partake instead of the harsh tonic of truth (as the critics see it). In this case, Sires’s “you always wanted to do more with these kids than was necessary” urges Billy to reconsider his whole approach to tutoring.

Yet once again this exchange is only the stimulating beginning of what ought to be a longer conversation between two students about their differences in perspective. Having witnessed the two of them working together during peer review time in class, I know that they also debated their approaches to education in person, though I did not keep a record of what they said and so cannot speak to the exact relationship between their online conversations and their face-to-face ones. Similarly, I wish I could report that this course took advantage of online

discussion's more combative affordances by asking students to respond in lengthy back-and-forths with their peers, but I had not anticipated this dynamic. Instead, I only required students to respond with one comment each to a few peers for each entry. Thus, I cannot say with certainty whether Billy even read Sires's challenge, let alone whether or not it prompted Billy to reconsider the "charitable savior" approach he had taken with the students. If we take into account the premise Deans cites that feedback in conversations tends to bring opposing parties into equilibrium, we can say that further conversation might have led the two students to reach an understanding of one another's perspective. Or, as often happens when people debate politics, the two may have ended up at odds, or simply agreeing to disagree. Unfortunately, while I do suggest here, as I did with Pilar and Alex, that confrontational online conversations about critical literacy have great potential to stimulate students' interest in the topic and to move their thinking about it, in the absence of a record of the students' in-person conversations or a requirement for further online conversations, I cannot say definitively how online conversations shaped student perspectives in this course.

In examining Sires's work in this final section, however, I am not just concerned with the possibilities for reorientation in dialogic blogs, nor simply with the blogs' emotional and authoritative affordances for their own sake. Rather, as I have done with Alex, I situate these blogs within the student's overall writing experience, from the first forum to the final paper, and use the whole to suggest how such informal genres can support the more formal writing we compositionists are charged with teaching. In this case, for reasons I will elaborate, the course design *did* facilitate Sires's engagement with critical literacy. Some researchers have critiqued critical literacy teachers for merely confirming their radical students' biases, rather than urging critical thinking (see Feigenbaum's "Traps" for a summary of such arguments). However, as I'll



show, the writing Sires completed suggests instead that a reflectively progressive course can educate such a student, one already committed to critical literacy, by providing a forum in which to develop his voice. Sires learned to communicate his existing political views in a manner designed to persuade others who do not share those views. In other words, for a student who is already aligned with a critical literacy course's politics, informal blogs and forums, combined with structured research assignments, drafts, and peer reviews, provide a genuine rhetorical opportunity for reasoned persuasion.

Sires was more of a Marxist than I; he traced the students' problems not to language or race, but to class, pure and simple. In one blog, for instance, he suggested that the students at Dios were "systematically repressed" and belonged "to a class of people not expected to do much in their life beyond menial labor." In another he wrote, "If I've learned one thing from volunteering, it's that we make these issues too complicated. What is these kids' problem? They're poor. That's it." A response Sires wrote to Billy shows not just that he was willing, even eager, to confront his classmates with this harsh truth, but also that he was willing to risk offending me, the instructor, by deeming the whole-class readings that would advance other explanations irrelevant:

In response to your attempts to tie in the readings to your experiences, my advice would be to not even try. They don't seem to fit well to the situation we're faced with at Dios. Most of the students have a firm grasp on English and the homework shows no signs of a bilingual education. Yet, these kids are routinely offered less opportunities and have less successful lives. To assume that these kids are in any way different from other students is ridiculous. They're the same as every student. Their race or ethnicity is not what defines them. It's their class . . . Don't let issues of race or ethnicity cloud your perceptions. If you do consider race or ethnicity, only consider how these ethnic groups have historically been exploited in our economy.

By asking that Billy not allow race to “cloud his perceptions” Sires deploys the very language of ideological mystification and revelation advanced by the first-wave critical pedagogues. Like Foucault’s philosopher, Sires believes himself to be voicing not just an opinion but a truth.

That “truth,” that class trumps race, offers a cogent rebuttal to the cultural deficit arguments advanced by Alex and, to some extent, Hannah. However, Sires shifted his stance by the time he wrote his final paper, a move hinted at in his final sentence above, which allows for the historical power struggles that have led to Latinos’ oppression in the U.S.. Sires’s final paper, titled “Racial Inequalities in Education,” addressed the intersectionality between race and class when it argued that Mexican Americans are trapped in a cycle of poverty from which they cannot escape, one first established under legal frameworks such as the Bracero program, since perpetuated through government cutbacks in educational programs that would equalize opportunity, and currently exacerbated by an ideology of meritocracy that urges Mexican Americans to blame their lack of upward mobility on their own cultural deficits.

This paper presented a striking argument, and that along with the forcefulness of Sires’s blogs prompted me to think about Sires as I developed this analysis in the years following our course. I used his blogs in a presentation I delivered at CCCC 2012 and again when I presented an overview of my dissertation on my campus. But still I wondered, what prompted the forcefulness with which he expressed the critical literacy perspective? I saw an opportunity to answer these questions when I received an email from Sires in the spring of 2013 that pictured him, appropriately enough, standing in front of a cannon. In it he requested a law school letter of recommendation. I told him I was glad to complete one and asked if he’d be willing to sit for an interview. He was.

Sires, too, had been taken with the paper he'd written. In the email, he had described it as the "finest piece of writing" he thought he had ever done. This seemed sincere, for in the interview, he described it as follows:

It was an idea that I had gotten invested in. Normally when I write a paper, the minute that I turn it in, I immediately start to think, "OK, if I had spent one more minute going over it, what could I have changed?" I get into this bad cycle of starting to doubt everything and think how I could change it. And usually within an hour I start to think, "Maybe I should have just rewritten it, completely scratched it, and started over again," because I'm never really satisfied with how a paper comes out. And, with that [Racial Inequalities] paper, when I turned it in, I had the biggest feeling of accomplishment I think I'd ever had. I just felt like I'd really hit my stride. It was one of those things where, kind of like in movies, a lot of people come in with great ideas, but they don't have the best actors. Or maybe they have a bad director or something. But this felt like everything worked. There was a good script. There was a good director. There were good actors. It felt kind of like I had written Star Wars.

The well-developed Marxist perspective of that "Star Wars" quality paper, however, wasn't the result of the critical literacy topic of my community-engaged, research and argument course. Indeed, it pains me to admit that in our interview Sires struggled unsuccessfully to recall *any* readings from my class. Instead, the course was one stop along in a long trajectory of Sires's education in progressive politics, one that began at another nearby university in which he was enrolled for his first two years of college and that would continue beyond my class in other history classes that reinforced Sires's desire to pursue a legal career. At the first university, Sires took a course on the death penalty that considered systemic inequalities in criminal justice. A challenging course he took there on modern political theory, one that included Nietzsche's concept of instrumentalism, also made an impression. The quarter in which Sires took my writing course was his first at UCI. Then too, at nights he was enrolled in "Race and Ethnicity." He reported he had "soaked up" the material from those readings quickly and that they "really drove home" the concept of Nietzsche's instrumentalism as it manifested in American history

and politics. These ideas, not the readings I provided on racial segregation and bilingualism, shaped the paper he wrote for my course, whose opening paragraph concluded with the assertion that our school system “discriminates against [Mexican-American children] based on their historic instrumentality as a work force in our nation.” Those were ideas with which I wholeheartedly agree, but they were not ones offered in my course, at least not using that vocabulary.

Indeed, one might argue that Sires’s conception of inequality hadn’t even been instigated by those first college courses but by his own life experiences; certainly, it shaped his ambitions. In his interview, Sires revealed that his family had struggled financially when he was a child. One of his blogs remarked that the neighborhood around Dios Community Center didn’t strike him as impoverished because, “Having spent eight years in South Pasadena, the sight of social inequality was as familiar as the American flag. If anything, this place was step up from the dump [he] hailed from.” In his interview, Sires elaborated on this theme, noting that his father had struggled between multiple part-time jobs, and his family had lived in what he described as a “cruddy” apartment smaller than the garage of the home in which they lived now. For Billy, such a turn of events would have supported the notion that meritocracy wins out as his father’s efforts paid off; however, at the time of our interview, despite his prospects of a college degree and entry into law school, Sires did not foresee upward mobility for himself, arguing that making lots of money would require either connections or a willingness to profit off of others’ misfortunes, neither of which he had. These facts support a picture of a young man already looking for ways to integrate his social justice vision and practical needs, and having trouble doing so.

However, while I cannot take credit for orienting Sires toward progressivism, I would argue that the course did in other ways set Sires up to write the paper of which he was so proud,

most particularly the blogs through which he developed his perspective on the fieldwork.

Though he knew the blogs were public, he approached them differently than he would have face-to-face conversations, as he explained:

I knew other people from the class were reading it – because I think we had to go back at some point and read the comments or something like that – but I never really took that into consideration . . . I never really thought that oh, they would look at my blog, and see me in class, and connect those two ideas. So I think it was sort of for me.

This comment suggests that even within the confines of a 23-student class, Sires separated his online persona from his face-to-face one. This allowed Sires, a forceful personality in any case, the liberty of opinion that comes from delayed and reduced feedback: he “never took [others’ responses] into consideration” and thought of the blogs as a sort of public journal, written by him, for him.

This liberty becomes evident when one looks at the blogs themselves. When I asked Sires in our interview how the blogs compared to his other writing in the year-and-a-half of classes he’d taken since mine, he said, “I don’t think I’ve been as creative since.” In fact, perhaps because the writing was both low stakes and public, Sires flat-out ignored several of the stated requirements, which asked each blog to address systematically two of the four categories of description, reflection, analysis, and research. Instead, each of Sires’s blogs had a different feel, as though he were exploring the genre in search of a mode that would capture his assorted impressions from the fieldwork. The first, titled “The Case of the First Visit,” was modeled on film noir featuring hard-boiled detectives as protagonists. The second blog, “Return of the Volunteer,” narrated in a tongue-in-cheek manner “our hero”’s adventures as a literacy tutor. That blog, Sires said, was modeled on the Star Wars prologue (e.g. “A long time ago in a galaxy

far, far away”). A third blog, called simply “The Room,” followed its observations with the refrains, “huh,” “chep, chep,” and “what a story!” as follows:

I get the impression that the schools aren't really focusing on helping every student, huh. This kid, who will be referred to as Denny, is probably the victim of a school system teaching a class rather than an individual. As a result, all the kids are expected to learn at the same rate. What a story!

Sires told me that he'd titled this blog “The Room” after the most awful movie he had ever seen, a pretentious effort by a novice director. Perhaps he was making fun of his own writing efforts or the rhetorical situation that required those efforts. At any rate, by the final blog Sires had decided that he was investing too much time in blog writing and that he needed to redirect his efforts to more pressing projects in this class and his other coursework. Thus, appropriately, he titled the final blog “Dios Center in Five Minutes.”

The creativity Sires allowed himself in the blogs seems to have played a role in their usefulness as a rehearsal for the “Star Wars” paper's final performance. The blogs and forums offered Sires a congenial space for getting his critical literacy perspective said clearly and forcefully, and often personally. If we take into account the research I have cited that suggests that online discussions are more likely than face-to-face discussions to privilege disagreement over consensus, and a few more of Sires's own comments in the interview, it's fair to say that the blog and forum platforms also strengthened his ability to speak in response to rival arguments forwarded by his peers, even if he didn't think they'd link those comments to him in face-to-face interactions. In the interview, Sires characterized his essay on inequality as “the most aggressive” he'd ever been and explained, “It felt like I could probably convince somebody with this essay about this problem.” At the same time, he admitted,

I kind of didn't think anyone would understand . . . or they'd think ‘This guy's kind of out there.’ But I don't really remember caring all that much what everyone else was thinking. I remember thinking, “This is a good idea and this is

what I can write to. So, if people have some sort of objection to it, I should take that and try to see that perspective and try to write to that in the essay.”

In other words, the blogs helped orient Sires toward the beliefs of his audience and thereby established the common cultural notions he drew upon in his blog comments and paper, foremost of which was the American Dream (hence, the comment to Billy that began this chapter). A picture emerges from these and similar comments of a student who will not let others’ opinions sway his own, but who *will* take into account how to respond to their opinions in forwarding his own. In other words, a picture emerges of a rhetorician.

However, if I were pressed to explain why Sires was able to use my course to develop what he considered his best piece of college writing, I’d say the blog genre’s unique affordance was only one of three important factors in his success. The second factor was the alignment between his previous education in critical race studies, which he drew upon in his paper, and the critical literacy setup of the course. Sires’s blogs were boldly confrontational, yes, and it is possible that Sires was simply something of a loose cannon, that he possessed the courage to confront – the inclination to outspokenness – that Foucault marks as essential to the *parresias*. However, I doubt Sires would have experimented so casually with blog genres, or spoken so forcefully to his peers about their misconceptions, had he not understood that his instructor was likely to agree with many of his radical opinions. Nor, as we saw when Billy challenged the critical literacy readings with equal force, does a simple willingness to “speak the truth” translate into well-developed writing when the instructor challenges that truth and the student backs off in response. Rather, as proved true with Sires, students who are able to draw from prior knowledge in guiding their current research (in Sires’s case, legal history and critical race theory), and to pursue that research from their own orientations, have an easier time in a research and argument course. Critical literacy was a concept that Sires’s previous education had encouraged him to

accept, and this course supported rather than provoked his engagement with it. It is fair to say that this meant that Sires's experience of the course was fundamentally different from the experiences of students like Billy, who found in the critical literacy readings a challenge to their thinking, for these students could not use the whole-class readings to support their own ideas, and they thus needed to initiate their own bibliographies to support their perspectives. Such papers could end up exceeding papers like Sires's, but critical literacy papers like his had a head start. Politics may help to explain why Sires's paper excelled many of the papers written by his peers, but it is a third factor that explains why his paper was better than others he'd written for other classes: sound pedagogy. This was a *writing* course, we'll remember, designed around a series of activities I have mentioned (twenty-four hours of fieldwork, a personal interview, online research) and several I haven't yet (for instance, a required rough draft and a peer review workshop on the organization of research papers into discrete sections). The 39C research requirement asked Sires to synthesize a line of thought about Mexican American educational inequality, to use sources to support it, and to imagine a rhetorical situation in which he might convince others of it. But it did so not just by demanding excellence or by providing a list of the qualities of an excellent research paper, but by leading every student through several steps in the process of writing a research-based, argumentative essay. For every research and argument course, not just my community-engaged one, these steps included instructions and modeling of keyword searches, first in popular periodicals, and later, through a librarian's introduction, in scholarly journals. They included detailed, multipart evaluations of source materials, as well as the writing of annotated bibliographies on selected sources. Like the standard research and argument course, my course offered models for constructing research questions and working theses, and it showed how these questions and theses could be revised in light of the evidence



researchers gathered. The course also required students to map in graphic form how cause and effect were presented in opposing analyses of the same problem (in this case our university's tuition hikes); and it required students to create a similar map for the issues they were researching. Sires understood his "Star Wars"-quality paper to have the right cast, crew, and director, but it was also true that it had the right producer: who better to sponsor a lower-division student in creating an excellent piece of writing than the lower-division writing program?

## **VII: Conclusion - Engaged Progressivism: A Pedagogy of Deep Listening**

Each of the case studies offered above bends toward the same conclusion: orientation is a long time in the making, and a single quarter's course is not enough to shift it. Each student came to the course with a disposition about what I'm calling critical literacy, about the ways that race and class shape one's opportunities for education. Hannah was disposed to see her own financial and second-language acquisition struggles in her work with the students and sympathize with them accordingly. Alex brought a cultural deficit approach to the Latin@-Asian education gap and found an interviewer and sources to support that perspective. Pilar argued for the ability of those who went to school and lived in her neighborhood, critiquing course texts that emphasized that neighborhood's struggles. Billy, a neoliberal from the start, left the course asserting that each racialized socioeconomic group was happy in its own station. Finally, there was Sires, who outside of my class had developed a Marxist perspective on class and race and who wrote a powerful paper from that perspective.

What are we to make of what we might call a stubbornness of orientation? Is it too much to hope that a ten-week writing course, one of four courses students take in one quarter of an undergraduate career, might develop their awareness as fellow citizens with the underclass? And

if such a project is not to be abandoned, what do these students' experiences teach us about how it might be rethought?

Put simply, I advise a rhetoric of listening.

For instructors, that means first – as emotive compositionists like Worsham, Micchiche, Quandahl, and Ryden have taught us – listening to our own emotions. It means stepping outside of ourselves and questioning our knee-jerk responses, probing their roots in our socialization, assessing the politics to which our orientations contribute. In my own case, for this class, that means recognizing that the discussion of privilege I sought to encourage would prove profoundly uncomfortable. As bell hooks has noted, the discussion of race and class privilege often makes people uneasy. For those of us who have benefitted from discrimination as well as those who have suffered from it, privilege remains difficult to discuss. As a white man and a graduate student in a composition classroom that I had refashioned toward engagement, one in which many of my students were Asian and Asian American, I felt exposed. I was hesitant to address race, class, and privilege in a sustained manner. I was predisposed to think that my Asian students, as “model minorities,” would question affirmative action policies that would benefit members of other, underrepresented minority groups but not themselves. Extended and uncomfortable discussions would be necessary to do the topic of critical literacy justice, and I did not relish the conflicts that might arise. Yes, I had designed the community engagement to address these topics. I moved students from a classroom on a college campus to community centers and schools across town, required students of privilege to sit across the table from working-class, Mexican@ students, to look over their shoulders, to teach literacy to them, perhaps to learn a bit from them, and I had followed my students into two local community centers and done the same. Still, it proved difficult for us to agree on a description of such

privilege and even harder to negotiate a place within it. By leaving my students to come to their own conclusions in online discussion formats and in their research papers, I allowed them to come at these topics from their own orientations, not an entirely bad approach; I did not, however, push to challenge those orientations in ways I now believe to be crucial for educators who would encourage a critical literacy perspective. I make that self-critique not simply to confess or to offer a cautionary tale. Instead, in analyzing my own emotional reactions to the course—discomfort with the discussion or race, guilt at promoting deficit-thinking—I hope to have modeled how self-reflection might advance course design for instructors who would practice what I’m calling “engaged progressivism.” Such a practice provokes us to assess the efficacy of the classroom’s most important tools: the instructor’s judgment and persona.

The question of the teacher’s authority in such discussions remains fraught. Teaching is, if not an art, then an interpersonal craft. When to push a speaker to explain herself? When to judge that a speaker has said all he’s willing to say? Stories like Billy’s show that an instructor can too easily silence dissent when it comes to such questions; in this kind of silence, the student’s oppositional perspective may grow stronger in the sense of becoming more entrenched, but if the student is not pushed to research to support that perspective, he or she is unlikely to do real learning, which requires the transformation of knowledge. Still, even if we struggle to avoid such blatant silencing, it is difficult to know when the teacher’s feedback is productive and when not. 1960s experiments in collective and cooperative education (Ira Shor) show that even when strong, visionary teachers reorganize classrooms more democratically a lot can go wrong. It is easy to remember Freire’s dictum that information cannot be deposited in students like a bank, simple to rearrange classroom furniture in a circle or even design a discussion thread from which the teacher extricates herself, one that invites strong opinions expressed in clear, colloquial

language. Instructors can distribute authority to students in these small ways, and ask that they bring the expertise of their lived experience to the conversation. However, I do not think it possible for them to advocate for the student's parrhesia. The instructor can tell the students that their opinions will be valued, but our function as sorters and rankers (cf. Deans: "Genre") precludes us from sincerely inviting students to piss us off. The point of parrhesia is risk—to speak of making the conversation a safe space is not to encourage parrhesia but to eliminate it as a possibility. The case studies above show the upside when we begin to construct conversational spaces in which students can act as authorities and challenge one another's authority. What they cannot show is how to construct a space where the student is absolutely free to challenge the teacher as an authority; such challenge always incurs risk. Unless we are willing to hand over grading and certification to students, we cannot erase our own authority. However, as reflectively progressive instructors, we *can* listen for moments of rupture, whether these come to us through our emotions—as I've outlined above—or, as I'll suggest in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter, through the opinions of others.

For both students and instructors, the texts that can most challenge us, unsettle us, reorient us, may be those authored by students themselves. Others have called the classroom a "protopublic"—one in which all have a right to, even an obligation to, bring our perspectives to the table so that we can deliberate together (Eberly). We might remember how Julia Lupton depicts the classroom in "Philadelphia," as a civic space, one in which we "follow rules and procedures for dialogue and debate," not just to "study the varieties of human interaction" but to act upon the values we determine through those dialogues (399). An example from this chapter: listening to students like Pilar and Hannah, and heeding my own discomfort, led me to introduce a few changes to the course design the last time I taught it. First, because my service-learning

version of the course followed our university's standard research course in focusing on a *problem* (in this case, in K-12 education), it had the unfortunate effect of emphasizing the deficits of the younger students and/or the programs that served them. Second, for students interested in issues *within* public schools, the course offered only after-school partners. Third, the course allowed students to research topics unrelated to their fieldwork, which more easily led to the understanding of that fieldwork as service rather than *service-learning*. By the third time I taught the class in spring 2013, I expanded the fieldsites to include a high school, I altered the object of study to include a problem *or strength* in the schools observed, and I required *all* students to complete the community-based research paper. Because this meant that students had to incorporate their field observations in their final paper, I asked them before they even began their service hours to seek out topics that would be appropriate to research in the after-school or within-school settings in which I facilitated their placement. Each of these ideas came from my attention to students' experiences, from listening to what they said in the course evaluations and in their blogs, forums, and research. Engaged and reflective progressivism required that we listen better if we are to make the impact on students that is the final measurement of any classroom.

Toward the end of listening, I would also argue for reading fewer words and discussing them more deeply, more interactively. In *A Pedagogy of Indignation*, Freire criticizes a man he has met who boasts of having recently read ten books. He argues that the glib encounters with texts necessitated by such a pace don't constitute reading. Reading, he suggests, is more active, more of a negotiation between what one knows and what others say. I agree. To rephrase what Freire is saying in the terms of this essay, reading, *deep* reading, is reorientation; it is learning. Despite all the discussion, deep reading does not always happen in a classroom when that classroom remains severed from practice. In a 2013 CCCC workshop on community-engaged

graduate work, Steve Parks spoke of his desire to move graduate education beyond a model in which one reads some texts, talks about them, repeats that process for 15 weeks, and calls it learning. Similarly, in one analysis of Humanities Out There (HOT), Lupton reveals that HOT tutors read tracts written by progressive educators—Jane Addams, John Dewey, Howard Gardner and the like—not for the texts themselves so much as for the concepts they communicated. Discussants in the practicum Lupton ran played with those concepts, tested them against their practice in the classrooms in which they taught and tutored, and so made them their own. Like Dewey, these scholars see education not as preparation for life but as the practice of life; readings can inform that practice, but only if we're ready to listen to them.

Certainly, though, such reorientation *must* begin with sustained attention to the voices of our class texts, and those texts aren't limited just to students' essays and reflections. One might encourage interactive, slow reading in such a course first by allowing critical literacy to take center stage for an extended period of time rather than serve as the theme for a week or two. A class that was prepared to approach critical literacy in a more sustained manner might begin with a text that's quite concrete, for instance a news story documenting how poverty affects a local student's daily routine; this could open discussions of critical literacy concepts. Later, the course might take up excerpts from classics that take a similar approach with underrepresented university students, books like Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* or Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* – or more recent titles that explore the same terrain in moving and accessible prose. To more fully address the intersection of language and power, only intermittently addressed in my course and in this chapter, the reflectively progressive instructor might even include dual-language texts that would unsettle our confidence in our monolingual knowledge, texts like Gloria Anzaldúa's *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*.

Yet what's most important isn't the texts we pick or even the amount of time spent discussing them, though both matter, but what form our analysis and discussion of those texts takes. Pilar has already modeled with her critique of the Dios Center recruitment video how the already assigned texts might be addressed more critically and searchingly. Wrestling with the values conveyed in whole-class readings could, as the emotive compositionists have shown us, include tracking our own emotional responses to their ethical claims (Quandahl, "A Feeling"; Quandahl, "On a Rhetorical Techne of the Moral-Emotions"; Micciche). And most important of all, tuning in to class texts also implies discussion, not just with texts but also with the instructor and with peers—as a whole class, in pairs and in small groups; in blogs and forums *and* in person; each of these configurations offers a different relation to the authority of the instructor, one's peers, and the readings. If, as research suggests, online discussions and silent writing allow for more conflict, I would suggest we ought to capitalize on that fact and use these formats to increase student engagement by challenging students to rethink their positions. In the case studies, I have noted moments during which I as the instructor might have helped students think through the issues of privilege their experiences raised. The hybrid classroom offers unique possibilities to follow up on such silent reflections with vocal, face-to-face conversations about the same issues. Furthermore, as I have already suggested, instructors might interpret their responsibility to guide discussions not to mean that they must ask equal assignments of all students; rather, they might direct students to respond to one another when students reach the point in their conversations at which they are most in conflict, most surprised, most confused – at the moments when learning as reorientation is most likely to take place. When we find ourselves definitely disagreeing with those new acquaintances whom we have met in the classroom, disagreeing on principle – “You always wanted to do more with these kids than was necessary”

or when we are momentarily surprised – “Wow, you actually grew up and went to school in Dios City” – then we and those with whom we converse have the chance to learn. Instead of letting such moments dissipate, the instructor might ask students’ permission to cull the more explosive interactions between students from the forums and blogs, post them, and have other students respond to them, either in writing or in conversation. In such discussions, participants might seek out compromises and adjustments between disparate opinions, or they might defend their perspectives.

I’m arguing for the composition class as a place for spirited, animated debate – and as the terms “spirit” and “anima” suggest, for emotion’s central role in such negotiations. The “engagement” in “engaged progressivism” highlights an ideal of instructor responsiveness to student learning in the moment, with its fits and starts, its contingencies. As is evident in what I have presented above of the exchanges between Hannah, Alex, and Pilar, or that between Billy and Sires, college writers in the engaged classroom are already negotiating issues of privilege and difference on their own. For the progressive educator, a responsible exercising of our authority requires that we do the same.



## CHAPTER 2: GENRE AND EMOTIONAL ROLES IN K-16 POETRY WORKSHOPS

### I. The Course Proposal: Confidence and Trust

What should a community-engaged English course look like? Who should participate, and in what roles? What genres should participants read, in in what genres should they write? In the fall of 2011, as I sought to involve UCI's literature and creative writing students in a partnership with underserved middle school students, I was charged with answering these questions.

Fortunately, Humanities Out There (HOT) founder Julia Lupton gave me a prompt. She told me to write a brief paragraph to the Dean's Office, one that outlined the scheduling, assignments, and learning outcomes for the partnership I had in mind. If successful, the proposal would convince the Dean's Office to establish a stand-alone, two-unit elective course. As I first imagined it, the course would bring the students in my poetry class to two after-school centers for a series of poetry workshops. I wrote:

I will be supervising the undergraduates at Barrio Center and Dios Center once weekly for five or six weeks as we teach the teens in one-hour lessons. These lessons will include a group read-aloud of a developmentally appropriate poem, direct instruction on a particular form required in that day's poetry writing (e.g. couplets), guided practice while the teens write their poems, and eventually some form of publishing of the poems, most likely in a scrapbook at the center. The main responsibilities of the undergraduates will be to select and prepare the lesson plans before our visits, to co-teach these lessons with me, and to guide individual teens or pairs of teens through their own writing of poems. The undergraduates will also be writing blogs in which they reflect on their mentoring experience. I will be providing the undergraduates with . . . prompts given to me by [Meredith Sexton], an MFA instructor in [UCI's poetry collective]. (My program is loosely based on that collective, which [recently] partnered MFAs and undergrads with elementary school students in an after-school program [in a nearby city].)

Following Láin Entralgo, Ellen Quandahl suggests that Aristotle's *pisteis*, commonly translated as logical "proofs" or "appeals" might be more productively understood as "faiths" or

“trusts.” Quandahl also quotes Jeffrey Walker in noting that “Being-persuaded. . . is *trusting*” (qtd. p. 20, 2003). “Belief” in such an understanding is not mere reason, but orientation to action. Similarly, Gorgias’s *Encomium of Helen* states “[I]t is easy neither to remember the past nor consider the present nor predict the future, so that on most subjects most people take opinion as counselor to the soul” (qtd. in Gross, *Secret History* 32).<sup>27</sup> This “opinion,” Gorgias argues, takes the form of rhetoric.

Applying Quandahl’s and Gross’s insights, one could say that I was never more of a rhetorician than when I sent the above proposal to the Dean’s office, outlining what would materialize as a total of sixteen workshops over three quarters. At the beginning of Winter Quarter 2012, I wasn’t even sure that I could get enough university and off-campus students interested to make a go of the workshops. However, launching this project required that my rhetoric convey confidence and inspire trust. This trust depended not so much on the particular words I used but on the genre that shaped them, the course proposal.

Unlike previous writing studies scholarship into genres at work within literacy partnerships, this one takes up emotion as a vehicle of analysis. The domain of emotions, long neglected or at least undertheorized in the humanities, and particularly in composition, has experienced a resurgence. But the question of emotional roles in civic writing, of how emotions are tied up in the genres through which we communicate, remains understudied. To map out this terrain, I combine Anis Bawarshi’s insights on genre theory with James Averill’s understanding of emotions as social roles. Throughout, I call on the familiar trope of emotion as a register for the pressures and pleasures of our roles, but I also demonstrate that emotion can be a means to perform them.

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<sup>27</sup> The quotation includes Daniel Gross’s combination of two translations.

For instance, I would argue that only by conveying my confidence through the course proposal could I combat the uncertainties and contradictions inherent in literacy partnership. In this case, it was the genre that enabled me to “fake it ‘til I made it.” Through the proposal I resolved my own ambivalence *by* performing my role—the confident administrator—to those who could recognize and respond to it. For the proposal to work, I had to find the proper identity in it; conversely, to know how to orient myself and my students properly in the course itself, I had to write the proposal. It was an apt genre through which to perform the labor of establishing a new course—no accident given that the course proposal, like other genres, is, in Susan Miller’s terms, a “typified rhetorical way[] of acting in recurring situations” (qtd. in Bawarshi 7). This wasn’t the first course proposal ever written, and I wasn’t the first to express confidence in it. Indeed, my argument about emotion and genre is that part of what’s “typified” here is the uncertainty, that the genre of the proposal explicitly excludes an emotion that’s essential to the work it accomplishes for its writer. Proposals turn uncertain dreamers into confident administrators.

In what follows, I’ll show the activity system after which I modeled these workshops: a poetry collective run by Grace Bernadette which takes place in a local bilingual elementary school. Then, I’ll delve into our own efforts through HOT, showing how both sets of students entering the emergent activity system set up by the course proposal – the undergraduates and the K-12 students – communicated using five genres, each of which entailed its own emotional role. Three of these were prose genres that continued the work of the course proposal: establishing the partnership. First, in an advertisement, the younger students responded inventively to my request that they signal their need for poetry. Second, in friendly letters, both the college writers and the younger students communicated their own enthusiasm for poetry. Third, in a private email, one

transgender student communicated his fear that he'd be excluded from the workshops altogether. Finally, when it came time to do the workshops, two subgenres of poetry proved useful: when writing list poems, the younger students experienced wonder; when performing spoken-word poetry, they overcame embarrassment.

Before continuing this chapter, I offer a paradox: emotions are passions (*pathē*, paths) through which we suffer and act at once. That is, genres and their attendant emotional roles can help us to break down the tired and false distinction between agency and passivity. Just as we use genres and are used by them, so too do we manage historical and rhetorical constraints on our emotional communication even as we communicate those emotions to accomplish our own rhetorical purposes. When genres require emotion, we undergo a double passivity, subjected simultaneously to textual structures and social pressures on appropriate emotional display. But feelings are no less real for all this; what we mediate through genre we feel immediately. Arranging words we choose in patterns that are, by and large, chosen for us, we are effectively affected and affectively effective.

It is my hope that by seeing how genres and emotions positioned all of us in our brief literacy partnership, by witnessing how we acted through them and were acted upon by them, readers will be able to more thoughtfully consider how genres and emotions are positioning them in their work, how genres are already at work for them, through them, and even against them.

## **II. Grace Bernadette's Collective: A Model**

In the late 1990s, working under Julia Lupton's directorship, poet and teacher Grace Bernadette administered a small grouping of workshops principally involving MFAs as lesson leaders in elementary school classrooms in La Mesita. Just as I was beginning conversations

with the after-school centers I had worked with in my engaged composition course about what shape our next partnership should take, I came across Grace's powerful edited collection. In this slender, colorful volume, which fortunately for me was sitting on the endcap in the UCI authors section of the bookstore, Grace Bernadette had collected poems and lesson plans from her own poetry workshops, which she was by that time calling by a new name. By 2011-2012, Bernadette was running her workshops at a local elementary school, those workshops overseen and funded not by HOT but by another department, along with private donors Grace solicited. However, though the institutional sponsors of Grace's workshops were at this point distinct from HOT, the work accomplished in them remained largely the same: partnering college students with elementary students in reading and writing poetry. This was just what I intended to do. And Grace's book showed that the results of such work could be exhilarating: the collected poems were thoughtful, inventive, and polished. Sometimes they were downright breathtaking.

Bernadette was gracious enough to let me tag along on her trips through two classrooms at a local elementary school one Friday morning in early February, 2012, the very same week my HOT workshops were kicking off. I was pleasantly surprised. It was one thing to hear Meredith Sexton, who'd worked under Grace and who'd met with me for the interview in which she'd shared the poetry collective's materials, describe the kids' reactions to the lessons, or to see the pictures and poems collected in the various publications. It was quite another to sit amongst the stowed jackets and paper reams and maps and puzzles and tables of an actual elementary classroom, listening to Grace deliver a lesson while the children fidgeted, murmured, and scribbled. This was the teachers' and the kids' room. And wonder of wonders in our post-227 world, the world was continuous with the streets around it: bilingual! By the doorway of the first

room were posted the days of the week in English and Spanish: *lunes*/monday all the way through *domingo*/sunday. And just inside, a four-foot tall map of “Los regiones de California,” with the *montañas*, *desiertos* and more each laid out in a different color that was keyed at the map's left margin.

This was the second visit of the quarter by the tutors, and it began with a ritual I'd read about: introductions. Grace presented us to the room. “So who do you know already?” she asked. The kids shouted out the names of familiar tutors. Then the new tutors were asked to introduce themselves, and the kids to ask them questions. “Where are you from?” they asked. The tutors answered Japan or San Jose, as the case may be. “What do you study?” they asked. The tutors professed their love of law and society, or biology, but judging by the kids’ reactions the favorite answer seemed to be that of the international relations major: the world. Grace encouraged the students to ask the tutors what languages we spoke. Hindi and Japanese made the list; one young woman had mastered four. I, the only older White man in the group, confessed when it came my turn that I spoke some Spanish but preferred English. Notwithstanding that preference, before the day was through, I was asked to perform two poems in Spanish, one on gypsies and another on spiders crawling around a well.

I did not know it at the time, but as I’ll demonstrate in this chapter and the next, by asking me to introduce myself and by getting me to read in Spanish, Grace modeled an approach to partnership that would prove essential to our own workshops: writing as vulnerable, interpersonal communication using all participants’ funds of knowledge.

### **III. Teacher-Poet Recruitment: Advertising Need**

Backing up a bit to the start of winter term in late January 2012, I found myself with a series of workshops to staff. My course proposal had accomplished its aim with the Dean's office; I had the course; now I needed the undergraduates, whom I eventually came to understand not as tutors but – riffing on UC Berkeley's Poetry for the People – as “teacher-poets.” To recruit, I visited classes taught by literature and creative writing faculty and by TAs who were gracious enough to accept my emailed requests, both upper- and lower-division courses. In my five-minute recruitment speeches, I provided logistics, not hiding the program's inconveniences: poets would need to drive to the community centers, and they'd have to submit a load of paperwork for the background check and TB clearance.

This was daunting; I needed something that would make the workshops more concrete to the undergrads who were considering whether or not to enroll. Somehow, I had to bring the off-campus students to UCI. Lacking the resources and authority to bring the young people themselves, I asked them to contribute to a recruitment flyer. One afternoon following homework time at one of the community centers in which the workshops would be held, I got the students there to write to my UCI students asking them to visit. One student, Marisol, helped me to type up the days and times, and I assembled those pieces into the handout below, from which I've stripped the identifiers:

# POETRY WORKSHOPS

**WEDNESDAY**

**4:15-5:30**

**FRIDAYS**

**3-4 PM**

- Earn 2 credits
- prep sessions  
wks 3-8 required - Weds. or Fri.
- contact [llangdon@uci.edu](mailto:llangdon@uci.edu) 2-3pm 1-2pm

I hope you guys can come  
So we can write a Song!!

I want to write mean, funny poetry

Roses are red  
Vilets are blue  
I can't wait to have your back

I want to write mysterious and scary Poetry

well I want Poetry!  
I want to evaluate Robert Frost's Beautiful Language! ♥

Hi! We want poetry! From someone awesome like you guys!

"We Want Poetry"

Figure 2: Winter 2012 HOT Poetry Recruitment Flyer.



Beginning with an analysis of the above flyer, and proceeding with an analysis of the friendly letters and poems the students and undergrads wrote and acted out together, we'll see that even when I had boxed the young people into a fairly narrow rhetorical situation, they seized power with playfulness and imagination. Both the undergraduates and the younger students were ahead of me, recognizing that even as they were spoken for by the genre of poetry imposed upon them, they could speak back, through speaking up on poetry's behalf in unexpected ways—including, as we'll see in the last section of the chapter, a form of poetry that neither the English Department, the younger students, nor I had anticipated.

For the flyer, the basic message I asked the young people at the after-school center to communicate was, although not in so many words, "please visit us and teach us poetry." We might call this genre the polite request. A brief look at the flyer finds students making use of it; Bawarshi asks us to "examine invention not only as a site for the writer's articulation of desire, but also as a site for the writer's acquisition of desire" (2-3). That seems to be the case here, as the young writers acquired the desire for the poetry workshops by asking for them. Yet the kids managed to convey something of their personalities and to inflect the request with their own desires. Perhaps the most blatant instance of this was edited out of the document we see above: "I can't wait to have your back" was originally "I can't wait to stab your back." One can just see the ghost of the erased "stab." However, the on-site supervisor, Gustavo, requested that the student revise that threat, and we are left with an informal promise of support for the poets. Similarly, "mean, funny poetry" isn't quite what most literature classes address when they attend to "universal" values and transcendent experiences.

The flyer shows the students are schooled in flattery: "someone awesome like you guys!" In the next chapter, I'll discuss what I call the "discourse of gratitude" at the after-school center,

which positions students as thankful recipients of charity; surely, the admiration that the students express here for their soon-to-be benefactors is also an emotion grounded in inequality: the student voices an emotion—admiration—but rhetorically, to call the unseen and unknown teacher-poet “awesome” encourages that person to feel well-disposed toward the young person making the request. And one young woman clearly knows how to touch the heart of an English major; how could such a person turn down a young lady who asks to do that staple of New Criticism—to “evaluate Robert Frost’s Beautiful Language”?—while adorning her paper with a heart and a smiley face and writing with perfect spelling and neat penmanship. But perhaps the most compelling version of the request on the flyer above is the simplest: ““We Want Poetry.”” In quotes. This could be a chant—a la “We will rock you”—or an ironic take on a forced occasion: “We want poetry” (yeah, sure).

I expect that the brief spate of language above demonstrates that even a small degree of reciprocity makes civic engagement unpredictable. Simply inviting off-campus students to explain what they’d like out of these workshops influenced both the content of the workshops (songs, as requested by one student, would show up in week seven) and, probably, the undergraduates who would choose to participate in them. For in some manner the workshops, and the undergraduates who signed up for them, would have to answer the students’ hopes, even those voiced indeterminately.

#### **IV. Fear of Misrecognition: Will this be a problem for the company?**

I fear these people not because I can imagine the damage they could do (I can equally imagine the threatening qualities of Atilla the Hun), but rather because my concrete relationship to this person—past and present—positions me unfavorably with respect to his or her capacity to harm me in the near future.

— Daniel Gross, *Heidegger and Rhetoric*

In all, thirteen students signed up to serve as teacher-poets in the workshops, nine on Wednesdays at Barrio After-School and four on Fridays at Dios Community Center. I directed these students to go through the standard registration process for each organization. A few days later, I found the following email in my inbox:

Hi Lance,  
I have a question about what information I should give on the online application because I am transgender and I have not legally changed my gender and name yet. I have been using the name Mikey and have been using male pronouns in class and at my current job for over two years. Am I able to use my preferred name and gender on the application, or will this be a problem for the company[?] I am very excited about this opportunity and I hope that my identity will not be an issue that will prevent me from being a tutor in this program. I hope that you will understand my dilemma and will help me figure out what to do. Is there any way that I can use my name and gender on the application without it being a problem?  
Thank you,  
Mikey

In “Public/Sex: Connecting Sexuality and Service Learning,” Rhodes describes her discomfort with the “body checks” that students in her upper-division writing course—English 306—were required to undergo when they engaged in service-learning in the public school system; she found herself asking “about the fact that the public classroom makes us all presumptuous intruders, offenders, TB-carrying predators” and wondering, “What are the unspoken assumptions about sex and sexuality . . . that necessitate such presumptive surveillance? (Alexander, Haynes, and Rhodes 4). That critique has remained with me each term as I have directed my students to complete the Department of Justice fingerprinting that checks their criminal background so as to clear them for work with minors. To bring my university students into these off-campus spaces is to require them to submit to examination by the state, a fact that makes me uncomfortable.

In this case, though Dios Center had allowed us to work with their students in a supervised situation without requiring fingerprinting, it still asked us to provide state documents, namely a driver's license. That's what made Mikey afraid. As he put it in emails he generously wrote to me later about this issue, "I was a bit apprehensive . . . I thought that I might not be able to do the workshops because I was afraid of being 'outed.'" Mikey, a transgender student, was known as male to the university community but might be categorized as female by the off-campus organization because his license categorized him as such. The state continued to understand and process him through a gender category, a genre, that did not match his gender identity.

Service Learning handbooks do much work to help students to think through their expectations for the service-learning experience productively, considering in the course of that reflection how their off-campus partners might perceive them. Indeed, my prompts asked, "What assumptions do you think the other part[y] made about you?" But always implicit in that question is that the students *will* be accepted by the community-site, that even as they are conscious of their possible differences and the fact that they're likely to be perceived as outsiders, they do have authorization to interact with the people at the organization.

Mikey was asking a more basic question: am I allowed in as who I am, or must I pretend to be otherwise? He wasn't much concerned about the kids' acceptance. He wrote, "I often find that children are more open minded about these issues and will respect identities without much question." Instead, he reported, "I was much more nervous to interact with the staff . . . I felt that they would automatically label me as female as soon as I opened my mouth."

I, too, was if not afraid, then at least apprehensive, for how the organization might treat Mikey as well as for missteps that I might make in handling his concerns. I couldn't very well

tell my student simply to “lie” on his application by listing himself as male when his government documents categorized him as female. Were someone at the organization to notice that discrepancy, they might become alarmed, and I did not relish the thought of being called to account by Dios for misrepresenting my student. I also confess that I was worried about the possibility that the after-school students’ Catholic parents would object to their learning poetry from a transgendered teacher and ask that the workshops be discontinued. However, nor did I want—simply as a matter of convenience—to force on Mikey a gender-designation that did not reflect how he understood himself. But if the organization were not receptive to his working there due to his gender identity, would I let them reject him as a participant? If I did, and Mikey communicated about that rejection with others, I might be humiliated by the university for disrespecting his rights to fair treatment.

I reassured Mikey awkwardly: I told him that the volunteer coordinator at Dios Center had a background in theater and thus, I presumed, experience working with transgender people. At Mikey’s request, I agreed that I would speak with her first, letting her know about Mikey’s desire not to be outed. The immediate problem was resolved when she accepted this explanation and carried out the orientation with him as she had done with the other students. But the experience did highlight some potential differences between the organizations that might have resulted in conflict had someone else been managing intake at Dios Center, and I discuss those here. First, I examine how the liminal, university-community space of partnership heightens fear, and how that fear might help us to reconsider the limitations of tactical partnership. Then I briefly consider gender as a category, a social role, through which literacy educators are read, as a genre that requires emotional labor.

Scholars writing on service-learning have noted the difficulties that can arise when students place with organizations that do not share their values, for example when conservative students are asked to work for progressive institutions and vice versa (Bacon; Parks, “Opportunity Lost”). In this case, I was organizing this literacy network across two institutions in which gender as genre produced social roles with important differences. I was acting on behalf of a public university, charged with educating all citizens without discrimination based on sexual orientation or, as of 2004, gender identity (University of California Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Association). Just this year, the university has agreed to recognize students under their preferred rather than given names in public records, partly as an effort to respect transgender students’ gender expression. Thus, were Mikey registering to work with an on-campus organization today, he would not need to fear being outed. Dios, however, was a faith-based organization, teaching Christian values to its children, values that might include what we would describe as discrimination. They’d invited us in to do poetry; we were guests. But we had rights, and shouldn’t have needed to depend on others merely tolerating us based on personal preferences. I argue that I experienced anxiety and Mikey experienced fear not just because of our temperaments but because we stood in an uncertain relationship to the institutions with which we were working. Caught between the genres of the state (license), the NGO (application form), and the university (which sponsored Mikey’s poetry), we wondered, what gender role belonged to Mikey? Which would he be allowed to inhabit, or required to?

The scholarship on Heidegger with which I began this section points to fear as a social disposition, an orientation to those who might do us harm, one that would guide our dealings with its object. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops this thought at some length, describing how terror and dread at unknown evils can claim a subject, distinguishing between fearing for

others and fearing for oneself, and noting that fear and uncertainty exist in tandem so that we fear most what is approaching but not certain to reach us (179ff). Fear, Heidegger goes on to suggest, places the subject in relation to death, her own nullification. And though it operates in the present, it is a means of bringing the future to bear on that present, of reacting to what is not necessarily there in body but is known to be approaching.

Aristotle suggests that we acquire courage as a virtue not by avoiding fear but by learning to live with it and act despite it; like other virtues, courage is strengthened and developed through practice. Mikey seemed to have learned that lesson already. Unfortunately, as I found out only later, for Mikey the prospect of being disrespected because of his gender identity was familiar. He wrote,

I often assumed that I would get the worst reaction possible in situations like this (from past bad experiences with professors) . . . More often than not, I have experienced discrimination in the classroom for the way that I presented myself simply because it made the teacher uncomfortable.

Legal policies to the contrary, life as a transgender person required continued courage in even day-to-day interactions. In fact, Mikey seemed to have developed a certain perseverance against obstacles such as ignorant instructors from having met them time and again. Against such trouble, Mikey leaned on habits, as he did in this situation when he went to meet the kids: “I was aware that I might be misgendered,” he said. “[B]ut I presented myself as I did in everyday life.”

Indeed, for Mikey, the question wasn’t about the organization’s Christian affiliation or its possibly opposing values at all. “I knew that the organization was run by Christians,” he wrote, “but that did not make me any more or less apprehensive.” Instead, it seems that the unusual, elective nature of this poetry project and the registration process itself asked Mikey to once again *initiate* a relationship using legal paperwork. One might say that he had to invent himself again in relation to a new institution with a unique potential to stigmatize or reject him.

Despite his expectation that his involvement in the project could be detrimental, he decided to try. The results were positive. He wrote:

I'm glad that my desire to work with the students overpowered my fear because I was pleasantly surprised. The kids were pretty intuitive and were able to read my gender identity from the various queues I was giving them (language, clothing, mannerisms). Also, I never had to disclose my legal gender at the time to anyone but you and the director of Dios who was also very accommodating . . . I feel that teachers should approach differences in gender, sexuality, race, etc. that make them uncomfortable in a professional manner because it is their job to make the space of the classroom a safe and respectful environment. I really do appreciate the effort that you took to make me feel safe and comfortable.

As pleased as I am at Mikey's vote of confidence, stepping back from Mikey's immediate situation, we should note that a tactical program such as these poetry workshops—arranged by the immediate consent of both partners—is more exposed to suffer the motives and values of outside partners, even when they conflict with the university's, than is a more firmly institutionalized and strategic program housed in a university. UC Berkeley's Poetry for the People (P4P), for instance, chartered its own constitution of sorts, which includes the following:

Originating inside a public institution . . . there are certain ground rules that must be respected inside this experimental, and hopeful, society:  
“The People” shall not be defined as a group excluding or derogating anyone on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, sexual preference, class, or age.” (Jordan16, emphasis added)

P4P exists first *within* the university, as a series of upper-division courses in the African American Studies Department.<sup>28</sup> In that program, Mikey would not need to fear exclusion and hope for the best (remember that he wrote, “I hope that my identity will not be an issue that will prevent me from being a tutor in this program”). Instead, he would be “safe and comfortable” from the beginning, secure in his knowledge that he enjoys full rights as one of “the people,”

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<sup>28</sup> As of this writing, Poetry for the People continues under the directorship of Aya de León through Berkeley's African American Studies 156AC course, with public readings scheduled in the spring of 2014.



wherever we work. The institution would extend its protection to the spaces with which it interacts. In my program, more contingent and tactical, he was not as sure of protection.

A full consideration of gender as a social role is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter, but in wrapping up my discussion of Mikey's fear and my apprehension, it helps to consider the common derivation of "gender" and "genre." Given that both derive from the Greek "gen" (to produce) and the Latin "genus" (class or sort), we might remember that society uses gender to allocate the labor of production and reproduction. This labor includes the teaching of writing, an occupation that is gendered by turns as masculine or feminine. Sometimes writing instruction is imagined as public work—training for civic participation—and sometimes it is privatized, understood to develop the practices of introspection, self-care, or intrafamilial communication. As has been documented in educational research, students carry differing expectations for male and female teachers, expecting nurturing and support from women and discipline and authority from men. Even genres acquire genders. Why else, at Barrio Center, were over three-quarters of the girls in poetry workshop, but less than one quarter of the boys?

All of this is to say that students' reading of Mikey's gender would likely influence the labor they would expect of him (including emotional labor; see Chapter 5). That is, his labor would be gendered, one way or the other. At that time, Mikey was unhappy about the prospect of being classed into his prior, feminine gender and was looking for recognition through the only other category available: masculinity. Mikey explained the conclusion to his story as follows:

On a side note, I did have my gender on my driver's license changed, as well as a legal name change by the end of the program . . . As the program progressed, I became less fearful because . . . I was starting to pass more as male. I had just started testosterone therapy when the program began, and the effects were more and more visible by the end of the program. Nowadays, I am grateful that I no longer have the fear of being read as female.

Mikey's little problem with paperwork processing points to the much larger gender structure imbricated in all of our labor, and highlights how the choices we make emerge from structures and genres, in this case gender, that we can navigate but not control. These structures carry with them emotions, in this case fear and apprehension, that if heeded will inform us of the disparate roles we inhabit even as we join together in the same activity systems.

## **V. "Dear Future Student Partaking in the Awesomeness of Poetry with Me": An Enthusiastic Invocation**

In this section I describe how I initiated a letter exchange to establish the two principal emotional roles I judged necessary in this particular partnership. These roles are two sides of the same coin: the enthusiastic teacher and learner. Following the model of Shirley Faulkner-Springfield's partnership, in which her composition students dispensed advice to local secondary students, I prompted my undergraduates to introduce themselves to the younger students through an initial friendly letter (Appendix C), and I brought these letters in person to the younger students at the after-school centers, who then wrote responses that I in turn carried back to the undergraduates.<sup>29</sup>

As we'll see, these letters demonstrate the power that genre has in shaping the emotional roles we undertake as teachers, learners, and writers. Indeed, it's amazing how slender a basis the roles solidified in these letters had in the usual activity systems of the university and after-school programs, and how directly the roles could be traced to these few texts: the letters, but also the course proposal and the recruitment flyer. Yet as will also become clear, one cannot summon an

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<sup>29</sup> When I had the undergraduates write their letters, we still didn't know exactly how many off-campus students would participate in the workshops. Thus, we were not able to pair or group up the college students with the younger students. I created a prompt that asked the college writers to address 1-2 students, but in practice groups at Dios contained one tutor for every 3 or 4 students, while tutors at Barrio enjoyed a 1-to-2 or 1-to-1 tutor-to-student ratio.

enthusiastic student-poet with a single handwritten note; the motives that brought the younger students to the workshop didn't always match those we'd project upon them through the letter, and they were less adept than the teacher-poets at concealing that fact. Nor did the younger students' knowledge of poetry—or even of letter writing—allow them to imagine what writing poetry with the teacher-poets would entail. Thus, while the letters *did* establish enthusiasm and curiosity, we'll see that those emotions continued to be projected toward objects that the teacher-poets, the young writers and I understood quite differently.

In analyzing this letter exchange, I draw on the work of Bawarshi, whose *Genre and the Invention of the Writer* outlines how genres (in this case personal letters) shape the rhetorical situations students face. I also draw on Flower's notion of "cognitive rhetoric," which "describes writing as a performative act, as a way of entering into rhetorical situations and discourse communities, often characterized by unique, unstable rules and configurations" (qtd. in Faulkner-Springfield 74). What are these letters if not an attempt by me (the organizer), the college writers and the younger students to join together in a new discourse community—the poetry workshop—by orienting toward one another and stabilizing their roles with respect to that third object: "poetry?"

Before I discuss the work these letters did, I must note a caveat. The genre of the personal letter typically requires sincerity and offers privacy, and my surveillance of the letters in this research project, though assented to by the students whose correspondence I analyze below, raises troubling questions about the impact of that surveillance of their content. However, I would argue that we do not need to understand the letters as purely sincere, private, or personal to understand the ways in which they worked to establish the functional dyad of enthusiasm and curiosity.

My students faced a challenging rhetorical task. They, not the younger students, had to write the first letter. True, they could fall back on the role they'd signed up to fill: experienced poet and/or poetry aficionado. And they had ample guidance in the prompt I delivered them, perhaps too much so: I called them "mentors" and charged them to convey their "hopes for the poetry workshops and one or two of the fun things [they'd] like to do in them" so as to "hopefully get [students] excited about the poetry that's coming up"; I also suggested they "might even share with [the students] any hesitations or worries [they had] about doing the workshops" (though none took me up on that); finally, the teacher-poets were also asked to convey a sense of themselves not just as poets but as people by sharing their interests, and to ask the students to do the same. I was asking them to model an attitude toward reading and writing that the younger students would emulate, a practice that, as I'll explain in discussing the young writers' responses, Aristotle understands as emotional.

Nonetheless, despite whatever comfort the teacher-poets might have taken in these prescriptions, they still had to invoke in their writing an unseen and largely unknown audience. I take the term "invoke" from Ede and Lunsford's influential "Audience Addressed/ Audience Invoked," which captures how these letters served as constitutive rhetoric. The younger students were familiar to my college writers only through the flyer and the basic demographic information I had conveyed in the five minutes I'd had to pitch the workshops: the younger writers were Latino kids in a low-income community who ranged in age from about sixth to tenth grade. Thus, in a sense, my college writers "invoked," or created, the students they would be mentoring in the process of addressing them, and it was not until they received the younger students' replies a week later, just before the first workshop, that this "invoked" audience would transition into an "addressed" one with the ability to speak back.

In a section titled “Genre and the Invention of Writing Subjects,” Bawarshi notes that “the power of genre resides, in part, in this sleight of hand, in which social obligations to act become internalized as seemingly self-generated desires to act in certain discursive ways” (91). Taken cynically, one might say that the occasion I’d created for letter writing, and the exhaustive prompt that I made to guide that letter, were designed to make invisible the ways in which the college writers’ desire to act as poet-mentors had been scripted by me, the program organizer. As far as the younger students were concerned, they were receiving a personal letter from a college kid crazy about poetry. A kinder way to put it would be that I was giving the college students a chance to orient the younger writers toward their particular personalities and interests before the first workshop. The letter gave them some discretion, if not in setting the agenda, as I’d originally planned, then at least in relating their interests and passions in reading and writing poetry to it. These were, after all, mostly English majors, and they had self-selected into workshops in which they knew they’d be teaching poetry to younger students. And a friendly letter, even one directed by an exhaustive prompt, leaves ample room for improvisation. Indeed, I could not have predicted exactly what the college students ended up saying, and that should come as no surprise; as Bawarshi writes, “Every time a writer writes within a genre, he or she in effect acquires, interprets, and to some extent transforms the desires that motivate it” (ibid).

Just what was involved in that “interpretation” becomes clearer with a detailed look at the letters themselves. First, there was the question of who these younger people were to be for the letter writers. Though one of the writers called the person he addressed “friend,” many more picked up on a suggestion I included in my directions: “mystery student.” Others simply addressed the letter, “Dear student(s).” My favorite, quoted as the title for this section, was addressed “Dear Future Student Partaking in the Awesomeness of Poetry with Me.” Following

my cues, then, most of the college students took on the role of teacher, albeit in a more informal register than would be typical of a classroom teacher. The greetings communicated this informality; one said, “Hey there,” and another began “Hi!”

Not surprisingly given what these workshops would entail and the directions I’d given for the letter, the most common theme of the older students’ writing was that they hoped the younger students would enjoy poetry as much as they did, and that they—the teacher-poets—could help them to do so. This opening is typical: “Dear Mystery Student, / I am very excited to explore the world of poetry with you.” I had asked the college writers to comment on their relationship to poetry, and all who did so stated that they currently took pleasure either in writing it or reading it (e.g. “Poetry has become a big part of my life”).

More than a few teacher-poets wrote conversion narratives that contrasted their earlier indifference to poetry, or even dislike of it, with the enjoyment they currently took in it. A few of these paid homage to the teacher that had brought about that conversion. The most straightforward comment on the topic was this: “About 4 months ago I hated poetry. That all changed after I took a poetry class with an amazing teacher and came to realize poetry is quite fun.” Others tracked their conversion to a specific moment in elementary or high school. Several of the teacher-poets expressed hopes that they might serve as teachers themselves, presumably inspiring ones like those who had brought them into their own love of poetry.

I hadn’t been so foolish as to dictate in the prompt to suggest *why* poetry was to matter to the teacher-poets, nor had I had the foresight to make suggestions on that topic; thus, the teacher-poets had wider latitude in filling out that part of the role of poetry enthusiast. It turned out that those teacher-poets who wrote poetry did so for expressive or political reasons. “Poetry expresses what inspires me,” one wrote. “Spoken word is like expressing yourself through telling

a story,” another wrote. A third said, “It opens up a part of your brain that nothing else can touch.” The topics about which they sought to express themselves varied from nature and the people they cared about to difficult experiences. The political writers took a different tack; one stated that poetry was “a powerful tool . . . in creating change” and another noted that he wrote “politically charged slam poems.”

When it came to reporting on their own reading, the teacher-poets were unabashedly enthusiastic, a quality I encouraged in the prompt because I’d found rare when teaching middle schoolers, who tended to be self-conscious about any love of learning. A few teacher-poets spoke of reading as a passion: “Writing and reading are everything to me,” one said. “I’m obsessed with diction.” Similarly, in describing herself as a reader one said she was “your standard geek.” As is true in much of the poetry community, those who spoke of reading were as likely to mention prose as poetry. Romance novels, sci-fi, classic literature—all made the teacher-poets’ reading lists. Still, more than a few mentioned reading canonical poets: Shakespeare, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens. Those that fulfilled the assignment’s requirement to include a quotation from a poem also tended to pick canonical faire: Tennyson’s “Ulysses,” Frost’s “Stopping by Woods,” a few Dickinson lyrics. Only one teacher-poet broke from this canonicity when he listed the names of contemporary spoken word artists Buddy Wakefield and SuperB. As I’ll discuss in the next chapter, such references indicate that the conservative canon is alive and well at our university.

Perhaps to render themselves accessible, the college students tended to speak rather informally and sometimes admitted to less than scholarly habits, though not without recognizing the norms against them. One, for instance, admitted to watching “an obscene amount of t.v. (seriously everything).” And befitting their role as teachers, the letter writers expressed their

desire to help the younger writers, to field requests and difficulties, to listen to their eloquence, and to follow their lead on their choice of themes. Almost universally, they expressed a desire to teach the younger students or help them grow as poets, often in the sense of helping them to express themselves on topics they cared about.

I have provided the quotations above to signal the variations in the ways that the college writers adapted to their roles as poetry teachers. But at the risk of flattening out their personalities, I draw on the most common traits to present the following composite portrait of the teacher-poet, the ideal or norm toward which the letters tended. Most often they write to express what they think and feel; occasionally they write about political topics. They have eclectic media tastes but love reading—sometimes poetry, sometimes fiction. They are schooled in the classics and find in them their authority as students of literature. As teachers, they are friendly, supportive, and engaging—informal in their language but passionate about the subject of poetry.

Even the most perfunctory of the letters showed the teacher-poets impressively fulfilling the social roles they were called into as poetry masters, and some of the longer ones were quite inspiring. But how would the younger students respond? In “The writer’s audience is always a fiction,” Ong suggests that not only do writers invoke their audiences, but that readers redirect themselves in becoming the kind of reader the text calls for, readers who “know how to play the game of being a member of an audience that ‘really’ does not exist” (qtd. in Ede & Lunsford 161). The younger students who read the college students’ letters were learning to do the same, albeit in a different sense than the reader of fictional texts whom Ong takes as his model. To what extent would the younger writers follow the cues the older writers offered and become those students the teacher-poets’ letters showed them seeking, ones that did not (yet?) exist? And would the younger students resist any cues?



Amongst the emotions that Aristotle lists as possible among equals is one we do not commonly think of today as an emotion: “emulation.” Aristotle writes that emulation is “pain caused by seeing the presence, in persons whose nature is like our own, of good things that are highly valued and are possible for ourselves to acquire” (*Rhetoric* 2.11). Emulation is the mirror of envy, in which we see an equal enjoying benefits or receiving praise we do not believe they merit. In emulation, the admired exhibits behavior that glorifies them, behavior that appear to us noble or beautiful, behavior that it is possible for us to imitate. One might wonder, then, what the younger students would find to emulate, what good thing they would feel pressed to acquire, in the writing style or topics of interest of those whom this project had set up to be their role models.

In their letters to the college writers, the young students expressed eclectic interests—pets, friends, foods—and dwelled on them at some length. When it came to poetry, they were familiar with a few strict forms, the sonnet and the haiku for instance. A few of the eighth- and ninth-graders who wrote poems admitted to writing them about love, while a few younger ones related that they enjoyed reading Shel Silverstein’s poems. Others were unsure if the genres they knew—nursery rhymes and songs—qualified as poetry.

Though their experience with poetry varied, the younger students took up the call to be engaged learners. Almost universally, they expressed the desire to find out more about poems and poetry, indicating their willingness to cooperate in what the teacher-poets had indicated would be their principal activity. Still, one student’s explanation of her puzzlement over more advanced work should help to demonstrate what difficulties they anticipated in the workshops:

I read ‘The Raven’ by I don’t know who, but it kept repeating ‘Lenore.’ I think it said ‘Lenore’ because it was the poet’s lover. I also didn’t get the part when he said someone was tapping at the door. . . Anyway, what I think of poetry? Hmm .

. . weird, it's weird. I want to meet a poet person, and want to make a poem with him/her. (ellipses in original)

The last sentence above indicated what role she imagined the teacher-poets might serve not just for her, but for all the students: to be “a poet person” from whom they might get an explanation of how poetry works and with whom they might write their own poems.

Thus far, then, the younger students were successfully interpellating themselves into the roles their teacher-poets had imagined in their letters. Sometimes, this play-acting took the form of responding to particular comments in the teacher-poets’ letters. When one teacher-poet spoke of poetry as a form of self-expression her student responded by telling her about a poem she’d written that expressed feelings of love. And when that college student I mentioned called herself a nerd, her student responded that he was “also a nerd.”

But this was not a monological group; that same teacher-poet had asked, “Does the beauty of lyrics in music move your mind and soul?” All three of her students quoted her question verbatim in answering the question, with two saying yes. But the other said bluntly, “The beauty of lyrics in music doesn’t move my mind and soul much.” Others, as we saw in the “weird” passage, expressed ambivalence about poetry. (Granted, given the teacher-poets’ stories that they hadn’t liked poetry when younger, such statements could be read as the students depicting themselves as receptive to conversion.) When one student was asked if he liked reading, he replied that he did like reading books—summaries, that is. And when it came to pop culture, students felt free to disagree with their teacher-poets’ tastes. To one teacher-poet who’d explained he didn’t understand the craze over Justin Bieber, the student replied in giant print, “P.S. I LIKE JUSTIN BIEBER!!! Hahalo!!!”

As the workshops developed I found that in some ways they did not fit the model I had imagined when I wrote the letter prompt for the college students. Owing to their schooling, for

instance, many of the younger students described themselves as skilled musicians. And, due to scheduling logistics at Dios and my own familiarity with the junior high rather than the high school students at Barrio, those attending the after-school workshops turned out to be younger than the group I'd originally imagined: fourth to ninth graders rather than the junior high and high school students I'd promised. The Dios students, I later learned, had been handpicked by the educational director, with most being honors students who had been enrolled in her own bilingual classes when she was a classroom teacher. The Barrio students were on the whole less proficient writers, and a few struggled with the basics of sentence boundaries and cursor alignment when it came time to write the reply letters. For both groups, if the college writers were to model an enthusiasm for poetry, they would need to recognize that the students were not prepared to learn everything they had to teach, but would need to be guided more deliberately through the basics. Whereas I had led them to convert young writers into poetry lovers, it turned out that the teacher-poets would also be responsible for teaching the grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary necessary for the kids' imaginative flights to become legible and vivid.

The scene at Barrio After-School Center on the day I delivered the letters, copied here from a set of fieldnotes I had revised into a narrative, shows too that the undergraduates' letters did succeed in stimulating curiosity and prompting emulation, though not in the directions we'd intended:

There are four of us in a back room at Barrio Teen. The initial hullabaloo has died down a bit and it's time to write.

The extrovert, McCartney, keeps asking me questions: "How do we start the letters?" "Can we ask them questions too?" "What do you call love poems?" She asks me if the boy who has written her is cute. When I give a noncommittal answer, she tries unsuccessfully to get Dennis to swap letters.

He refuses. He's intrigued by his tutor. "How do you say his name?" he asks. "I've got to say it when he gets here, like he asked: 'Just call out my name, Stitch, and you'll be sure to recognize me. I'm the guy with the spiky hair and the smile plastered on my face.'"

“Is he cute?” McCartney asks again. I start to wish she’d write quietly, like the other two workshop participants.

Marisol, who asked to analyze Robert Frost on our recruiting flier, is eager to meet her tutor too, but not for the reason I expected. “Wow,” she says. “Look at her handwriting! I’m going to write neat too.” Ten minutes later, midway through her first paragraph, she asks, “How do you spell ‘musician?’” then tries on her own before I answer, getting it right (honors student that she is).

Dennis’s letter from the cartoon tutor is typed, so he has decided to type his reply. After introducing himself and listing his hobbies, he’s stuck with a lot of white space, even with the 14 point font I’ve suggested. The tutor has written, “I like anime and comic books,” and he has replied, “I like comic books too, like\_.”

His cursor blinks impatiently. “What’s the title of a comic?” he asks. I work with him to answer this question, and to locate on the internet the knowledge he needs to meet the letter’s other demands—on comics but also on spoken-word poetry, about which the tutor wrote quite a bit.

Commenting on Dennis’s experiences before I comment on McCartney’s and Marisol’s, I should say that in the end, Dennis erased the sentence starter in which he bluffed knowledge of comics. Instead he wrote that Stitch’s comment about comics had gotten him interested in them. Whether Dennis made that decision because he gave up on the internet search for comics titles or because he decided to present who he was rather than who he aspired to be, I can’t say. Clearly, though, it isn’t so much the knowledge as the social role provided by mastery of that knowledge that Dennis seeks. Only by successfully naming what he doesn’t yet know, the same way we’d carefully pronounce the name of a theorist we don’t know, does Dennis put himself in a position to participate and learn.

When it comes to McCartney and Marisol, it’s clear that the letter prompted curiosity and emulation. But McCartney’s desire was for a cute boy, not a powerful poet. Put another way, the genre of the letter had succeeded in piquing her curiosity, just not about poetry. (As it turned out during the actual sessions, she would be a bit disappointed by her teacher-poet’s looks but would write some fabulous poems with him, but her best day seemed to be the session in which we had more teacher-poets than students and she was able to corral *two* teacher-poets’ attention, though

only one was male.) Marisol, on the other hand, did understand writing as a powerful practice, one that lent the writer prestige and perhaps opened doors to higher education (another goal of this partnership). But she understood *handwriting* and spelling to be key. Was this because her teachers stressed the importance of presentation over content? Perhaps, but the desire remained. I'm not saying that the teacher-poet would have to let her know that "Evaluat[ing] Robert Frost's Beautiful Language" involved more than admiring his penmanship; Marisol knew that already. But the teacher-poet might have an uphill battle in convincing Marisol that crossing out and revising her poem as she went along would be part of what made it beautiful.

These examples suggest the overall theme for this letter exchange with which I'll conclude this section: though the power of genre is great, it runs up against limits in the knowledge and motivation of those who make use of it.

First, the power. Recalling the first section of this chapter, we can say that with these personal letters the undergraduates began to fulfill the promises made in the course proposal even as they accomplished their own motives. That is, the university successfully created a credit-bearing course in which undergraduate English majors brought our cultural capital (Tennyson, Frost, Dickinson) to underrepresented students in local communities; this was the English Department's motive. And through that effort our undergraduates achieved their goal: professionalizing as teachers. Similarly, these letters show the undergraduates and I were able to use the genre of the friendly letter to successfully cultivate the enthusiasm they'd need as teachers. When I asked (demanded?) that college writers draft a letter demonstrating their love of poetry, they did so by finding their own desires for poetry (expression, politics, reflection) within the prompt.

But the power of genre has its limits. To some extent the younger students did convey the sought-for enthusiasm, but if we look carefully at their responses, we find complicated backgrounds that produce competing or contradictory motives. What parts of their lives would they bring to this new activity? Their experience performing music? Their love of animals? Of their families? Would they build on the formal poems—haikus and acrostics—they read in previous poetry class? On their desire for good penmanship? For a crush? The students' relative inexperience with poetry comes through in what they wrote, and for some their inexperience with letter writing does too, as they answer the teacher-poets' questions in list form, as though responding to a teacher's prompt (which the letter was, but also wasn't). Even those younger students who expressed a love of words did so not quite in the way we at the university would have imagined for them. Altogether, the younger students' responses show that these letters were spaces to try to make connections with the teacher-poets (remember Dennis's blinking cursor), but they also show that any orientation toward the teacher-poets and the poetry they brought would be in its nascent stages when we sat down to write together. Because what they wanted varied and what they knew was incomplete, the younger students' reorientation to poetry couldn't be accomplished in one letter.

Nevertheless, the letters did help to get everyone more comfortable once we sat down together to write. One could say that I was little more than an intermediary, serving the function of circulator, as two groups of students summoned one another through texts. But that is to ignore my role in choosing the subject of the workshops, in asking the younger students to ask for poetry and compiling those requests into a flier, in asking the groups to communicate and picking among the available genres for this communication—all actions based on programmatic models, to be sure, yet selected with the goals possible in this institution and for this dissertation.

My hopes, too, were, in Ahmed's terms, "dependent on past interpretations not necessarily made by" me, yet they were nonetheless very much mine. In the next chapter I will critique how a later workshop focused on aspects of poetry that were less than ideal for facilitating the younger students' literate development. However, looking back on this section, the overall picture is that the letters were successful in producing at least the positive orientation of both parties toward the workshops. The teacher-poets' enthusiasm had prompted the learners' own curiosity. By the time we began the first workshop, meeting around a group of tables to examine a box of seashells, we had said many promising things about what we hoped we'd be doing together. What we would actually get done was another question.

## **VI. Wonder and the Writer of Lyric Poetry**

My seashell is as salty as the sand.  
It looks like a drill going down.  
Its sound is like a windy storm.  
My shell is like a bumpy road.  
Its smell is like a rotten fish.  
I see it as a pointy knife.

### *A. Wonder as a Habit of Mind*

A student at Dios Center wrote the above poem in the second of five workshops we did there, one called "Seashells and Similes," created by Susan Starbuck (Olson 197ff). I had experienced that lesson from the student side during my summer in the UCLA Writing Project. Students in small groups make close observations of a seashell brought by the instructor. They write descriptions of the shell's characteristics (bumpy, smooth, white, pointy) and make comparisons of the shell with other objects (the shell is an ear), sometimes noting those characteristics in the process (as smooth as my grandmother's cheek). For younger learners, this process offers the opportunity to do generative thinking first, then to learn the labels we apply to such thinking (metaphor, simile, noun, adjective); in Patrick Hartwell's terms, Grammar Five—

descriptive grammar used to enhance students' rhetorical style—grows out of Grammar One, students' unconscious language ordering capacities. I was so happy with how this lesson went that summer at UCLA that I mail-ordered a box of seashells and used them with my students whenever I thought they could benefit from a lesson on close observation, description, and imagination. I taught the lesson frequently.

Before delivering any lesson to the kids at the community centers, we—the HOT teacher-poets and I—ran through it on campus during an hour-long preparatory session. Thus, a sunny Friday morning in February found me traveling our campus with a wooden box underarm. I bumped into a fellow grad student, Maureen.

"What do you have there?" she asked.

I explained to her the lesson plan.

"I think it's great that you're using nature," she said. "And you have faith on a Friday that these kids are ready for wonder."

Looking back, I do think the students were "ready for wonder." I'm going to take this small occasion, this single poetry workshop with a few dozen teacher-poets and K-12 students on a single afternoon a few years ago, to ruminate for a bit on the role of wonder and similar emotions—especially curiosity and engagement—in poetry. In doing so, I hope to ultimately make the case that poetry is (to recuperate a word) a *wonderful* genre for stimulating at least the first four of those habits of mind that the WPA, the NCTE, and the NWP have recently agreed are essential to proficient writers: curiosity – the desire to know more about the world; openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world; engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning; creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas (CWPA).



I'm tempted to say that poetry is ideal for such exploration, but I'll content myself with noting that we settled on poetry in these after-school spaces because we wanted something that would grab students' attention, that would get them both observing and imagining, something that let them know we weren't in the multiple-choice classroom (where only multiple-choice thinking would be rewarded), something that offered at least a chance of the form of the writing following from its meaning rather than arbitrary generic structures. I'll delay that last thought on the genre(s) of poetry, however, for I first wish to make a case for poetry as a practice of what the frameworks name as openness and curiosity, terms I combine in another term: wonder.

Maureen wasn't the only one to suggest that a poetry lesson like this seashell lesson would necessitate the emotion of wonder (really the *faculty* of wonder; wonder combines cognition and emotion).<sup>30</sup> Nancy Atwell suggests "Poetry changes us: it makes us think, look, hear, and wonder in ways we never would have otherwise" (qtd. in Olson 197). I take these uses of "wonder" to suggest part of what Sara Ahmed says of the term. Wonder marks our ability to become disoriented, to be, one might say, thrown.<sup>31</sup> Ahmed's citation of Descartes's *The Passions of the Soul* gets at what. Descartes notes that wonder abides outside of utility, that we might pay attention to an object "before we know whether or not the object is beneficial to us" (qtd. in Ahmed 178). That was ultimately true of the observations I asked students to undertake in the seashells and similes workshop. Only as a vehicle for observation, for thought, was the seashell a tool. It didn't *do* anything. That was the point. Without going too deeply into Heideggerian thought, I suggest that this lesson asks students to push beyond or draw back from objects'

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<sup>30</sup> "Interest," as anatomized by Mary Ainley, is one way that educational psychology combines the cognitive and affective aspects of what I'm calling "wonder."

<sup>31</sup> Though Ahmed brings up wonder and pedagogy in *Cultural Politics of the Emotions*, I am using the term apolitically. Ahmed does notes that learning the hidden history of the objects around us can lead us to marvel over them (in Ahmed's case, she says feminism allowed her and required her to view the familiar as strange, the strange as familiar). Rather, I linger simply in wonder's possibilities for surprise, for openness.

readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*), their everyday usefulness, and to explore the properties of their presence-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*), their being (Brandom and The Hegeler Institute).

A related but distinct aspect of wonder is that the object of attention isn't simply useless but puzzling, and intriguingly so. From Descartes, as quoted by Ahmed:

When our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it to be, this causes us to wonder and to be astonished at it. Since all this may happen before we know whether or not the object is beneficial to us, I regard wonder as the first of the passions.

As we can see, Descartes posits that finding “novel” material of the world might challenge our habitual perceptions. Things wholly new to us often produce wonder. But Descartes also notes that an object might be “different from what we *supposed* it to be.” Yes, the students in these particular poetry workshops at Barrio and Dios centers could get to the beach in less than an hour; but whether or not students had seen seashells before was irrelevant to whether or not these shells, on this occasion, could facilitate wonder. For the shells, upon closer examination, were not just what students had supposed them to be. Each had unique, distinguishing characteristics. Whether or not they had looked at shells before, they hadn't quite seen them, not in the way required for this writing lesson.

Ahmed follows Descartes's quotation with a summary of Wittgenstein's argument on the familiar, with what is "taken for granted, as the background that we do not even notice." In opposition to this, "wonder expands our field of vision and touch. Wonder is the precondition of the exposure of the subject to the world." (Ahmed 179). Exposing subjects to the world, in this case to an object dislocated from its usual place in nature, was key to this workshop. So too was noticing what had been taken for granted. In this workshop, one poet had his student clasp his hands over his ears and then release them, then describe the sounds he heard. The idea was to notice what he'd been hearing all along but never really listening to. Just by having students sit

and stare at the shells for a period of time, having them turn them over, hold them, examine them from different angles, we urged them to see them. The contrast with an encounter of the new through Ahmed’s positive “wonder” and Heidegger’s negative “curiosity” may be instructive. In *Being and Time*, curiosity is negatively defined as a search for novelty, a refusal to stick with and care for an object, to dwell with it (Heidegger 216). Wonder is different: it asks us to form an understanding as we look, to inhabit with the objects in *Dasein*.

When the students did look, and wrote down what they found, they made some fresh observations: The shell was “as smooth as my grandmother’s cheek, when she’s cold.” It contained a “cheetah’s spots.” It was a “spotty turtle shell,” “the beach.” In one just one poem, it became “a churro, delicious and crispy,” “a wiggly slide,” “a bumpy node,” “a unicorn horn,” an “icicle,” and “cracked as a tree.” In others it was “rusty,” shaped like “a rice hat,” and “light as a powder brush.” Or “empty like a haunted house” and “hollow as a porcupine needle.”

These words are the substance of an encounter, a learning moment. As Luis’s poem and these excerpts show, we focused; we looked, listened, smelled, and touched; we described and we imagined. The poetry students created is evidence that the lesson prompted students to engage, investigate, and create. They allowed wonder to take hold.

### *B. Poetry as a Genre: Voicing Experience, Vision, Truth*

In this lesson, the process of observing the seashell and generating descriptions and comparisons got students curious and engaged: they took a long time to examine the shells and produced a lot of words concerning them. It required openness—the ability to “consider new ways of thinking”—for students generated connections between the shells and the worlds they knew, and listened as their peers did the same. As practiced in this instance, poetry became a wondering, wonderful genre. Poetry evoked at least what Renninger names “triggered,

situational interest,” the transient state of curiosity, even if it’s too much to ask that one lesson, or five or ten, develop in student writers curiosity as a permanent trait, a habit. This much is evident.

But what exactly is the role of language in such an investigation? Ahmed quotes Philip Fisher on the relation of wonder and language: "Being struck by something is exactly the opposite of being struck dumb. The tie between wonder and learning is clear" (Ahmed, 180). How is it that to speak, not to be struck dumb, is to learn?

To begin with, I maintain that poetry workshops like these ask us to become more aware of and deliberate in our use of language. June Jordan’s most basic definition of poetry is helpful here. In her *Blueprint*, she provides a sheet titled “Guidelines for Critiquing a Poem” that includes the following section:

2. Is it a poem?

Poetry: A medium for telling the truth

Poetry: The achievement of maximum impact with the minimum number of words

Poetry: Utmost precision in the use of language, hence, density and intensity of expression.

The “minimum number of words,” “density . . . of expression,” and the “utmost precision in the use of language?” These aspects of the definition coincide with current-traditional rhetoric’s focus on concision and clarity. They describe an essay almost as well as a poem, and get at the pressure we wished to exert during this poetry workshop to get students to utilize particulars in their descriptions and comparisons. As Twain notes, “The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—’tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.” This lesson drove that home, as each line of the poem required students to communicate a fresh image to the reader, an image that could only be summoned by the writer—for her own benefit as well as the benefit of readers—with fitting words.

For her own benefit? Yes. As T.S. Eliot puts it, the poet “does not know what he has to say until he’s said it” (qtd. in Sastri 193). Poetry offers at least the lure of saying, in the words of Prufrock, “just what I mean.” Whereas science calls for a corroboration of observations between investigators, poetry calls for what another poet-scholar names “testimony” (Fisher), for fidelity to the first moment of perception, or rather to the articulation of that individuated and yet socialized perception that each of us carries within our cargo of language and memory.

By “socialized” I point to the fact that when our metaphors likened these seashells to similar objects earlier in our experience—the knife, the drill—we recall these objects through incandescent word-images in memory; we summon them to mind through what Bakhtin calls inner speech, and that some portion of this speech both translates into language and emerges from it. Emerges from it by the words we have learned to associated with the memories, translates into it when we present this those memories through that language as we put the words down on the page or speak them. Too, our poems’ adjectives (bumpy, soft) were words with which we recognized the shell by implicitly likening it to other objects we already recognized—other bumpy objects—with that word serving as the lynchpin of the likeness, as the means of understanding and organizing the experience of shells. In a certain sense, language is already and definitively a movement out of wonder: through discourse we both name the everyday and establish our socialized relations to it.

As a “speech genre” (Bakhtin), this poem asked these students to reconfigure the shell by bringing their own prior relationships to objects to the observation of it. But, and this is crucial, they were not to explain the stories behind each of those relations, but to share that relationality as a voice. That is, they were asked to instantiate themselves in each line as perceivers, visionaries even—speakers of their inner image/words. The poems were thus lyrics—not in the sense of music (the lyre) or strong feeling (though feelings obtained in those images), but in the sense of students composed a “fairly short poem in the *voice* of a single speaker” (Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy 2028, emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup> Voice means that no answer is wrong. A seashell *is* curled like a churro or cold like a grandmother's cheek when the words hold it up as such. The shell *becomes* through analogy and word: “cold” is grandmother's cheek; the “echo” of the inner ear melds with the memory, mass-mediated or not, of ocean. And voice can be literal, vocal. The students who authored these poems, though they drew from their peers’ and teacher-poets’ insights, ultimately “published” the poems by writing them down themselves on their own papers and reading them aloud—speaking them—to their groups, to the class, or in the case of the final workshop at Dios Center, to their parents.<sup>33</sup>

When we identify the seashell poems as lyrics using Norton’s basic, broad definition, we have gained the insight that we expect students to produce short works that they will write alone. But we’ve left out something important: imagination. Indeed, this was so central to what I understood the workshops to be doing that—taking a cue from our university’s introduction to poetry course, “The Poetic Imagination”—I included “imaginative” in the class title: “Partners in

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<sup>32</sup>“Short” is a given. In our hour-long, discrete sessions, designed to allow entry to students who could only attend for a day, we had time to write only short poems.

<sup>33</sup> This requirement for a “single voice” wasn’t absolute. I do not have space to discuss two other workshops here in which students incorporated pieces of others’ poems, others voices, into their own. Once they wrote “dialogue poems” in line-by-line conversation with a poem we brought and read with them—Carl Sandburg’s “Summer Grass”—and once they wrote free-form poems, mostly narrative, that incorporated phrases and lines we read to them, an activity that was modeled for me both by Bernadette and at UCLA, where Jane Hancock named it the “Call of Words.”

Imaginative Literacy.” But imagination can also mean fiction, storytelling. So to further delimit what the seashells and similes lesson called for, I suggest that it was poetry’s momentary *release* from the constraint of storytelling, which necessitates an overarching conflict and resolution, that defined the list poem as a genre. Indeed, it was this that enabled wonder.

Instead of a story, these poems sought a more quickly shifting truth. June Jordan is right to call poetry “truth” in the sense that it takes courage to name what we see, even with something as innocuous as a seashell. If a man walks down the street saying, “The sun is an igloo. Rice is happiness. Washing breeds tigers,” others may think him insane. Say the same thing in this setting, and he’s a poet. As I’ll point out in more detail in the next, spoken-word section of this chapter, creating an occasion in which students feel comfortable voicing the idiosyncratic is an important aspect of the emotional labor of a workshop coordinator. That’s why Jordan and others stress trust as a path to truth. I understand Jordan’s truth as something like Foucault’s “parrhesia”: a pact by the speaker to tie his or herself to the speech act, and damn the consequences. This “truth” would coincide with what scholar Maisha Fisher calls “testimony.”

I can speak to this notion by recalling the day that the venerable George Hillocks brought his shells to us, teachers from the L.A. Area’s writing projects. We were gathered in a cavernous hall on Cal State LA’s campus, and I remember Hillocks pacing between the tables at which each local project was gathered, asking, “What does it look like to you?” And then turning the shell and asking again, “Now what?” In retrospect, this was a beautifully simple lesson on description as perspective-taking. But in that moment I was scared mute. Even as a grown man of twenty eight years, and even though surrounded by new colleagues and a room full of supportive fellow teachers, a simile was risky. It exposed a potentially addled mind. What if the shell looked like

something I wasn't comfortable voicing with this group? Or even something innocuous, but weird? *A hat*, I thought, but didn't say. And of course someone else did.

### *C. Fixed Forms: Producing Wonder?*

I'm arguing that this teacher became a poet in articulating what she saw. But poetry also implies a certain artfulness in the presentation of thought, and that leads me to a final question that I explore through the students' poems in the remainder of this section. It involves the last of the four WPA/NTCE habits I mentioned, creativity, and specifically, the last aspect of it. I ask, can "poetry" provoke students to *represent* ideas using novel approaches? Sticking with the theme of "wonder," another way to put that question is, was the form in which students wrote about the shells part of the method of defamiliarization? Or, to set a lower bar, did the form of this poem follow from its thought? And how can poetry prompts be used to support that marriage of thought and form? To put my driving question most broadly, I'm wondering of any writing occasion a teacher creates, how much structure is too much?

A simple answer is, when that structure halts writing. This is not simply true of writing, but of other learning tasks as well. Mary Ainley's summary of educational researchers' investigations into "interest" notes that learners seek both complexity and control in learning tasks. They want puzzles they can solve, but not without effort. When considering writing as a puzzle or a challenge, scholars have rightly pointed observed it to be an inherently complex task, with multiple demands that must be negotiated simultaneously. It is helpful here to remember Flower's and Hayes's groundbreaking investigation into the cognitive demands of writing—"A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing"—a study that initiated a movement now sometimes forgotten by studies like this one, which foreground how social relationships shape writing. Flower and Hayes depict the demands of writing as "thinking processes which writers



orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (366), and give us the memorable, if now archaic, image of the writer as a switchboard operator who must put various callers in communication with one another. This is to suggest that getting text onto a page requires writers to do several things at once. The cognitive processes that writers execute simultaneously are embedded in one another hierarchically, so that, for example, generating, goal setting, and organizing all fall within the process of planning (370).

Hayes’s and Flower’s model urges me to attend to how the seashell prompt in particular simplified aspects of the writing task unique to poetry and thereby enabled students to be successful in producing something that we can recognize as a poem, however rudimentary. I show how students structured their writing by drawing from the schema provided and from their prior genre knowledge in this simple writing task. And I argue that guiding such a poem too strictly with a prompt does not produce poetry because it does not require the writer to solve, however imperfectly, the difficulty of organization.

The diverse formal responses of the students to this particular “seashells and similes” prompt suggest that, as with so much in education, the answer to that question about the added value of form in generating creativity depends on the individual student’s capacities. For some, an open form was productive, and they were immediately able to experiment with its particular affordances. Others, without the guidance of a formal structure for presenting their ideas, wrote in paragraphs that would be more likely to be recognized as prose than poetry. As an example of the later, take this seashell poem, written by one of our youngest poets:

This is a churro delicious and crispy. It is as curly  
as my mom's hair. And it is pointy as a knife. And it  
is white as the whipcream. It has lines like a car. It is  
old like my grandma. It is dry as a desert. It looks like  
a wiggly slide. It looks like a bumpy node. It reminds  
my like a unicorn horn. It is cracked as a tree.  
When I see it I am thinking an ice cream. And it looks  
Like an icicle.

As is evident from the “drill” poem that begins this section and this one, the basic *form* of the “seashells and similes” poem is a list of similes and metaphors. Each comparison is presented as a sentence complete with a subject, a verb (often a linking verb, like “is” or “looks”), and either an adjective describing the subject or another noun likened to it, or both. Beyond that, this student is using only that form already familiar from everyday uses of language: the sentence. The sentences show a bit of variety, usually beginning with the pronoun “it,” but also using coordinators (“And”) and one subordinator (“when”). Still, the net result of offering thirteen (!) comparisons in a row is repetitive. But I’m asking that we attend for the moment to that relentless imagining as a strength. If by “essay” or even “paragraph” students understand themselves to be making a sequence of thoughts that add up to something, then how wonderful is it to enjoy a prompt that asks them to reapproach this object in front of them from a different angle each time, to invent something new? If that’s all that poetry enabled this student to do in this lesson, then it has achieved something.

Other students, building either on their prior experiences, the guidance of their teacher-poets, or the worksheets I offered those teacher-poets as a resource, explored more demanding structures, ones in which they did imagine the object anew with each line but also managed to fashion something that embodied the progress of their thought. The above poem literally runs up against the right edge of the page, so I’m not reading the line breaks as proper breaks, just as

moments when the poet ran out of paper. Concerning the following poem, I'm not so sure that the line breaks aren't deliberate:

orangey  
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The shell is an Hershey kiss  
Maybe caramel flavor  
Its glossy surface reminds me of a  
Jewelry box, it's wrinkly like an old dog  
It is an angel wing in the Sun  
It looks like a ladder to heaven, but  
bumpy like a bullfrog.

The second line reconsiders the first. Grammatically, it's a fragment. Logically, it's a complete thought that deserves its own line, and it gets it. In the same way, the last line reconsiders the previous line, correcting the ideal beauty of the ladder to heaven with the earthy lumpiness of a bullfrog. Those last words, "bumpy like a bullfrog," are alliteratively lovely, as well as a surprise. So, a fitting conclusion, made the more impactful because they stand alone after the line break. I would argue that this poet has shown in her line-breaks "the ability to use novel approaches to represent ideas," as the habitually curious writer should. But whether one believes that or not, I maintain that rendering this little dynamo as a prose paragraph would ruin the fun.

The "drill" poem that began this section also uses a "novel approach." And it helps us to see why that terminology, "novel," is misleading. That word demands too much. More accurate would be to say that it's a good habit for writers to consider which of the known genres they have in their repertoire applies in a given case. Following Hayes, we can think of these genres as "task schema," as examples of similar problems similarly solved. If we examine how the opening poem of this section as it sits on the page, we notice it forms itself as a concrete poem (this was even more obvious in its handwritten form). Like the drill and the knife to which its second and last lines refer, and like the shell itself, the poem begins large at the top and tapers smaller at the bottom. Too, the poem is further organized by the five senses, progressing through taste (salty),

sight (a drill), sound (windy), touch (bumpy), and smell (rotten), and then capping off with another sight (knife). In these ways the writer has brought unity and regularity to what, in the paragraph poem, was wildly inventive in its particulars but as a whole shapeless and directionless. The “drill” poet manages to craft a smaller set of comparisons into a single object of art.

But the greater danger is not, I think, that young writers will linger overlong in shapelessness when they might proceed to art. It’s the opposite, that they will settle into a schema too readily prepared for them when they ought to be constructing one that suits their audience and purpose. Admittedly, audience and purpose, always elusive structures, are made the more so, if not by poetry’s imaginative freedom itself, then at least by students’ unfamiliarity of the social scenes in which “poet people” practice. Still, the stultifying effects of a prescribed form are real. I found them to be so in our workshop.

I mentioned that I provided my teacher-poets with a schema, a sequence of sentence starters I’d found in Olson’s book and copied off onto a handout. The worksheet reads:

As I gaze into  
First it is  
And then it is  
And then it is like  
And then it is like  
And then it becomes  
And now it is  
And now it is  
And now I am

Unsure as to whether or not this form was overly prescriptive, I allowed the teacher-poets to choose whether or not they would distribute the worksheet with the poem as a kind of fill-in-the-blank form to the students. If we turn our attention to it, we notice that it does the hard work of ordering the observer’s multiple similes and metaphors. Those become a story in which the poet announces herself as a first person narrator (“As *I* gaze into”) who describes a sequence of

transformations in the object (“*First* it is,” “*And then* it is”) that culminate in a transformation of the poet/speaker herself (“*And now* I am”).

It's the old dilemma of the five-paragraph essay: impose the form, sometimes to the sentence, and get a clean, logical product. For the intro: hook, transition, thesis, 3-point path; for the body: topic sentence, context, quote, analysis; for the conclusion: summary, broad application or prediction. For the shell poem: a sequence of transformations that wraps up with the poet's transformation. Gone would be the bumpy bullfrog.

Or perhaps the caramel kiss poet would have managed that constraint as well, transforming herself into the bullfrog in the final line. The point isn't that schema/frames are bad. Every prompt is a frame. The point is that authors must be able to make room within the frame/prompt/genre/schema for the movement of their thought, that it must allow thought some space to play. Carol Booth Olson, aware of the controversy over prompts, allows as much:

Some teachers may object to giving students such as the one below to use as a point of departure for their poems. But my experience has been that those students who need the structure of the frame or pattern will feel successful if they follow it. Those who find the frame or pattern limiting can simply ignore it and create their own.

This is how it should be. Feeling successful, which includes the self-efficacy that keeps students moving through writing and the pride that they feel afterwards about the writing they've created, is essential. Writers who don't feel successful eventually stop writing. I also agree that structured tasks promote that good feeling in uncertain writers, and that practiced writers often feel free to ignore overly prescriptive assignments and chart their own path (see Sires's journals in Chapter 1 for an example of this). I agree too with Olson's claim elsewhere in the same text (2003, 195) that it's good to get writers acquainted with restrictive situations in which the “frame” for their writing will be hard and fast, with no room for negotiation, as in a college application essay that allows not a single word more than 800.

However, though poets have been inspired through the millennia by the challenges of strict forms, I think Olson is right to suggest that many students in introductory poetry writing workshops learn more when they forego or adapt the schema. And to call the frame offered in the book simply a “point of departure” is misleading, for if students stay with the frame provided then each line requires both a departure and a return trip, to the moment in time just after the last utterance (First it is . . . Then it is . . . Then it is). One of our students completed the prompt with the following phrases:

As I gaze into the seashell  
First it is a weird worm  
And then it is a mysterious pine tree  
And then it is like a white cone  
And then it is like a hard horn  
And then it becomes a curious pattern  
And now it is a smooth caterpillar  
And now it is a unicorn horn  
And now I am writing about this seashell

Let’s take what writing this “poem” actually required this young woman to write: “the seashell / a weird worm / a mysterious pine tree / a white cone / a hard horn” and so on. The objects she imagines are lovely, but they’re simply a list. It’s not surprising that she took the last line literally: “And now I am . . . writing about this seashell.” Well, yes. But not writing poetry, not quite. Rather, this sort of writing is exactly the short, fill-in-the-blank sort of writing that research suggests happens far too often in English classrooms: “writing without composing” (Applebee and Langer). This type of writing does not encourage the habits of mind.

In contrast, take this poem, in which a student attempts to import a schema:

Shells look like fancy hats. I  
hear the waves hit the ground.  
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Abandoning the acrostic was probably a wise decision for this poet. I suspect it proved too constraining to accommodate the required content of the five senses simultaneously with the metaphors. But, I would argue, this student was better served by this “failure” than the “now I am writing about this seashell poem” was served by her success. Similarly, the 13-comparison paragraph was a step in the right direction, a draft of a poem; in it, the writer had to create not just her own sentence starters, so that the comparisons were each complete sentences rather than noun phrases, but also her own order for the list, and her own conclusion. The “I peer into . . . At first . . . And then” schema, on the other hand, assures the writer that she can be comfortable with the one, finished draft she has completed. It has a unity and a structure that meet the demands of the rhetorical situation: the speaker has become the thoughtful observer, the intelligible “I” of the lyric poem. But because she hasn’t done it on her own, I’m not so sure that she could do it again. In fact, I worry that the prompt prompts her to think she needn’t.

Over the years, first HOT and then Grace Bernadette created several anthologies of poems created by elementary students in workshops like those I’m discussing. These anthologies each show the power of the teacher-suggested/prescribed form to please. But sometimes it is only the second poem when this novelty is betrayed as routine. What seemed like a “fresh voice” was, in fact, an inventive but ultimately narrowly restricted response to a prompt given by the program. I can’t help but think that the focus on the product, which was often lovely, sacrificed the process, which in the ideal case involves mistakes and rewriting. Hence my affinity for the “caramel kiss” poem, which shows this process as its final draft.

I suppose in the end I’m arguing for the value of exploratory writing that grows out of exploratory thinking. Of course beginning writers need some frame to guide that exploration. Everyone does. The most accomplished writers all draw on “frames” called genres, even if we

are likely today to grant the status of “high art” to those texts that set about resisting and dismantling the genres. But when possible we ought to get writers to make decisions not just within frames but about them. Even a teacher who wants to err on the side of caution in supporting writers with a frame that provides enough structure ought to make sure to include two or three formal options. Here, that might be the acrostic poem above the concrete “knife” poem at the start of this section, the worksheet with the sentence starters, and the poem by the teacher who created the lesson, which purports to be free form but, like the poetry of William Carlos Williams, is actually composed of heroic couplets. Teachers might have them pick which form fits their poem and write it in that form, and then explain why it fits. This is an early version of what our composition program calls a writer's memo, a “writing about writing” activity, one that asks the writer to say, “Here are the rhetorical choices I made, and here's why.”

As for what we did, giving many kids the one form and having them write in the blanks, it's not all bad. Yes, schema can cut thoughts short as much as it can support them, and it can thus stultify wonder. (In the next chapter, we'll see how rhyme and rhythm did this for some students in this workshop.) But still, I would wager that, at least for many of the younger kids, just producing that poem is useful. No matter how formulaic it may be, they're learning to speak the metaphors through which they each see the world. That much is still poetic. For them, no matter how similar their peers poems might be to their once anthologized, it's the *one* poem that counts, the one they make. Sitting down, observing an object carefully, finding likenesses between it and six or a dozen different objects in one's imagination, and then having the courage to set that testimony down on paper, whether in blanks, in a list, in a paragraph, or in a full-fledged poem. Those are wondrous moves.



## **VI: A Felicitous Meeting – Overcoming Embarrassment and Fostering Pride in Spoken-Word Poetry**

A group of fifteen young men and women stand in a circle. They hold up notebooks and read aloud. The last speaker says, “Pride is what I feel when people have respect for me.”

A woman stood in the circle amidst the teens, listening to their words and smiling. Later, she spoke to the mother of one of the poets, saying, “You missed it. There were tears coming down my cheeks.”

The spoken word poetry workshop described above occurred on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012 at Barrio After-School Center, and included a dozen young students reading inspiring lines from their poems, lines that invoked imagination both fantastic (“I feel a unicorn’s horn”) and political (“I dream that one day racism will stop”). The onlooker was Ms. Evans, the leader of the community center. Her smile and her tears I noticed right away from my place across the room where I was standing in the circle along with the young poets and their teacher-poets, and it's safe to say they were expressions of pride. But the question of the poetry itself, of what enabled the performance that provoked that pride, requires a longer answer.

Drawing liberally from ancient rhetoric, positivist educational psychology, and contemporary affect theory, this section argues that the kids’ performance that afternoon came off because an expert practitioner had trained the young writers to inhabit the social role of the impassioned poet. In other words, it argues that the leader of these spoken-word sessions, an undergraduate named Stitch, created this generosity of response between teachers and students, audience and performers, by effectively teaching the genre of spoken-word poetry, which demanded not just writing but acting. His expertise in spoken word remade what counted as “embarrassing” in the workshop, and thereby allowed students to engage affectively in the language-play inherent to poetry without fear of being attacked. By bonding the group

affectively through icebreakers, by reading his own poem and by bringing in that of his fellow spoken-word poet, Stitch helped to create a culture where one need not be embarrassed for standing before a group and voicing visionary ideas (e.g. “I dream that one day racism will stop,” “I feel a unicorn's horn”). But this section also must explain why what worked so well at this center had fallen flat five days before at the other one in a lesson taught by the same undergraduate. That explanation is found in what researchers in the emotions might call a diachronic account of signal systems, that is, in the development of emotional scripts and roles over time.

Put another way, the most successful workshops came off not because they drew on the skills of careful reading and reasoned analysis central to the education of students in our English Department, nor because they allowed teacher-poets to bring to bear the creative writing program’s equally fastidious attention to diction, syntax, tone, and rhythm. For even though Stitch was a member of my introductory literature course, it was his membership in an extracurricular club of spoken-word poets called “Uncultivated Rabbits” that prepared him to inspire the younger students and instruct them in the power of poetry. With a little prompting from me, he created a lesson plan that taught basic skills that we too often leave out of our literacy instruction, skills that allowed the younger students to engage in emotional, embodied performances of the spoken word. If, as I have argued, community educators benefit by heeding the emotions of participants, then my most important contribution to this project was allowing Stitch to take over when I recognized the pleasure that he took in these performances and the enthusiasm with which the younger students responded to his talk about them.

An hour before the successful group-read, just after the icebreaker that started the lesson, Stitch, had performed for the students a nostalgic poem about the cartoons of his youth, titled

“It's Morphin Time.”<sup>34</sup> After showing the students a video clip of another member of the on-campus spoken-word group—Victoria—performing her poem, “This is for the Dreamers,” he told the younger students that they too would be performing today.

“That's embarrassing!” a student shouted.

It surprised me that she would think so. This fifth-grader, whom I'll call Ella, had volunteered to go first during the icebreakers both that day and at the previous workshop. But right now, she'd put Stitch on his heels by challenging the activity he'd proposed.

He recovered quickly. “It's not embarrassing,” he said warmly. “It's fun.”

“No,” Ella said. “It's *embarrassing*.”

Ella was saying, I believe, not just that performing was embarrassing, but that we were overstepping our rights by asking her to perform a poem, and that she would not do so. *Why* she thought the performance embarrassing, and how we ultimately convinced her to execute it, has much to do, I argue, with emotional exchange. I believe this exchange to be crucial to understanding students' “buy-in” or enthusiasm during this poetry workshop, in other words, their coming to believe through experience Stitch's “It's fun.” And a key for any instructor is figuring out how to make students want to engage in those social transgressions that are cognitively and affectively productive.

#### *A. Shame, Motivation, and Learning*

Aristotle cites shame or disgrace (*aischros*) as one of the three “considerations” of virtue (*Ethics*, 1104b). That remains true today in schooling generally and in the liminal space of the civically-engaged writing class in particular, in which avoiding shame is a major motivator.

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<sup>34</sup>A longer version of this section could include more information about how Stitch enacted the values of UCI's Uncultivated Rabbits, a group of undergraduate spoken-word poets who gather biweekly for a poetry open mic. One thought: Stitch had clearly gotten comfortable performing before others, even in places where I found such performance embarrassing, such as one of the campus's dining hall, where over a lunch meeting he performed a full-throated version of “It's Morphing Time” during our pre-prep prep. session.

Indeed, when I asked one of my students what I should include in my article on emotions, he answered in one word: “shame.”<sup>35</sup>

But substantial quantitative research in educational psychology suggests that when students perform tasks so as to avoid being shamed—researchers call this “achievement avoidance”—their plans often backfire; such students are more likely to become hopeless, anxious, and (ironically) ashamed than are students who pursue knowledge for its own sake (“mastery”) or for the glory it brings (“achievement approach”). And to add insult to injury those negative emotions are themselves mediating factors leading to poor cognitive performance (see Pekrun, Elliot, and Maier). Put simply, when students are preoccupied with getting embarrassed, they are less likely to learn. Such evidence suggests that language instructors at whatever level ought not to emphasize the possibility for shaming in any given instructional situation. That means, among other things, not holding up flawed student work for others to critique.

The same social science research suggests, though, that while it’s unprofitable to avoid shame it is useful to pursue glory. They call this motive “achievement approach.” Again looking to Aristotle’s account of the development of virtue, this “achievement” seems roughly equivalent to shame’s opposite, *kalos*, which can be translated as the noble or the beautiful. So by responding warmly to Ella’s performance of her poem, we were able to shift her attention from what was “embarrassing” to what fostered pride. (And not forgetting Stitch, to what was “fun” or what Aristotle marks out as a component of every positive emotion: *hēdonē*—pleasure.) Just as shame, in and of itself, can reduce student learning, so can pride enable that learning, whether students seek mastery or glory. “It is hypothesized that experiencing positive affect opens an

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<sup>35</sup> I take shame to be a more permanent form of embarrassment. See Parkinson 192ff. for an extended discussion of the two terms.

extra window, allowing students to take advantage of learning opportunities” (Ainley, 47).<sup>36</sup> In this exchange, affect became a resource, increasing Ella's “self-assessment” and encouraging her to invest more effort. Thus, in fostering Ella’s pride we created a situation in which she was better able to learn. She finished the poem strong.

And, looking to other research on motivation in educational psychology, I would argue that such successes can have repercussions beyond the immediate task. In “expectancy-value” theory, for example, “*expectancy for success focuses on the general question ‘Can I do this task?’*” (Conley 34). Educational researchers have found that students’ belief in their own prowess (self-efficacy) factors into the effort that they bring to future tasks. When students stand in a circle and respond to each other’s work, they help each other to develop an identity that includes literate performance. Students learn to be poets; they confirm that they’re skilled users of language. In short, as discussed in the following section, this poetry workshop, in a situation where it was quite possible that the fear of shame or embarrassment would prevent learning, instead facilitated the positive emotional feedback which allowed Ella’s success.

### *B. What’s Embarrassing? Theories of Deflection and Social Evaluation*

In analyzing this situation it's crucial to understand what embarrassment *is*. Social psychologists disagree. On an intuitive level, of course, we can understand why a student would balk when asked to write a poem then stand up and recite it in front of a room full of people (her friend, older students from the teen side of the community center, not to mention the program supervisor and the nine or ten near-strangers from the local university). Of course that’s embarrassing. But why, and in what way? Psychologists’ various models of embarrassment offer different, if complimentary, ways of explaining both her statement and the embarrassed performance she ultimately made. Such theories are useful not just in explaining this situation

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<sup>36</sup> For a critique of this argument, see Gross and Alexander “Frameworks for Failure,” forthcoming in *Pedagogy*.

but in explaining any classroom in which students are called upon to use language with skill and tact, to speak or write with an awareness of their role as rhetors performing for an audience. In short, understanding embarrassment can help instructors in every writing classroom.

In what follows I first show how the basic, deflection theory of embarrassment doesn't apply to these workshops; then I show three theories that do. One theory discusses embarrassment as the felt need for approval; the second theory outlines how people learn over time the scripts that allow them to act out the roles established by social norms, and the third highlights the conflicts that arise when someone, like Ella, is called upon to act out two roles simultaneously.

In *Emotions in Social Relations*, Parkinson et. al postulate a simple stimulus for embarrassment: “public attention” or “being put on the spot” (190). In this account, we communicate signals when embarrassed—perhaps a smile, a flush of the cheeks, a bowed head—to deflect unwanted attention. This is true even when that attention comes in a manner likely to elicit a pleasurable response, as when a student is praised in front of the class. Because even infants when given attention will produce signs we read as embarrassment (an averted gaze, a smile), the authors of this theory propose that later social “rules about the proper occasions for such embarrassment may be superimposed on these more basic elicitors [i.e. attention]” (192). This is an argument about embarrassment that grants a certain basis in biology, albeit one overlaid by social scripts.

But this theory is not very useful for getting at what happened in the workshop. We might take Ella's argument—“that's embarrassing”—to mean simply that *any time* a room full of people are standing around looking at her, she is embarrassed. But because Ella is often the first in the

room to shout out answers, that's unlikely. Ella isn't equally against every form of attention. Rather, she objects to this particular activity: standing in front of a room and performing a poem.

A more compelling account for what Ella meant, then, is Keltner and Buswell's "social evaluation" explanation that "people get embarrassed when they believe that others may evaluate them negatively because of some social transgression" (cited in Parkinson et. al 189). That is, those who are fearful of social exclusion or who desire others' approval will be more easily embarrassed than those for whom these concerns are less pressing. And who is more afraid of exclusion than a middle schooler? One way to read Ella's comment, then, is that she thought if she did what Stitch had done, she would be ridiculed and excluded.

But what was it about the poetry performance that could prompt such a thought? This occasion was unusual in a few ways: it called for the students to speak to the whole room (in which case the "deflected attention" theory of embarrassment would apply). But it also asked them to reveal something about their thoughts and feelings, and unlike a written poem it had them do so in front of an audience that could immediately respond to those personal statements. Finally, as spoken word *poetry* it called for people to speak using figures, in this case metaphor and personification, that didn't necessarily adhere to everyday speech. For example, the prompt for the first line of the poem was "I am a/n [animal]." As I mentioned in the seashell section, standing in front of a group and saying "I am a bird" could indicate a bold imagination of hallucinatory propensities, depending on whether one's frame of reference is a poetry reading or a speech. Perhaps Ella's "that's embarrassing" comment indicated that she was using the latter frame of reference, and thought her peers would as well. Students who exhibited the strange behaviors required in sharing poems with the group ran the risk of being laughed at, disrespected.

### *C. Not Embarrassing: Diachronic and Synchronic Development of Spoken-Word Poetry*

In “Emotions in the Wild,” Griffiths and Scarantino suggest a framework that helps us understand how this particular workshop was able to surmount the specter of embarrassment. They stipulate that emotions are social and performative. Given communities make particular emotional performances available, and develop the practice of those performances over time; for example, any given Sunday morning in a Catholic church offers the time for a single confession (synchronic), but emotional engagement in the practices of confession develops in Catholic culture over time (diachronic) (12).

My argument is that in saying that performing was embarrassing, Ella didn't speak entirely for the group. Others in the group had, over the years (diachronically) engaged in emotional performances that anticipated the one necessary for this day's poetry workshop. They'd done so in school, but also in previous icebreakers. And the synchronous feedback that students received *during* the workshop was sufficient to convince those emotional holdouts that their performances wouldn't violate the norms we'd just established. Their emotional performances wouldn't be punished with social exclusion.

Looking diachronically, the younger poets were (or weren't) drawing on already-learned emotional repertoires. In this case, a few had acting backgrounds because they went to a middle school that focuses on the arts. One student (at least) was in the drama program at her school. She was also in a band. She was used to performing. Even within the narrow diachronicity of the five-week workshops, Stitch—schooled in the rituals of his own spoken-word group—had understood how to build a community in which, in June Jordan's terms, “speaking and listening to somebody becomes the first and last purpose of every social encounter” (3); I hadn't managed to do the same at the other community center where the same workshop had fallen flat. There,



the students remained in much the same position that they had when they'd first written letters to the teacher-poets: interested in doing poetry but unsure how to bring their experiences to it.

One simple practice through we'd come together *as* a group was doing good icebreakers, which Stitch modeled on the ones he'd done with the UCI spoken word poets. Icebreaker 1, which began the first workshop, was a "group picnic." Each student had to bring food that started with the same sound that started his or her first name. The kids had trouble pronouncing "naan" and "lentils" that UCI students brought. Likewise, the UCI students and I had trouble with "elote," which we learned from P was corn on the cob smothered w/ chili and butter. We did this icebreaker during the first week. It took almost one-half hour, time which I was loath to sacrifice given our already brief window for lessons. But it helped to build the sense of the group as a group that would prove so crucial during the later performances. Indeed, these circles, in which we all faced each other and during which students giggled while other students presented, anticipated not just the emotional climate but the physical formation we'd be in the day the students ultimately read their spoken word pieces as the coordinator cried.<sup>37</sup>

We'd also done icebreakers at the other community center where the spoken word day fell flat, but in retrospect I see that they emphasized the points that separated us. The first session I'd asked: what school do you go to, what grade level are you in, and what interests you have? Stitch's family picnic, on the other hand, asked us to project ourselves into a space that was communal (family gathered to enjoy each others' company , to share (com) bread (pan) and in which we each brought something unique: our names and preferences (individual). It thus built a

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<sup>37</sup> This icebreaker offers the clearest example of students at the community center teaching those of us who were guests: elotes. The "group picnic," a multicultural encounter, allowed for reciprocity, as we all learned vocabulary tied to manifestly real people and, by extension, to the social contexts (university, community) from which they hailed.

space for performing a poem that was also personal (I am, I feel) but which also brought the student into the larger group as he or she performed this feeling for others.

Perhaps more important than the diachronic development of the group *as* a group was the synchronic signals the poets received when they were first paired with their mentors to rehearse their poems. The small-group rehearsal time was crucial for students developing their “act.” Because we’d practiced the silly moves we would require of the kids during our own prep session on campus earlier that day, each teacher-poet was prepared to encourage his or her own student to have fun with them. In the reflective blog that she wrote as a course requirement, Jessica explained, “I especially like that each mentor is paired with one student, because it really encourages the student to speak up and express their ideas. This eliminates potential embarrassment, which often results when working with your peers. As someone who is shy herself, I understand [A]’s hesitations in participating.”

We had nine teacher-poets to seven kids that day. This allowed us to overwhelm the kids with an “ongoing exchange of emotional signals,” such as the snapping, “mmm”ing, and hand-clapping we taught the kids (Griffiths and Scarantino 3). McCartney, for example, had two mentors that day; she was focused on manipulating the teacher-poets, not her friend. She placed one in a chair across the room, for example, to practice reading aloud to him. Eye contact, clapping, and smiles (or the lack thereof for sad lines) provided feedback that enabled powerful performance. And when we came back to the large group, we kept those signals going.

Griffiths and Scarantino suggest that emotion is “dynamically coupled” to the environment (2). That is, people send out emotional signals sometimes not as expression of a realized emotion (anger or joy, say), but as an ambiguous signal that might be taken for either by

the receiver. Griffiths and Scarantino's example of this is a bird that makes a threat gesture. This gesture is as often a prelude to taking flight as it is to attacking.

One might say that the large group formation was an environment which was positively coupled to students' emotional performance. When the first poet Ella performed her first two words "a puppy" (the mentor had to start her performance off by saying "I am" for her), she may not have known what emotion she was projecting. In Schachter's terms (summarized in Parkinson et. al 14), she may have been in "an undifferentiated state of metabolic activation," or in layman's terms, keyed up. But by the time the crowd warmed up with snapping, she was performing joy, as when she waved her hands in a later line and said, "I am a beautiful waterfall."

But of course, we in the "environment" formed a group of people. So another way of understanding the same performance is to say (following Parkinson 99) that our group, when we took charge of the room, modified both the "display rules" and the "feeling rules" of the center with "expansive prescriptions." That is, the writing of the poem asked that kids "feel more emotion" even as the performance of it asked that they "express more emotion" in something like a "party spirit" (ibid). At the same time, partly by modeling the behavior, we also instituted a restrictive prescription regarding the display of disapproval in the form of disgust or scorn (and, arguably, suggested through that restrictive display that neither was it appropriate to feel scorn). It wasn't cool to put people down.

When Ella made her waterfall sign, it opened up the space for others, including Esperanza, a quiet child who was the last to go. I was just beginning to say something that would have given her an "out" when she flapped her arms and said clearly (albeit while blushing), "I am a bird."

#### *D. Conflicting Scripts*

I've argued that we as teachers and teacher-poets gave feedback that allowed the students to engage in unselfconscious (or at least not debilitatingly self-conscious) performance. My fourth and final theory of embarrassment, this one by Erving Goffman, helps to explain how students reconciled the performance available to them in this new feedback loop with the one that would have made performance (perhaps impossibly) embarrassing. This theory offers a way to understand what was happening as the two younger students, Ella and Esperanza, worked through their lines while blushing and stammering.

Goffman's 1956 theory posits that embarrassment is what happens when individuals must negotiate between two conflicting sets of norms (cited in Parkinson et. al 189-190). One example of such “competing norms” would be when hierarchy and democracy compete, as when a graduate student is caught in an elevator with a professor. Should the two be friendly, as the space might provoke, or should their demeanor remain distant and formal? One or the other might smile as he or she produces a greeting. In the case of these workshops, the competing norms would be not democracy versus hierarchy, but what we might call “poeticizing” versus more informal socializing. The first asks students to shout out odd phrases that in everyday social interaction would seem crazy.<sup>38</sup>

In Griffiths and Scarantino's terms, the students had expressed hope, imagination, and indignation in “skillful engagement” with the environment, which in this case called not for emotions that would redirect existing relationships but for the performance of emotion as an art. That is, the rhetors were learning not to reconfigure themselves against members of their

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<sup>38</sup> Really, any disciplined activity could cause dilemma at the center. For example, is it OK to do homework when other students are hanging out? That's an important social norm for adults onsite to establish.

community, as friends or enemies for instance, by expressing an emotion like hope, but to *display* it by acting in a role we'd requested, as a poem-writer.<sup>39</sup>

Goffman suggests that in situations with conflicting scripts, “[s]howing embarrassment is a way of avoiding a failed performance when one's position would [otherwise] be untenable” (Parkinson’s summary 190). And indeed, Ella’s and Esperanza's situation was difficult, almost untenable: not speaking meant they wouldn't live up to the teacher-poets' expectation of them to perform what they'd practiced. Speaking would mean they'd have to perform in front of middle schoolers who, despite the new norms we were instituting, might ridicule. The solution was to perform, but show embarrassment while doing so. In this reading the blush and averted gaze in their performance thus signaled “a commitment to the norms that [they were] failing to live up to and a promissory note that more successful performance [was] possible in the future” (190).

They blushed, then, because it was unclear what the perfect performance would entail, or rather because they hadn't been trained fully in the new norms that spoken word performance required.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, if the norms shaping spoken word performance were more fully entrenched—that is, if the students had more time to develop performance skills, or if the crowd were more fully committed to the performance—then embarrassment would cease. Imagine a room of committed poets, who'd accepted virtuosic language use as a value and an identity. An embarrassed smile there would indicate that one hadn't completely adopted the norms of the group (commit to words!), and would be a liability, or at least a sign that one was an apprentice rather than a master. Ella would need a different performance to meet the needs of that group.

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<sup>39</sup> Kenneth Burke's notion that art dances over the body of fact gets at this basic unreality of poetry performances. Art is not a speech-act that moves the world, but a statement *about* the world.

<sup>40</sup> Julia Lupton has reminded me that even experienced in-group members get nervous performing. Professional actors get stage fright, as do tenured professors. Still, I would maintain such actors are not so much embarrassed at having done something strange or unacceptable as apprehensive about the possibility that they might not be able to pull off what they already know they should do.

Here on February 15<sup>th</sup>, though, was a space for a learner and a partial insider. To quote Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, these writers had to “like all beginners, learn by making mistakes” (390). This fourth reading suggests that when the rules are unclear and contradictory, when *any* performance is a mistake from someone's perspective, embarrassment necessarily accompanies that learning. It also suggests that only by embracing embarrassment can we hope to *learn*, at least in public, for if we do not already know the rules we're attempting to practice under, then we're necessarily beginners.

## **CHAPTER 3: (BI)LITERACY SPONSORSHIP IN LATIN@ AFTER-SCHOOL SPACES**

### **i. Preface: “We Want Them to Feel Well-Received”: Sponsoring Working-Class Gratitude**

In October of 2012, just before my daughter was born, the staff members and students at Barrio Center threw me a surprise baby shower. Ms. Evans led the teens in applying puffy paint designs to several white onesies. Each teen decorated one in his or her own style, filling in sleeves and collars with teal curlicues, yellow loops, and watercolor rainbows. To simulate a suit, one staff member ran a purple dress tie down the front. To make our daughter an impromptu soccer jersey another staffer stenciled a large number “1” and “Langdon” on the back. They also lettered in messages of loyalty and family: “I love mommy,” “Daddy’s girl,” “Grandmas Are Best.” They wrapped the onesies in brown paper bags strung with pink ribbons and decorated the bags with more designs—baby bottles outlined in black ink, tiny feet and hearts, sparkly stars, foam cut-out butterflies—along with more messages, including one that summed up the feeling these gifts communicated: “We love you baby.”

I was touched. Without my knowing it, the principal had invited my partner Merilee to come to the center that afternoon to join the kids and staff in surprising me. Of course, Merilee and I had been anticipating the arrival of the baby for months, and our families had already thrown her a baby shower. But this was the only baby shower to which I was invited. Somehow, having everybody there celebrating made it easier to anticipate my daughter’s birth with hope rather than fear. Now, every time I dress her in the outfits the kids made or look up on the wall to where I’ve posted the decorated gift bags, it reminds me of the kindness shown to me by everyone at the community center.

Nor was I alone in receiving a show of gratitude from the students at the center. The students there created several cards, posters, and gifts for the center's regular volunteers. These volunteers included Mike, who worked there for six months supervising the kids before securing full-time work at a local police department, and Alice, who ran a weekly "Girls' Club" with the young women attending the center. I also witnessed the teens writing thank-you cards for one-time visitors: the rotary club members who volunteered to repaint the interior, the lawyers who led an informative session on Obama's 2012 executive order on immigration, the FBI agent who presented on her career in law enforcement. Indeed, other than their schoolwork, no other writing activity was as prevalent at the center as these thank-yous.

As I witnessed this activity over the two years in which I visited Barrio Center, I sometimes worried that the center's students were being schooled too often in what I would call "a rhetoric of gratitude." If these kids were so frequently using literacy to acknowledge the charity bestowed on them, wouldn't they come to see themselves as dependent on this philanthropy, even as necessarily subordinate? Esperanza, a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, shared comments in an interview that suggested this was a possibility: "A lot of people come here to our site and talk with us, and we want them to feel that they were well received. We're always welcome, with a smile, and the greeters are always greeting people." Given that she was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of this interview, I take "well received" as Ms. Evans's phrase, not part of Esperanza's prior vocabulary. Ms. Evans had taught Esperanza how to show gratitude for a generous benefactor and hospitality for a guest by smiling and saying these words. Esperanza could now take that phrase, along with the attitude it represented, with her to other situations that called for similar behavior. She had internalized a rhetoric of gratitude.



In one sense, Ms. Evans was raising the students at the center to be what Octavio Pimentel calls “*bien educado*,” as he puts it, “well mannered and respectful of all others, despite their age or social status” (175). However, while I would certainly not wish to prevent children from showing respect for those who contribute time or money at the community center, I do worry that the “emotional labor” involved in making those guests feel “well received” prepared students not to be respectful of “all others” but of those with a status and power the kids couldn’t attain. In economic terms, I worry that they were being prepared for roles in the low-paying service industry, or, if they female, in the unremunerated labor of at-home hospitality. The smiles and gratitude the kids expressed were strikingly similar to the attitudes put on by the flight attendants whom Arlie Hochschild studied in her landmark work *The Managed Heart*.

I worry, in other words, that in writing these little thank-you notes the students at the teen center were being schooled to accept America’s structural racism. What does it say about our society that these children were being raised to be gracious and effective beggars?

However, even as I voice such worries, I cannot critique Ms. Evans and the other site directors for sponsoring this rhetoric of gratitude. I understand that the center needed to offer something back to those who gave their time there, and that the (staff-sponsored) gratitude of the kids was a renewable resource in a setting where more tangible payments such as money were not possible. Put another way, these kids had to solicit as a gift what ought to have been provided as a right: a variety of meaningful literacy experiences that contributed to a well-rounded education.

## I. Introduction

Ms. Evans was right to worry about paying her patrons, whether in gratitude or cash. Barrio Center, which was at first funded by private charity but was later supported primarily by tax dollars, and which sat directly under apartments where some of its students' families had lived for a decade or more, was shut down due to lack of funds in the spring of 2014. In contrast, the other after-school center I address in this chapter, Dios, is still open for business today. A Christian-founded organization located in the heart of one of the most economically distressed communities in the county, it too secures funding by drawing on patrons' emotions in tellingly problematic ways, asking them, for instance, to bring hope to the hopeless.<sup>41</sup> These emotional appeals are no accident; they point to class and race relations between the transnational Mexican@s and Mexican Americans served by these centers, who are working-class, and the middle-class, predominantly Caucasian patrons who fund them.

Whereas most educational research centers on school literacies, and investigates how home literacies might support success in school, this chapter places the school as only one of several literacy "sponsors" (more on that term shortly). I follow Brian Street's New Literacies approach in tracing what functions of literacy can be more easily realized in out-of-school spaces. These particular out-of-school spaces, as the Spanish names I have given them are meant to indicate, were housed in neighborhoods of immigrants from Latin America, predominantly Mexico. Like other community centers that sponsor literate practices, Barrio and Dios both occupied a liminal space. Each community center was at once an American public institution and a Chican@ and Latin@ cultural center, a crossroads and a home space. As I'll demonstrate, that tension played out in the university-led poetry workshops I ran, and it was even more crucial to understanding the literacy sponsorship undertaken at the centers by the Latin@ staff members.

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 1 for a critique of the "hopeless" rhetoric by a Dios City resident enrolled at UCI.

I approached this investigation first as a teacher and administrator seeking to construct better K-16 poetry workshops. I believed that the after-school spaces offered a rare opportunity to exit a monolingual schooling system and make use of the funds of knowledge brought by all partners: the youth from their families, the staffers from their life experience and college education, the undergraduates from our English program, and me from my research into literacy networks. By the end of the partnership, I saw that I had been viewing things too simply. The knowledge valued in our English program didn't always translate well at the centers. And not everyone at Barrio or at Dios easily brought shared Latin@ experiences to their writing. Rather, there were divisions between the students, staff and parents, and even within individual staff members, concerning ethnic identity. It turned out that I, the White man, was more radical than all the staff members in my stated beliefs about race (though not always in my practices), that the lead staff member at Dios disagreed with me about the usefulness of the Spanish language, and that the schools and neighborhoods in which the staff members had grown up had given them good reasons for their perspectives. Put simply, the staff members did bring funds of knowledge, but they were often geared toward survival and prosperity in a monolingual schooling system and a culture that values whiteness. And while the students at the center did converse in Spanish, and were (as I'd anticipated they would be) familiar with aspects of Mexican culture that were beyond me and the non-Latin@ teacher-poets I brought with me, they weren't necessarily comfortable bringing that knowledge to the center, or to our poetry sessions. Even as I discovered that the poetic tradition I brought from our English Department was stiflingly White (see "Mr. Lance's Anger," below) I learned that Dios staff members weren't eager to take on what Gilda Ochoa calls a "power-conflict" perspective on race, one that I brought from my education in critical race studies. To sum up what I found, race, class, and language fluency

played out in more complex ways at these centers than what I'd anticipated; conflicts surfaced both within these communities, in which Mexican Americans shared space with transnational Mexicanos, and between them and the Anglo American communities with which they interacted, whether in our university's English program or in adjoining neighborhoods in their cities. These and other lessons learned will be most immediately salient to those interested in forming literacy partnerships with communities disadvantaged by race, class, or English-language fluency. However, I anticipate that the stories I gather here will also prove useful to teachers anywhere whose classes contain at least a few students from disadvantaged communities; and that is most of us.

Much of what follows is guided by critical race studies and research into bilingual education, but the master term for the chapter is "sponsorship," which comes from Deborah Brandt. Brandt defines literacy sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way" (19). Her interviews with over eighty inhabitants in the Midwest over the course of several years reveal a wide array of such sponsors: "older relatives, teachers, religious leaders, supervisors, military officers, librarians, friends, editors, influential authors" (20). Brandt adds, "obligations toward one's sponsors run deep, affecting what, when, why, and how people write and read" (ibid).

My fieldwork at Barrio after-school center included observations undertaken over the course of two years as well as formal interviews with students and staff members. In this work I identified four primary literacy sponsors: students' English teachers, their families (including parents, grandparents, and siblings), the staff members in the after-school program, and those of us from the university who ran the poetry workshops. Because I conducted my research in the

community center rather than the home or school, I focus on the last two sponsors: our university and the center's staff. However, I did ask students to describe their literacy at home and school, and I speak to how those activities inform the literate practices students engaged in with us and with the staff members.

In most of what remains of this chapter, and all of the next one, I analyze the sponsorship of Barrio and Dios staff members: Gustavo, Ms. Evans, Orgullo, and Mike. College graduates all, these staffers each expected the students to include college in their own life plans, and saw literacy skills as integral to achieving that goal. But each staffer also had unique goals for the students he or she interacted with – whether those be Brown pride, English fluency, biliteracy, or job skills – and each staff member expected the literacy he or she sponsored to forward those goals. As I develop the approach of the various staff members, the reader will find them negotiating the conflicts I mentioned above. Before doing so, however, I present an analysis of my own sponsorship, one that picks up where the last chapter left off, in the midst of the poetry workshops.

## **II. Mr. Lance's Anger**

Anger is a distressed desire for conspicuous vengeance in return for a conspicuous and unjustifiable contempt of one's person or friends.

Aristotle. *Rhetoric*

I resume my analysis of those workshops in a place appropriate for Aristotle's "distressed desire for vengeance" in return for another's "unjustifiable contempt": a junior high classroom. Or is it a community center? The question this section turns on is to what extent my own anger during a workshop I ran was undertaken, as Aristotle puts it, "for the right reason" and "to the

right extent,” or whether there was not something foolish in the situation I created that prompted the anger.

I was running a workshop that would be a review of skills our group of university teacher-poets had taught in prior weeks: the couplet, the limerick, the ballad. We had entered spring. The UCI teacher-poets had done their last workshop a week before. Morale was low. At the end of the last chapter I described the peak of the program at this community center, in which nine teacher-poets taught seven students while two coordinators looked on, one of them crying tears of joy. The following quarter I’d only managed to recruit two teacher-poets, but they shared with me other good days I don’t have the space to discuss, days when we were settled into a comfortable routine working with five or six kids. Today, however, the teacher-poets had finished their duties at the community center and returned to our university to gear up for finals, and the workshop had dwindled to one tired TA (me) teaching four or five kids in a dimly lit room.

This day’s lesson repeated prior material. During the spring’s first lesson, the older and younger poets had toured the outside of the center, with the young people making observations about the sights, sounds, smells, and textures all around them and the older students taking them down on paper to later transcribe into a few rhymes. The second of the five lessons began our study of rhyme and rhythm. That session we had taught rhyming using a pop song one of the girls in the workshop enjoyed: Taylor Swift’s “You Belong with Me.” The next week we’d proceeded to couplets. The following week we’d counted syllables and made limericks. These were built on couplets and could succeed even in fairly loose adaptation of the standard rhythm so long as the AABBA rhyme scheme remained intact. The teacher-poets’ final lesson of spring had been ballad form. For I was determined to realize one of the spring workshop’s goals:

linking song lyrics and poetry through rhythm. What better way to join poetry and music than the ballad, a form that the English language had used to join poetry and song for hundreds of years?

As I began the 6<sup>th</sup> lesson, alone for the first time, I was proceeding under the impression that the ballad lesson had gone passably well but that I needed to develop students' facility in working in the forms we'd covered in the previous five lessons before proceeding to new material. However, browsing through my fieldnotes now I can see how this mentality was overly optimistic. The mood of the class had already been in peril during that last session with the teacher-poets. The younger students had been busy communicating with each other rather than paying attention to the opening lecture on the form. During writing time with the teacher-poets in the small groups, one young woman had left her table and busied herself in the front of the room. (After the session, the teacher-poet who had led that girl's group approached me and the site director, distressed at her failure to hold her students' attention.) I had done little better: the small group that I led that session had contained a student who had remained mute despite my best efforts, and all of the students had experienced trouble completing their assignment, which asked them to track the number of syllables in each line of a poem.

Despite these warning signs, during the sixth workshop I continued to press on with the rigorous work of scanning songs for rhythm and rhyme and writing poems that made use of these devices. But then something happened to interrupt our project, and I became angry.

I don't remember everything that the students did or that I did that day, partly because I was a bit ashamed to write my anger down in my fieldnotes, the official record on the workshops. Indeed, my first note tried to put the incident out of mind: "Yelled at McCartney. The day poetry club died? Bah! Don't worry about it." I'd also written,

Bad day began when McCartney asked to be the one to read the article I'd brought in on California's newly appointed poet laureate, Felipe Herrera, the son of migrant farmworkers. She didn't take the time to read about him.

Reading this now, I can see that in Aristotelian terms, I was angry at what I interpreted as McCartney's "unjustifiable contempt" in ignoring my lesson, even if I also understand now that I share some responsibility for her lack of engagement in that first task. When I arrived with the article and she'd asked to read it, she'd been in a room with a dozen other teens, not exactly a prime spot to plow through reading. Thus, when we five would-be-poets and poetasters convened an hour later to begin the day's workshop, it shouldn't have been surprising that she needed to read the article for the first time.

However, that day, as she worked her way slowly through the first few lines, pausing over unfamiliar words, I grew impatient. This while the other students looked out through the windows with what looked to me like resignation. Out front, two students who had been here last week but who had decided this week's lesson wasn't worth their time were horsing around on the front stoop, and it began to feel like I was dragging the remaining kids through another period of school when they'd prefer to be enjoying themselves.

At my suggestion, we gave up on the article; still no one knew who Felipe Herrera was, nor would they. The rest of the lesson got underway with me going to the front of the room and walking through the iambic tetrameter of my example ballad: "Amazing Grace." I'd found it when I did a quick internet search on the form, and I thought it would serve as an easy introduction.

While I talked, I noticed that McCartney was dipping her hand in a paper cup of water she had propped next to her on the bookshelf. She flicked it at Stephen. Stephen closed his eyes for ten or fifteen seconds and I stopped lecturing. When the other kids at the table leaned in to



ask him what was wrong, he whipped his head up and tossed it around, flinging water over McCartney. She recoiled with a shriek. I reprimanded them, saying that the next person to interrupt the lesson would be told to leave. McCartney kept laughing during that reprimand, and I kicked her out.

All this I pull from my fieldnotes, but what happened next I have to recall from memory because I found it too embarrassing to write down. As McCartney took her bag and headed out the door, K, the friend who'd been at the whiteboard last week during the lesson on ballads, snatched up her backpack and ran out after her, laughing. I closed the door behind them and turned to face the three remaining students. The room was unsettled. We assessed one another, them perhaps wary, me feeling apologetic. This was supposed to be fun, a poetry workshop. But here I was and there they were.

Struggling for a calm, pleasant tone, and trying not to heed the shadows of the kids passing outside the window, I asked one of the three students (an overachiever) about the iambic tetrameter.

I don't remember if I was still asking the question or if she'd started to answer it, but it was then we heard the noise that set me off: on the classroom wall, lasting only a second or so, a spatter of drum beats. And not quiet drumming—tappity tap—but loud. The whole wall—drywall and studs—became a resounding board: boom-Boom-boom-Boom-boom-Boom-boom-Boom! (Or at least that's how I'd like to remember it; someone had mastered her iambs.)

I turned my back on the class in the middle of whatever we were doing and threw open the door.

“McCartney!” I shouted out front. “You had better quit! I am DONE with you, today. DONE with you!” As they moved away I heard a patter of feet, some more laughter maybe. And that was it.

James Averill follows ancient thinkers in suggesting that communication of anger often has a function in society. That is, there are situations in which it is *proper* to be angry and improper to remain calm (hence Aristotle’s oft-cited quote: the one who never gets angry is a dolt). Yet Averill also finds the ancients agreeing with social psychologists that feeling and performing anger necessarily involves contradiction and conflict, for example in deciding whether or not to let oneself become more angry, or cognizing what the anger is about, or deciding what to do with it. Thus, the role of the angry person is fraught with choice, and understanding what values compete in that choice can become a means of understanding the values of larger society and the ways that anger is channeled to reinforce those values.

There are many ways to demonstrate such a claim but perhaps the most delightful is to compare anger as it is regulated and performed in different cultural contexts. Parkinson et. al have followed this line of thought in an extended review of prior investigations into how cultures organize anger, an emotion often recognized as dangerous and thus carefully managed socially (77-81). In that review we learn that the Utku ban anger from expression (Briggs); Tahitians vent it at inanimate objects (Levy); Santa Isabellans in the Solomon Islands require that it be "disentangled" through formal negotiation before a group (White); Faeroe islanders train kids to interpret others' anger as an attempt at humor (Gaffin); Westerners view it as an assertion of individual rights (Kahn-Waxler et. al); Japanese turn it against outsiders (Ramirez et. al).

Such characterizations can be reductive; more interesting are the studies themselves, that lay out individual cultures' taxonomy and praxis of emotion in greater depth. Anthropologists Shweder, Haidt, Horton, and Joseph, for example, examine sacred writings and contemporary mores in Hindu and Muslim traditions. In analyzing the influence of culture on the perception of emotion, they trace contemporary vocabularies that would describe emotions to the roots of those words in sacred texts. Partly, they work to destabilize universalist work like Ekman's that would postulate common "basic emotions" across cultures. Instead, they argue, we of different cultures "are not only basically alike [...] but also basically different" (425). That is, the experience of emotions depends upon culturally specific modes of appraisal and regulation, culturally available action tendencies, and so forth, all of which are mediated through language. Whether we have different names for emotions such as "rage" and "frustration," whether we view these emotions as virtues or vices, and in what ways we envision socially possible ways of acting upon them, are just a few of the ways that "getting angry" is different for those influenced by, say, Christian or Hindu sacred texts.

A reflection on my anger in this scenario, its justice or injustice, its place or displacement at the community-center (or was it a classroom?) offers some rich possibilities for exploring just what the "place" of community literacy is, just what literacy is as a project, and what either party of the usual pairings—teacher and student, mentor and mentee, community member and university scholar—has a right to expect out of the partnership.

Sutton, who conducted studies that included surveys asking secondary teachers to comment on their experiences of anger, notes that teachers who get mad dwell on that anger and take actions to cope with it, often altering future lesson plans in an attempt to avoid a repetition of the situation that prompted the anger. This makes sense if we take up cognitive psychology's

prevailing view that “basic anger” occurs when a subject experiences “goal incongruence,” that is when his or her projects are blocked and when the cause of that blockage is judged to be external (if internal, the subject experiences guilt). Following this schema, if the goal is educating students, and the goal isn’t being met, then anger is a signal that the students must be made to adjust their behavior, and guilt a signal that the teacher must adjust her or his approach.<sup>42</sup>

So which emotion was merited in this situation? If the goal of the lesson was indeed to increase the students’ knowledge, and McCartney was preventing that goal, then one could say that I used the anger well, getting mad, as Aristotle puts it, “at the right time . . . toward the right people” (1106b). Remembering that Averill suggests that one social function of anger is to “uphold accepted standards of conduct,” we might say that the anger in this case guided the other students toward paying attention during the lecture (317). Furthermore, battling Seneca’s quietism, we might also argue for anger as a legitimate means of, in Heidegger’s term, “being with.” When teachers tell students that they’re frustrated, they’re informing the students that they’re not meeting standards, *and that it affects them personally* (i.e. they’re in a relationship where teachers have the right to ask them to do things; that they care).

But to rest there would be to forego the opportunity that this anger gives to rethink the pedagogical situation in which I was engaged. For questions remain about the other parts of Aristotle’s formulation: did I get mad “in the right manner,” and was the anger experienced to the right extent, not allowing the anger to move me “too much or too little” (1106b)? In answering this question, I must remember that McCartney lived in the apartment directly above the teen center. Thus, I wasn’t yelling at a kid at school, I was yelling at a girl on her front porch.

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<sup>42</sup> “Goal congruence” appraisal theory is mentioned in Sutton’s p.263 footnote, and also discussed more thoroughly in Parkinson pgs. 6-7 as “motivational congruence.”

And she wasn't drumming on the wall of my classroom, she was drumming on the wall of her home.

So perhaps I didn't get mad in the right manner and to the right degree, especially given that McCartney left and so didn't benefit from the end of the lesson. Surely, shouting at a young woman as she entered her home went beyond what the situation merited. Indeed, had I truly been "done with" the student in this case, as I yelled, I would have had to leave the space she owned, not vice versa. Perhaps that power dynamic ought to inform the way instructors think of the spaces we share with our students, especially off-campus ones. It's telling that I feel a little ridiculous looking back on this situation.

But even dwelling on the embarrassment that goes with that recognition would be to ignore the most productive aspect of Aristotle's nostrum: that the wise person gets mad "for the right reason"—alternately translated as "with the proper motive" (ibid). To understand my *reasons* for getting mad we must understand my reasons for doing the workshop at all, and to understand those I turn towards Brandt's notion of sponsorship, which reminds us that those who sponsor literate activities do so to advance their own interests. In retrospect, "sponsorship" captures that combination of self-interest and institutional momentum that led me to persist in the effort to teach metered verse rather than switch to an activity that may have garnered more student interest. Sponsorship thus allows me to address the conflict that led to the anger and to assign blame not just to myself as an individual (though I certainly have my share) but also to the university under whose banner I carried out my work at the after-school center.

Brandt emphasizes that sponsors always have something to gain by promoting literacy, and I was no exception. I wasn't angry just because students weren't learning. McCartney, who was interested in socializing with her friends, was getting in the way of my lesson, and the

lessons were key to my doing an engagement “project” and writing it up. No lesson, no dissertation; no dissertation, no PhD; no PhD, no job teaching at a university. Thus, student learning wasn’t the only motivation for my workshop. I needed learning that I could record and that would be respected by my dissertation committee members once I did so. For reasons I’ll discuss shortly, I had determined that poetry workshops would fulfill those aims, and I was determined to finish what I had begun with our work on metered verse.

I was also acting on behalf of H.O.T., a program with its own history and set of motives. H.O.T. did speak to the possibilities for reciprocity, noting that it attended to the tasks of “building a common base of shared cultural knowledge and fostering understanding among people from different backgrounds” (Humanities Out There, “About the Program”). But as I have indicated in the introduction H.O.T. emphasized *outreach*, not necessarily community-based learning, as when it stated that it aimed to “bring a university education to public school classrooms” and when it stated that its aim was “to increase the college enrollability of students from underserved groups by promoting a broad-based, knowledge-driven literacy” (Humanities Out There, “Home” and “About the Program”). That is, H.O.T. saw itself as bringing what we knew about literacy to younger students so that they, too, could develop the knowledge they would need to attend an institution like ours.

But perhaps students attending that community center were not in the room that spring afternoon to achieve that goal. Perhaps the parents simply wanted a space for their children to be taken care of during the afternoon, and the teens accepted that space as one where they could enjoy the company of their friends. The history of this organization, after all, mentioned that the center was a response to mothers in the neighborhood who came together to request a *safe* place for their children to study. If this was true, then from the teens’ perspective, any literacy

activities I sponsored ought to have facilitated reading and writing that was embedded in already existing communication channels *between* students, who were there simply to hang out. Indeed, if we took the teens' motives as our sole guidance, those from the university would only assist with writing and reading as the teens used them to socialize and entertain themselves. One can see how promoting literacy with the aim of college enrollability would be difficult to reconcile with such work.

However, that overstates the dilemma, for the after-school center *had been* designed to foster a college-going culture, and the students were already caught up in that college-going mentality. I found in my interviews with the younger students that all of them knew at least one university attended by one of the staff members who supervised them, and most knew more. That was no accident; the staffers had posted their college diplomas on the walls along with pictures of themselves in their graduation gowns. Additionally, all the students I asked said they planned to attend college or university (most mentioned local institutions, but one young woman said she wanted to go to Columbia). That was no surprise either, as I could see college information and messages all around, starting with the posters listing university admission requirements. Indeed, in the main room for the high school students, someone had even created a mural that depicted a racetrack with "college" printed on the banner at the finish line. Tiny figures labeled with student names were pinned on the track, with freshmen just starting out and seniors ready to break through the tape.

However, even given that the staff *wanted* to prepare students for college, that students were saying they wanted the same, and that H.O.T. was designed to support that goal, the question remains what exactly made up the "broad-based and knowledge-driven literacy" that would prepare them to do so. In answer to that question, Lupton had created the literacy triangle,

writing that “HOT counterpoints cultural literacy (knowledge of Western civilization) and multicultural literacy (informed awareness of other traditions) in the service of basic literacy” (“About the Program”). The idea of “cultural literacy” draws directly on E.D. Hirsch’s influential book by the same name, and means that H.O.T. lessons include a focus on the Western tradition that provided exclusive cultural capital to the Anglo-American middle class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The second term, multicultural literacy, I take to be a reference to the work in ethnic and cultural studies that has renovated the academy since the 1960s, manifested on our campus in departments and programs in such as African-American Studies, Women’s Studies, Chicano/Latino Studies, Asian American Studies. The third element, basic literacy, I understand as emphasizing decoding and other prerequisite skills.

One way to read my interaction with McCartney is that I prompted her indifference by attending too much to the first of these three elements, the “cultural literacy” of Western civilization, and that I ignored multicultural literacy and even basic literacy. Of all the literate skills I could have taught, rhyme and rhythm were perhaps most narrowly specialized within the English curriculum and thus less likely to contribute to the project that had brought together H.O.T., me, the students, and the center: getting these kids to college. No college application prompt I have read requests verse.

Thus, what was an occasion for anger (her fault) becomes an occasion for guilt (my fault). However, using the notion of sponsorship, I would argue that the guilt is not merely personal, but institutional: my fault *and* my university’s fault, or at least my fault in thinking I could take the university’s activity system into the after-school setting, that I could simply *bring* its education to the public. For I was a sponsor whose activities were themselves sponsored not just by the H.O.T. program but also by my university’s English Department.



Though Brandt lists many individuals as sponsors in the quotes with which I began this chapter—“relatives, teachers, religious leaders”—the bulk of *Literacy in American Lives* attends to larger institutional sponsors: the press that spoke to and shaped farmers’ consumption patterns in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the military that ramped up literacy education for the specialized occupations required of soldiers in World War II, the prison-reform movements that authorized libraries and literacy training in the decades following the Civil Rights movement, the corporations that depend on programmers to code for them, and so on. I would argue that in the same way that editors, commanding officers, prison librarians, and programmers work within the institutions available to them in promulgating particular kinds of literacies for particular ends, I too was working in a constricted space. In short, I was sponsored, and that sponsorship shaped my choices.

I had my home as a PhD candidate in the English Department at our university, and was authorized by that department in both my teaching and my research. Accordingly, when I set out to staff these workshops, I recruited undergraduate teacher-poets from two pools: the literature survey class I taught in Winter Quarter that addressed “the poetic imagination” and a few creative writing workshops taught by accomplished English-language poets in Spring Quarter.

Arguably, both programs teach iterations of the Western tradition that I’m arguing bored McCartney. The English program foregrounds Anglo-American literature and organizes itself by historical period, beginning with Middle English and continuing through to postmodernism. While it’s true that rhyme and rhythm aren’t staples of most courses, it’s also true that such a department provides far more attention to prosody and verse than would, say, a communications program focused on multimodal workplace writing. We have, for example, specialists in Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and the Romantics. And though the program does not adhere to a

1950s conception of literature as a white male endeavor—two of my 20<sup>th</sup> century classes were on Hemispheric Americas and African American literature—the program’s attention to the past does tend to privilege the white men who made up the canon for so many years.

I am less familiar with the creative writing program, but from the readings I have attended I do know that work in the program is conducted exclusively in English and that it appeals to the vibrant writing community at our university: well-educated and middle class, with Caucasians well represented. And, given what I’ve seen of the demographics of the poetry community in the U.S. at large and the era in which those who teach in our program took their positions, it’s perhaps not surprising that the instructors are also predominantly Caucasian. This is not to say that ethnic authors are not represented, but it is to argue that the program does not make ethnicity a central concern, as did Jordan’s Poetry for the People program, which was housed in the African American Studies department. And when it comes time for its faculty to select the voices who speak most eloquently to the issues that concern them, our creative writing program certainly offers a far different take than did, say, the Chicana@ Studies poetry courses I audited with a Spanish-primary professor at our university a few years ago. Admittedly, when it comes to questions of scansion, members of the creative writing program are more likely to be found practicing and teaching the free verse that predominates in poetry today. But this program, like our English Department, devotes some attention to prosody; for instance, one of my teacher-poets stated that he his assignment was to get comfortable with iambic pentameter by copying several Robert Frost’s poems.

Thus, when I drew teacher-poets from these programs, I was drawing on a very particular form of expertise. We focused on verse because that’s what we were good at and that’s what

being successful in college involved for us.<sup>43</sup> Success involved those elements partly because the masters and scholars who inform us acquired their posts in a time when multicultural literacy was emergent but what Hirsch calls “Cultural Literacy” was still dominant, at least at my university.

I’m arguing that the curriculum I taught, though I thought at the time I had devised or adapted it, in reality drew on that cultural capital. Finally, taking emotion as a signal of the motives and reasons for our actions, I’m arguing that I did not get mad at McCartney “for the right reason.” McCartney acted with the indifference that roused my anger not because of an individual failing on her part, or mine for that matter, but because the curriculum was irrelevant to her goals and projects, though it was not so for mine.

Had I paid more attention to June Jordan I might have drawn more inspiration from that program’s alignment of spoken word poetry against a narrow conception of the literary canon that privileges rhyme and prosody and toward what H.O.T. is calling “multicultural literacy.” Indeed, a section in *Poetry for the People* called “Reinventing the Canon” states that the group has “a lot of questions about the so-called literary canon” and goes on to speak of the group’s attempt to “name, reinvent, and reclaim literary and cultural traditions” in “pursuit of literacy in today’s world literature of poetry” (74). Adrienne Rich follows this call with an essay that recounts that the “canon” she learned excluded poetry in Spanish and poetry by women, and that her own poetry was blinkered as a result (77). But Rich’s education was in the 1940s and 1950s; this is the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given that my student was a Spanish-speaking Beatle-fan drummer, it’s fairly obvious that there was a better way to utilize her music skills than

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<sup>43</sup> My own interests and education in poetry also informed my decision to conduct literacy outreach/engagement around that genre. To call these interests “personal” would be to ignore the way that they too were shaped by the educational institutions in which I was raised—the Catholic high school where I first studied poetry in a Norton that parallels my PhD program’s attention to historical periods and a B.A. in literature at a liberal arts college that addressed many of the same authors. By the time I began my M.A. in literature with an emphasis in creative writing at a comprehensive state school, it was too late; I was hooked on verse.

having her scan “Amazing Grace” in a small group. I’d been culturally obtuse. Yes, I’d tried to build on students’ interests in choosing a pop song one of them liked to begin exploring rhyme and meter, but by the time we’d gotten to the ballad I had lost sight of that interest. The ballads I chose made no use of the Spanish McCartney and other students spoke at home. One of Jordan’s rules is not to rhyme unless absolutely necessary, and she teaches a “vertical rhythm” that challenges the prosody of the literary canon. On the other hand, I had required a finicky attention to rhythm and rhyme in English, a language not given to rhyming to begin with and in which the students were still developing a vocabulary. Students were left with a small group of words upon which to build their themes. It is no surprise that one of them checked out and walked upstairs to return home.

The implications of this interaction, and of my sponsorship as a whole, for work with after-school programs may be obvious but they’re worth restating. For the configurations that made this partnership difficult are by no means unique to our research university or to these centers. Much language arts education at the high school and college level continues to focus on what Raymond Williams calls “residual” rather than “dominant” or “emergent” forms of “cultural literacy,” even as the students in our classrooms and those with whom they’ll communicate draw on a wider range of cultural practices. In particular, the ever growing number of Latin@ participants in the borderlands culture of the Southwest ought to prompt reflection on how we can conduct literacy training in a manner relevant to the projects, goals, and linguistic funds of knowledge of Latin@ students.

One brief example: in a later workshop, I brought in “La Gran Señora,” a Spanish-language song by Mexicana pop star Jenni Rivera. The singer, who as one of the students put it, “always told the truth” not just about lost love but also about the difficulties of advancing her

career in a patriarchal culture, had died an untimely death in a plane crash earlier that week. We spent the workshop time translating her lyrics into English and discerning their themes. In that process, students' familiarity with Jenni's story allowed them to disentangle ambiguities in the text and to arrive at a reading that reconciled passages that at first seemed contradictory or ambiguous, such as the relationship between the speaker (Jenni, "La Gran Señora") and those whom she addressed. It struck me after I taught that lesson that the students had provided what we usually find in the footnotes of poetry anthologies such as the Norton: the historical and political background of the text. Because they were the experts, they helped drive the lesson, and they took ownership in interpreting its themes.

To generalize this experience, I'd suggest that when literacy educators seek out partnerships with community agencies, they out to make use of texts that draw on the off-campus students' funds of knowledge, even or perhaps especially when the cultural traditions in which those students are steeped are different from those of their college partners. In this way off-campus constituencies have a basis of authority from which to inform university students; and the on-campus students, who will necessarily be seen by themselves and the younger students as possessors of cultural capital, will nonetheless find they have something to learn from the young people.

This is easier said than done. These partnerships exist because both sides perceive that the university brings cultural capital from which the younger students can benefit; in our case, that was the Anglo-American poetic tradition (or as the student put it when advertising her enthusiasm in Chapter 2, "Robert Frost's beautiful language"). However, I think university students are more likely to get something out of the partnership when they realize that the Anglo-American domain they are mastering can be challenged by community-based knowledge,

knowledge which in this case was most evident in the younger students' facility with Spanish and their familiarity with Mexican and Mexican-American culture.

Of course, on the university side, we must guard against the tendency to stress only our differences and thereby make our partners into others against whom we establish our own identities. It is the faith of such endeavors that the study and practice of language allows each member of the partnership to communicate his or her own sense of identity in a manner that merits attention and respect, that accounts for the diversity within us as well as between us. That is, as Jordan stresses, poetry is about speaking *and listening*. It's inevitable that the administrators and undergraduate tutors in a K-16 literacy partnership will know that we have something to say, but only if the partnership is set up properly will we also realize that we have something to listen for, something to learn.

These K-16 partnerships are richest for our own college writers when they develop a thorough understanding of what drives literacy at these centers, from the federal and state policies that led to their funding, to the academic and interpersonal goals of their board of directors, to the choices the individual staff members make about how best to carry out their jobs as educators. In a writing *about* the community model, such knowledge makes for a well-informed and persuasive research paper (see Chapter 1). In a writing *with* the community project, like the poetry workshops I discuss in this chapter and the preceding one, such knowledge prepares our writers to meet the younger students halfway. That is, it encourages them to be receptive to the funds of knowledge the younger students possess and cognizant of the ways in which the after-school center's role models and activities already orient the students toward given pursuits, be they the hip-hop dance performance I witnessed in my last visit to the center or the police work I discuss in the next chapter. Having such an understanding in place helps to

prevent the missionary tendency of outreach work, a particular danger when the partnership takes the form of college students tutoring younger students in the skills they'll need to get to college. Too often in such scenarios, local culture is overridden by university demands and goals; however well-intentioned, these partnerships miss the mark by short-circuiting the possibility for the college students to do learning of their own, not least of which is unraveling prejudices in the course of listening to the formative experiences and driving ambitions of those from other walks of life.

As administrators, we have some choice in how to use what we learn of the partner organization's goals as we set up the activities in which we'll engage along with our college students. We might directly align our tutors' writing instruction with the community partners' goals or, as I'll argue in the next chapter would be most useful in my case, we might choose to forward goals for the younger students based on our unique understanding of their abilities, needs and motives, goals that complement rather than reinforce the partner organization's goals. Either way, informing ourselves of the work that's already going on at such centers, and the ideologies and economies that shape it, can only make our interventions more effective for all relevant parties.

### **III. Gustavo's Pride: Journaling Latinidad**

The last section examined how a subject from outside this nondominant community – I the teacher – experienced anger at students' disinterest. Upon reflection I found that the anger was misplaced, and that it could be more productively transformed into guilt at the institutional projects I was forwarding. That guilt, in turn, drove a desire to recalibrate the curriculum to better match the needs of the students I was trying to engage, a move that proved successful.

This section develops the emotions of joy, unease, and pride as they relate to the literacy work of a liminal figure in this Latin@ community, Gustavo. He was a man who could not choose to be left alone by racial categories. My analysis focuses on Gustavo's recollections of the journal writing he sponsored in his role as mentor to the junior high and high school students. I demonstrate how he undertook literacy work that was attuned to the ethnic and political contexts of this barrio, one segregated along ethnic and class lines from the other half of Two Cities. To illuminate this work, I present what Gustavo shared with me in an interview about his ethnic identification and about a journal he asked the students to complete on the feelings that they had regarding their own. With that journal, he guided the students as they faced up to the possibility of racial discrimination and encouraged them to consider themselves as joined with him in a Latinidad that he explicitly valued. Gustavo's work shows the unique affordances that an off-campus space such as the Barrio Center can offer to minority youth who would grapple with the issue of structural racism. But it also shows how such conversations can be stifled or cut short by "post-racial" ideologies that ignore our country's traumatic racial history and deny how race continues to promote unjust social hierarchies. I anticipate that others involved in civic writing will find similarly expert practitioners at work in the communities with whom they partner, and similar difficulty in taking up literacy in such communities from a critical race perspective.

*A. Neighbors by Force, Pride by Choice: Fictive Kinship in a Latin@ Community*

In my analysis of the ethnic pride Gustavo promoted in his journals, I follow Signathia Fordham, Mae Ngai, Lisa Lowe, and others in suggesting that one way of understanding the racial categories Latino, Asian-American and African-American is that each is a collective formed in opposition to a mainstream American culture that refuses to recognize the diversity of



people within any one of them. Writing of the category Black/Negro/African American, for example, Fordham suggests that it is a “fictive kinship” created in response to an “historical and continuing tendency by White Americans to treat Black Americans as an undifferentiated mass of people” (qtd. in Villanueva 42). Put another way, those from various countries in the Americas form the coalition “Latino” in response to white hegemony. Another way of putting it in this case is that “Brown pride” becomes available in this particular barrio in which Chican@s and Mexican@s mix.

To understand race as it impinges on the young people at Barrio Center, it is worth explaining why I have chosen to name it “Barrio” and the municipality in which it is placed “Two Cities,” both in this monograph and in my *Reflections* article drawn from Chapter 4. To do so I must account for the demographics of the neighborhood, rejecting the nostrums that its racially segregated neighborhoods arose purely because of free-market “choices” made by individual families.

In American popular usage the word “barrio,” literally “neighborhood” in Spanish, carries the connotation of poverty and crime. Admittedly, my use of the term is intended to pick up on those connotations: it accounts for the conflict between gang and police presence that influenced several staffers’ approach to literacy education at the Center, foremost amongst them Mike, a police-officer in training who ran a Criminal Justice Club with the kids; too, “barrio” recognizes the working-class status of adults in this community, some of whom, as we will see at the end of this chapter, take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. But I also use “barrio” to honor the culture of this community of Mexican@ and Mexican American residents. In that usage I follow historical archives compiled by scholars who have documented the history of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican and Chican@ communities in Orange County. In such archives as the Orange

Public Library's "Cypress Street Barrio" collection, we find detailed accounts of the schools, markets, and workplaces in which this Spanish-speaking people joined together (Orange Public Library). We find a history of migrants from the Mexican Revolution who settled across California and the Southwest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Orange County, they often labored in the citrus industry that gave the county its name, men working in groves as pickers, women working in the packing houses as graders and packers. In those archives we find documentation of the schools Mexican-descent children attended when they were not laboring, schools that remained segregated from whites under *de jure* segregation in the schools until Mendez v. Westminster—the Orange County court case that served as a precedent for the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education decision. We find weddings and funerals, sports teams and community organizations, all operating in relation to the racial segregation that characterized the era. My use of "barrio" emphasizes that these structures of external oppression and internal organization persist today in this working-class community, as was clearly evident at Barrio Center. This is a community that's predominantly transnational Mexican@ but also Chican@/ Mexican American.

I use "Two Cities" to emphasize its continued separation from middle-class suburbs in the same city, suburbs in which Mexican Americans and Anglos intermix. As we know, housing in Orange County and elsewhere in the United States has often been segregated by race. The Roosevelt-era Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) institutionalized this practice at the federal level when it set up the infamous "redlining" districts in the 1930s, so named after the color on real estate maps that marked out the neighborhoods deemed the highest risk to lenders. Documents associated with these assessments explicitly name the races of residents and

categorize certain minorities as “subversive racial elements,” intensifying the racism that locked such minorities out of homeownership in more “desirable” zones (Goldberg).

Though the fair housing act abolished such *de jure* segregation in 1968, several factors contribute to the continued *de facto* segregation that joins together Mexican immigrants and later generations of Mexican Americans in this community. Income is one. Immigrants in the neighborhood are often pressed into low-wage jobs that make these affordable apartments a viable choice. Mike stated that affordability was the major factor for his parents’ choice of neighborhood. When I asked him why he lived in a neighborhood very similar to Barrio, he said that that was where his mother and father—a housecleaner and a handyman—could afford to rent: “As kids we don’t work so we don’t choose where we grow up or where our parents can look forward to live.”

But Mexican Americans don’t live alongside Mexican immigrants in these communities simply because they can afford it, though certainly educational inequality, labor-market discrimination, and other factors make it far more likely that they will earn wages well beneath those of their Caucasian neighbors. Instead, race continues to enter into the equation, not just by “pull” factors such as ethnic affiliation—for example children’s desire to live near their extended families and peer networks—but also by specifically racial “push” factors. One Bay Area researcher has demonstrated how landlords identify prospective tenants by race—even over the phone—and use that information in deciding whether to convey that the property is or isn’t available (Baugh).

These and other issues add up to a neighborhood that is segregated along ethnic and class lines from the wealthier and whiter neighborhood just across Two Cities’ main thoroughfare. Mike, who went to school in four different high schools in the district, commented in our first

interview on what it was like to cross those divides. The school he first attended, and the one he ended up returning to for graduation, was predominantly white, with in Mike's estimation, only one African American student and "forty or fifty Latinos" amongst over two thousand students (though my look at school data suggests the number of Latinos was higher, and has since shifted upward significantly). Further distinguishing the kids in that school from those in his neighborhood was their wealth, evident in the BMWs and other luxury makes they drove to school. Mike said of this period of his life: "Going to that school, and then going to the neighborhood back and forth, it was two worlds, two different worlds."

Yet as Gustavo's journaling with the students' will suggest, this segregation does have some benefits for those pressed into these neighborhoods. In *House on Mango Street*, Cisneros memorably describes the solidarity that can develop between immigrants and Mexican Americans in neighborhoods where naïve whites fear to tread: "All brown all around, we are safe." That is, as is true of the Chicago Mexican barrios documented by Guerra, the concentration of Mexicans and other Latinos in a community, though sometimes isolating, also aids their familiarity with one another, and, as Gilda Ochoa points out, the possibilities for action in solidarity. Even as the segregation of those sharing Mexican heritage into this neighborhood produces inarguable liabilities for the kids, it also allows them to gather together in a place like the community center where they can dialogue about differences and commonalities. This happened in Gustavo's journal and in other literacy activities sponsored by the staff members at the center, and I also saw it happening in the literate communications the kids undertook on their own (though not always to positive effect, as when they teased one another about their skin color or pronunciation).

In particular, students can counter with ethnic pride the potentially debilitating racism they'll experience as nondominant language speakers and as members of a minority group – Mexicans – whose historical relationship with the U.S. is one of oppression and exploitation. Michael Dyson's essay on "Black pride" explains how race pride responds to such a history, and the parallels between Chicanos' exploitation and that of African Americans make it worthwhile to examine the sources and effects of Black pride at length in order to shed light on the similar Brown pride that Gustavo was supporting through journaling at Barrio Center.

Citing centuries of slavery and Jim-Crow segregation, Dyson notes, "History and politics shape the racial solidarity on which black pride rests" (67). Today, common enemies – for example, disenfranchisement with voter ID laws, criminalization by the criminal justice system, the continued prevalence of Caucasian standards of beauty in mainstream media – continue to create common political movements through which to combat them; ethnic pride helps to assure people who gather together to support those goals that they have the ability to create change. Of course, the goals at any particular moment and for any particular subset of the black community must be continually reassessed and renegotiated. As Dyson puts it, "Such solidarity must be continually redefined by the black folk who bind together in pursuit of common interests" (ibid). For his part, in a move that maps on well to Gustavo's goals for his students, Dyson understands these "common interests" to be economic advancement, as those who succeed in a hostile culture through intelligence and determination open the door for others to rise into positions of power and esteem: "the ultimate end of black pride is to replicate itself, to provide the conditions of success for those who follow behind, and who follow through" (80).

As with other emotions I have discussed in this dissertation, ethnic pride is at once social – in that it brings members of the oppressed ethnic group together to pursue common interests –

and what we would call psychological, in that it transforms subjects' relations' to their own identities. Pride helps restructure a racist socioeconomic landscape for African Americans by making success with it *imaginable* as manageable. Black pride, as Ngugi puts it "decolonizes the mind," untying it from whites' valuation systems. Dyson puts it this way: Black pride is "rooted in our *will* to be as free as possible to love ourselves without apology or regret" (emphasis mine). Again, as the phrases "our will" and "love ourselves" suggest, ethnic pride is at once personal and collective; Dyson writes, "The need for black pride, therefore, is really quite simple: to tap the healing *self-love* that any *group* should take for granted as its birthright" (62, emphasis mine). Our current emphasis on psychology often atomizes individuals when it understands their responses to a hostile environment as neuroses or illnesses; righteous indignation is pathologized and delegitimized as it is read as an emotional-irrational reaction by a single person to events that can't be helped. Conversely, Black pride acknowledges and combats the abiding power of society's racial hatred and devaluation, bolstering the individual's ability to withstand it and combat it by promoting a self-love developed within a community that grants its members mutual love and esteem. Put another way, Black pride is an action-oriented rhetoric; it exerts force on the way the world ought to be, continually recreating the black community's response to racist attacks and sustaining individuals within that community with confidence in their ability to create the lives they desire and deserve.

B. "*The Latino-Mexi Connection*"

Gustavo's demeanor was laid-back and unflappable; I can't remember ever seeing him in a hurry. Even during our interview, when we were interrupted by students asking for guidance on projects, Gustavo gave students his full attention for as long as they needed it and provided them encouraging feedback. A taciturn man, he usually kept his opinions to himself. However, during

our interview, which took place there one summer afternoon in 2012 as the day's events at Barrio Center were winding down, he was forthcoming about his own background and the ways in which he saw it influencing his work with the students. I began my interview with Gustavo thinking that as a community member, he would share a cultural background with the kids. I found, however, that though Gustavo granted that he could relate to the kids because of what he calls the "Latino-Mexi connection," he stressed that he was *not* from where the kids were from. He described himself as more Americanized.

In Gilda Ochoa's *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community*, a sociological monograph on the conflicts and alliances between Mexican Americans and Mexicanos in nearby La Puente, she points to an individual's ethnic self-identification as a strategic response to intractable contingencies of history, culture, and politics. "Institutions, ideologies, and individuals may structure, limit, and constrain Mexican Americans' life chances such that their identities often are not optional," Ochoa writes; she goes on to note that those she interviews negotiate "fixed racial/ethnic constructs by challenging stereotypes, naming themselves" (97). Such an analysis illuminates the tensions Gustavo describes himself as negotiating in articulating his own ethnic identity.

My conversation with Gustavo about the topic of ethnic affiliations began awkwardly. I told him that for my research, I wanted to find out about the kids' countries of origin but had been hesitant to ask because I thought that asking such questions might cause the students to fear they were being investigated with an eye toward their or their families' deportation.<sup>44</sup> It was when I explained my misgivings about my outsider status that Gustavo revealed his own status as a partial outsider to the students' cultures. He explained how he engaged in what I would call,

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<sup>44</sup> It probably didn't help that some afternoons I wore an Obama T-shirt to the center. To me, it communicated "progressive." To immigrant communities, I'd later learn, it read more like an endorsement of the "deporter in chief," who'd overseen massive deportations through Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

following Fordham, the “fictive kinship” of “Latinidad.” Seeing themselves as Latin@, together, allowed them to bridge differences between his identity as an American born to parents from Mejicali and the identities of his students, who identified more strongly with Mexico:

G: I even ask them about it [ethnicity] sometimes and I wonder if it’s OK or not, and then they start asking me questions and I’m like, “Well I’ve been here all my life. This is where I was born.” And they start calling me out. And they’re like, “You’re not very Mexican” And I feel like it’s kind of true. I’m not. Like, I wasn’t born in Mejico, so if I go to Mexico, I won’t necessarily stick out like a sore thumb because of the way I look, but the way I act and the way I speak, like (pause)

Me: [If] you’re talking to people, they’re gonna know.

G: Yeah, they’re like “This guy’s not from around here. He’s from up north” type of thing.

When Gustavo said, “[I]f I go to Mexico, I won’t necessarily stick out like a sore thumb” I took that to mean that he recognized how his dark skin racialized him as Mexican: for him, “passing” as a (White) American in Mexico wasn’t possible. Simultaneously, the way he acted and the way he spoke marked him as non-Mexican. His shifting pronunciation of “Mexico/Mejico” also indicated this liminal status. Even as he stated he hadn’t been born in Mexico he pronounced the place-name as though he had been, this word a token of his membership in a Mexicano discourse community (for a discussion of linguistic tokens and ethnic belonging, see Fought). However, he then shifted to pronounce “Mexico” as an English-only speaker would, thus anticipating his comment that Mexicans could determine that he was “not from around here. He [was] from up north” due to his Americanized speech. By renaming the country—Mejico/Mexico—Gustavo was, as Ochoa suggests, renaming himself, though not in the sense of a fixed and final identity but of a context-specific performance of ethnicity.

Because Gustavo did return repeatedly to the words “Latino” and “Mexican” in describing himself, and in discussing the students’ journals on ethnicity, it’s worth investigating what he meant by those terms. I first interpreted Gustavo’s identification as Latino rather than



Mexican as a move to distance himself as a middle-class, mainstream staff member from the working-class, ethnically marked students whom he teaches. However, going over the interview again, I understood that he was instead paying deference to the students' knowledge of Mexican culture even as he spoke to his own difficult place as what Ngai calls an "impossible subject," a citizen of the U.S. of Mexican heritage. His later comments made this clear:

[T]hey joke around about it but I feel they still feel that connection, that Latino-Mexi connection. They make fun of me but it's all in fun. I don't feel like I'm any less Mexican. I'm more just, maybe a little bit more Americanized. They teach me things and I teach them things. I'm like, "Yeah, you're younger than me, and you know a little more about certain areas of Meki culture than I do" . . . It's not the Mexican culture in general it's just different areas you come from, like different states, some ways the food is prepared. I tell them this is the way my mom makes it. It might be a little bit more Americanized maybe, a little different. They're like, "That's not how you do it. That's not what it is. It's made this way."

Gustavo admitted students' authority on Mexican culture and allowed them to teach him about it. The give and take that he described here as "joking" lives up to the democratization of classroom space that I advocate up in Chapter 1 (for more on that topic, see Shor; Paolo Freire; Lu and Horner). This teasing allows emotions about ethnicity that might otherwise lead to contention to be underlaid with mutual esteem, "Brown pride." By teasing Gustavo for his outsider status (but not attacking him maliciously), students could own their heritage publicly and take pride in it; conversely, even as Gustavo accepted their knowledge he explained why, given his parents' origins and upbringing, it was not possible for him as a Mexican American to adopt that identity.

Ochoa, citing a Hood and Morris study conducted in 1997 on Anglos' perceptions of Asian and Hispanic immigrants, notes that the more contact that U.S.-born citizens have with immigrants, the lower the level of animosity between them (127). The label "Latino" had prevented me from realizing it at first, but I came to understand that here at Barrio Teen I was also in a contact zone, this one between Chicanos and Mexicanos, the staff and the students,

Gustavo and the kids who journaled with him. The exchange Gustavo described, which built on the instructor's and students' commonalities even while delineating their differences, illustrates how contact accomplished that mutual understanding and reduction of hostility. Partly this was possible because Gustavo understood students' backgrounds enough to know that such ribbing came from a generous place. Even as Gustavo engaged with students over his own ethnic identity, and granted their expertise on aspects of Mexican culture lost to him, he saw himself as Mexican enough to understand their concerns about being able to integrate fully into American society. When he asked explicitly about this issue in a journal, he carried over his and the students' verbal conversations about ethnicity into written form and thereby stimulated them to use writing as a means of thoughtfully exploring this topic.

*C. Journaling Two Cities:*

*“The Question Was, ‘How Do You Feel about Your Mexican Culture Living in the U.S.?’”*

Gustavo would often help students with their homework, but the principal literacy activity I witnessed him sponsoring was the journals. Journaling was, for the first few months I volunteered at the center, a required activity. In a sense, the journals functioned as busywork. More than once I witnessed the following exchange: a student would claim to have no homework and the staff member supervising would then suggest he or she do the journal, at which time the youth would “remember” that his teacher had assigned homework after all. At other times vocabulary or math development exercises filled the same timeslot and purpose as the journals. It was not so much that the teens sought to avoid writing; it was just that if they had to work, they preferred to spend time on schoolwork that would be rewarded with a grade rather than journals that were, as Gustavo said, “writing just to write.”

For each journal the kids would write anywhere from a few sentences to a long paragraph in response to a discussion prompt written up or delivered orally by the supervisor, usually Gustavo or Mike. Gustavo explained to me that in the prompts he gave the students, he sometimes followed the example set by one of his own high school teachers, providing key words—sometimes just the name of a color like green or blue—from which the teens could improvise their own freeform entries. Other times Gustavo asked the teens to write about their day in the form of a diary. Still other prompts were discussion questions of the kind one might find at a party: “What would you do if you had a million dollars that you couldn’t spend on yourself?” Some of these journal prompts, Gustavo said, led students to explore deeper topics.

G: One I read had to do with ... a father and what they thought a father was. They felt like they didn’t have him. It was something I didn’t know about them and it was really eye opening.

LL: Intense.

G: Yeah it, it just, it makes you feel better because they trust for you to read that.

As Gustavo’s comment about “trust” makes clear, though a few teens seemed to take an interest in the writing for its own sake (motivation by individual interest; see Renninger’s “Putting Things into Words”) and others wanted to know if what they wrote was any good (motivation by mastery goals; see Conley), most wrote more when they knew the opinions they expressed in the journals would be read and responded to by the staff and by their peers. That is, as will become evident in students’ description of their home literacies, these journals worked when they used writing as a form of meaningful communication (see Bruning and Horn, also discussed in Chapter 5). Put another way, these students were writing for some of the same reasons they were speaking: to say who they were and what they thought of things. We might understand such writing as expressivist, but as an analysis of Gustavo’s prompts and their responses makes clear, “who the students were” was shaped by the racial pressures of their communities and “what they

thought of things” by their understanding of what Gustavo was disposed to receive of their experiences concerning discrimination.

Gustavo said that he asked the students in the journals to “be themselves.” As a caring educator he also assured that they formed those selves in relation to him, for he showed the students that he valued their writing by selecting prompts that allowed him to make personal connections with them:

G: Some of the prompts I have here, I try to think of things that I can relate with them, that I find interesting or that they find interesting, that kind of connect me as a [teacher] to the students. It can get pretty interesting, pretty deep journal entries. And other times you get, just “here you go,” just “leave me alone” type of thing.

Even as he acknowledged that sometimes the teens would write only as much as they had to, he explained that he encouraged them to take the writing seriously by writing himself along with them. He said, “[T]o help relate to them . . . I wrote with them. And as I was going through it, I could tell them about something I was writing. It helped them get focused, because they’re like, ‘If he’s writing I should be writing too.’” Gustavo explicitly posed himself as a role model, not just a teacher but also a writer. This ethos as a fellow writer coupled with the give and take relationship Gustavo cultivated with the students, would prove important when he asked them to address the topic of ethnic identity in one of his journal prompts, one that involved both Gustavo and the students considering how they fit into the discriminatory racial hierarchies in *Two Cities*.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bawarshi’s *Genre and the Invention of the Writer* demonstrates how any writing prompt calls into being a certain subjectivity on the part of the writer who answers it: “the prompt situates student writers within a genred site of action in which students acquire and negotiate desires, subjectivities, commitments, and relations before they begin to write” (127). We will see that in Bawarshi’s terms, Gustavo’s prompt about Mexican

culture demanded his students' ethnic "commitment" as Mexicans and a consequent "relation" to the Anglo-American mainstream as outsiders; in doing so, the prompt asked the students to negotiate not desire, as Bawarshi suggests, but an equally powerful affect: the pain that follows discrimination. I argue that Gustavo's framing of the journal question both opened up and foreclosed a space for discussing that pain even as it offered recompense in Latin@ ethnic pride. As I'll show, even as the prompt guided the students toward what Ochoa would call a "power-conflict" perspective, it covered its tracks by using ambiguous language that dodged the question of white hegemony, and it allowed the students do the same in their clever responses.

This is what Gustavo asked:

G: The question was, "How do you feel about your Mexican culture living in the U.S.? Do you feel like you're (pause) treated different because you're of a different culture or do you accept it more?"

Gustavo's first use of "difference" named the discrimination these Latino students faced from mainstream-white residents of Two Cities euphemistically; he asked not if the students at the center felt they were belittled or insulted but if they felt like they were "treated different." Gustavo thereby opened up a space to speak of the students' vulnerability to racism without insisting that the students name their treatment by mainstream culture as harsh or discriminatory. "Treated different" might, after all, mean that students were treated better.

Gustavo's second use of the word, this time as an adjective, "different culture," reified the students' difference by arguing for (one might even say creating) a unitary Mexican culture that stands separate from and to some extent against White European American culture. Gustavo reinforced that structure when he asked students if they were "treated different" because they were of "a different culture." This is not to say that the students at Barrio Center did not self-identify as Mexican. Judging by comments I overheard in my time there as a volunteer, most of

them did. It is, however, to say that the prompt asked them to take up that identity actively and to think about ethnic relations through it. Bawarshi echoes Bartholomae in suggesting “it is *within* the prompt that student writing begins, not *after* the prompt” (127). Within the occasion this prompt created, then, these students *had to be* Mexican.

As Gustavo described them, his students’ responses took up what I would call “fictive kinship”:

G: I had a couple who really thought about it and they said that they love being Mexican and that to them it’s not (pause). They don’t feel like they’re very different because where they live and where they’re around it’s a lot, there’s a lot of Mexican or, like, Latino people. So I know they really like that.

The students were comfortable where they lived because they lived amongst “a lot of Mexican or, like, Latino people.” With this correction, Latino for Mexican, Gustavo at once acknowledged that Latino does not equal Mexican and proceeded as though they are equal, suggesting that these Mexican students find common comfort with their non-Mexican Latino neighbors. As Gustavo described it, students whose parents moved from Mexico found themselves Mexican *and Latino* in this Orange County neighborhood of fellow immigrants. I argue that, because Gustavo made this move in a conversation that began with the question of discrimination, with whether or not the students “fe[lt] like they [we]re treated different,” his statement suggested that the bonds between Mexicans and other Latinos in this barrio result from their shared experience of discrimination in a mainstream society that too often refuses to differentiate between them (such that, in current conversations about immigration reform, every migrant from Latin America is “Mexican”).

Yet to return to Gustavo’s words, because structural racism and the coalition-building that arises as a response to it are happening in a putatively “post-racial” era, one might also wish to deny discrimination even as one describes it. This may be especially true in a rhetorical

situation like the one Gustavo faced during my interview of him, in which he was asked to describe the prompt and the students' responses to me—a white male who, he might have assumed, believed in assimilation. In any case, remember that the third and final time Gustavo used difference/different in the quotations above, it was to say that the teens at this center reported that they “d[id]n’t feel like they [we]re very different.” Whereas Gustavo had asked students if they were “treated different” by whites, the students responded with pride in *being* different—“they love being Mexican.” Notice that even as this answer admitted a possible “yes” to the question of discrimination, it used racial pride, a “love” of the country/race, to refuse an opening to the negative feelings possible from that discrimination.<sup>45</sup> Gustavo didn’t say that the students didn’t feel different from whites, nor did he explicitly state that they did feel so. Instead, the problem of discrimination went explicitly unanswered even as implicitly it was answered with a yes and simultaneously resolved by describing the students’ incorporation into an ethnic community: “where they live there’s a lot of Mexican or like Latino people. So I know they really like that.” It’s easy to miss the fact that Gustavo engaged in a clever reframing of his original question about discrimination, for he hid the evidence of doing so (or perhaps it was the students who hid the evidence). He (or they) thus found a way to speak to the feel of discrimination without acknowledging any pain that resulted from it; less optimistically, he (or they) allowed a disavowal of that discrimination to take place even as it was being discussed.

Looking at Gustavo’s negotiation of race through that latter, more pessimistic lens, I find his rhetoric was in keeping with what Villanueva states about the rhetoric of “marginalization.” That word hides the reality of oppression, “acknowledg[ing] what can’t be denied while denying that it is structural” (57). Instead of “marginalization” Gustavo picks up on the multicultural

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<sup>45</sup> On the collapse of the distinction between Mexico as a country or origin and a race, see Ngai’s description of U.S. rhetoric on the topic in the 1920s (pp.8ff).

trope of “difference,” that word being a cover term, as I have suggested, for the conflict between mainstream (White) culture and Chican@ culture, a term that suggests that these cultures receive equal respect in American society (57). The effect is the same: the problem of white hegemony and its resulting pain is introduced but answered with its corollary: a racial pride that goes hand in hand with segregation.

Despite this critique, Gustavo sponsored the most supportive space I found in these literacy partnerships for a direct discussion of the structural racism that helped to shape these students’ lives. Outside of an ethnic studies class or a community center such as this, high school students would be unlikely to have the opportunity to write to a prompt like the one Gustavo delivered. Even to raise the question of ethnic difference requires courage on the part of instructors, and to do so in a prompt that calls for students to share personal feelings signals a level of trust between the discussion leader and the student not often found in a classroom space. Such work demonstrates the ethnic pride that a self-consciously Latino sponsor can instill given the unique affordances of this Latin@ contact zone.

#### **IV. Ms. Evans’s Assimilation: Shame and Success**

Another take on ethnicity was offered by Ms. Evans. If it’s true that my English-only workshops were less productive than they could have been, I was not alone among the sponsors at the center in this misplaced emphasis. Indeed, as I found through fieldwork and interviews, Ms. Evans also sponsored literacy only in English. As director of daily activities at the center, Evans sought to assimilate students into an American schooling culture that demanded from these teenagers homework rather than paid work or housework, and that measured them in the English they were taught at school rather than in the Spanish they were taught at home. I argue



that Ms. Evans's self-identification as a Mexican American was crucial to her managing the center as an assimilationist space. Accordingly, I provide here a few theories on Latin@ racialization that should help to clarify how Evans's identification made sense given white privilege in American culture.

In "The Social Construction of Race," Haney-Lopez argues that for Latinos particularly race is "plastic, inconstant, and to some extent volitional" (166-169). In part, his argument for the plasticity of Latino race emerges from the possibilities that certain members of a mestizaje people can "pass" for White in a culture of White privilege. Given the right/white skin color, Latinos can escape the discrimination faced by their neighbors and friends, even their family members. But Haney-Lopez's attention to the plasticity of race also speaks to the ever-shifting role of Latinos in U.S. society. He points out how Mexicans were racialized in differing ways in the 1800s as Whites took over their lands and capitalized on their labor. When Whites wanted only their land, Latinos were "slothful" and thus undeserving of it; when Whites wanted their labor, Latinos became "industrious." "Latino" identity is thus relational and historically contingent, a response to imposed categories that can nevertheless sometimes be negotiated.

This perspective is in keeping with what Gilda Ochoa found in her interviews with thirty-nine Mexican Americans in nearby La Puente. Ochoa argues that her respondents' complex racial self-conceptions are influenced by several factors: "ancestry, culture, and experiences of racism" as well as "familial connections, others' perceptions, and for some, the adoption of a power-conflict perspective—which is based on an analysis of power and inequality" (72). While outsiders (including the Mexicans whom Ochoa interviews) often attempt to use only skin color or Spanish-language fluency to categorize U.S.-born Latinos, Ochoa finds that those she

interviews view themselves in more nuanced ways due to their personal, communal, and family histories.

Ochoa's text, which ironically was introduced to me by Ms. Evans herself, also suggests a historical explanation for why a Mexican American like Ms. Evans would develop monolingual, pro-assimilation attitudes. Ochoa's study traces the shifting demographics and political ideologies that influenced Mexican immigrants' attitudes toward assimilation into U.S. culture over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ochoa suggests that for older citizens who faced the racist discourse of biological determinism that was prevalent in the 20s and 30s, assimilation was a way of proving their humanity and worth to a culture that denigrated them. Because members of the Mexican American generation who grew up in the 60s were descended from those who served in World War II, and because they and their parents experienced the prosperity of the post-war boom, they too identified more strongly as Americans. Ochoa goes on to explain that, with the recent resurgence of immigration, immigrants who arrived recently have been more likely to grow up in neighborhoods where they, rather than 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage, form the majority, and where the Spanish language is used frequently not just in the home but in the marketplace, schools, and civic life (115ff). Due to advances in communication technology, it is also easier for these immigrants to maintain ties with those in their home country. This has prompted scholars to use not "immigrant" but "migrant" (Schmidt-Camacho) or "transnational Mexicano" (Guerra) to describe members of this group, a usage that I take up when my fieldwork data supports it (e.g. when students whom I interview mention conversing with relatives in Mexico or traveling there for a visit).

Ms. Evans's parents are both of Mexican heritage, but both seem to have more in common with the Mexican American generation than with contemporary transnational

Mexican@s. Her father is a third generation U.S. citizen whose uncle fought in World War II. He grew up in an era when teachers enforced schools' English-only policies, a practice involving corporal punishment.<sup>46</sup> Evans's mother emigrated from Mexico at the age of three and never returned there to live. Evans said that her mother suffered less discrimination than her father due to her lighter skin, noting that many who saw her didn't view her as Mexican. Her mother also adapted to her new home by learning to speak English early.

Having these parents as role models helped to shape Ms. Evans's early conception of herself as American, not Mexican. Evans's pigmentation, too, may have shaped her consciousness. Ochoa notes that those of her informants who faced discrimination were more likely to promote a power-conflict or oppositional stance in solidarity with Mexican immigrants, and that those with darker skin, like Evans's father, were more likely to suffer discrimination, even if they were born and raised in the States. Evans's light skin and hair might have released her from such discrimination and thus from the alliance-making Ochoa describes.

Perhaps because of her pigmentation, Ms. Evans did not learn she was Mexican until an aunt told her so at the age of 12. Even her social group was mostly Caucasian; she was a swimmer in a club in which she and another girl were the only Latinas. It wasn't until high school, Evans said, that a full awareness of ethnicity dawned on her, and she came to see herself as different from the Spanish-speaking Mexicanas with whom she shared classrooms and hallways. At the time of this study, in her role as coordinator of activities at the after-school center, Evans found herself sometimes othered and ostracized for her race, not by whites but by Mexican@ students who judged her to be Caucasian due to her accent and her lighter skin.

Still, it might have been otherwise for Ms. Evans, for hers was a Spanish-speaking household until she encountered the trauma of English-only schooling in kindergarten. When

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<sup>46</sup> See Victor Villaseñor's memoir *Burro Genius* for a moving account of such abuse.

Evans entered school she knew no English and quickly fell behind her English-speaking peers. To make matters worse the school miscategorized her as learning disabled. From that point on, Evans said, her family spoke to her only in English, with her mother taking time at night to instruct her in the language and eventually succeeding in getting her child redesignated as “normal.” Spanish was reserved for conversations between her mother and her grandmother.

Evans explained how her upbringing influenced her own approach to the after-school students’ education as well as her own ethnic self-identification as Mexican American rather than Chicano or Mexican. She presented her perspective on the differences between the terms:

I feel Chicano is very political identity. I don't see myself as that. And I think Latino is more of a cultural identity. Someone who identifies as a Latina might be someone like Lucas who's Brazilian. I think Mexican American acknowledges that I'm different, that I'm Mexican but I'm very much American. I love my country but I like to acknowledge that I'm Mexican.

Clearly, while Ms. Evans refused to disavow her heritage and acknowledged that she was “different” (a trope we observed in Gustavo's journals), she considered herself American, and America her country. Ms. Evans recognized, then, that even as her ethnicity might mark her out as “different” from White European Americans, she was also in a different cultural location from her students. Partly this was due to her being born in the United States. Evans explained, “There is a generation gap. My mom grew up here. But their moms came across [the border]. A lot of the students don't have papers here. I try to speak sensitively to their situation.”

However, Evans also saw this difference between her and the center's students playing out economically: “I think that I was a little spoiled. I had a lot of opportunities that set me up for success, whereas they don't.” She suggested that the economic struggles of the students' immigrant families created different expectations for them than her parents had for her. In

Pimentel's terms, students were expected to be "*buen trabajador[as]*"—hard workers, not in school but at paid jobs (172). Ms. Evans said,

The understanding here is to survive. One of the kids is in a one-bedroom apartment with six of them and they have a bunk bed in the living room. They're struggling to integrate. The cultural maps are very different. The mom, I can't teach her how important higher education is, because, in her defense she's struggling and she needs help. So her [idea] is to have kids work. There's a few parents that I know get it, that get that their students have to read that they have to put school first. But the majority of the parents here don't.

As Ms. Evans saw it, not just parents' economic necessities but the cultural maps through which they negotiated them led them to expect their children to be part-time workers rather than full-time students. This paid employment impeded their ability to do the schoolwork that would lead to growth in their reading and writing scores and in their high school graduation and college attendance rates. Because after-school programs like this one are judged mainly on their impact on kids' academics (that and their ability to keep kids from delinquent behavior, a topic I'll cover in the next chapter in light of Mike's Criminal Justice Club), it's inevitable that the mismatch in expectations between Evans and the parents would lead to conflict.

In the comments above Ms. Evans divided parents into those that "got it" and those that didn't. As Evans's other comments show, those who "got it" that understood that their kids needed not just to focus on school but to learn English, even at the exclusion of Spanish. If they didn't, Ms. Evans said, "that affect[ed] them" and they fell behind. Ms. Evans saw this Spanish-primary attitude as tied up in a rejection of an American schooling culture; that schooling culture requires reading homework that would preclude kids from the paid work their parents expect of them. She said,

Their culture is still tied to their homeland, so a lot of things they find important [are different]. Some of them are still assimilating; they're still speaking Spanish. They don't want to adapt to the culture here. Most moms don't expect them to read.

Unfortunately, often communicated along with that English-only curriculum is an ideology shared by many of Ochoa's Mexican American respondents—and echoed here by Evans—that Mexican culture is backward, or at least renders children unprepared for full participation in America's schools and economy. Specifically, Ms. Evans saw the parents' desire to hold onto the Spanish language as an impediment to their kids' school success. By “success” Ms. Evans meant college and the careers that are possible as a result of it.

In pushing the girls to accept these demands and realize an (English-only) literate future, Ms. Evans was asking them to follow her own example. She grew up in a neighborhood of immigrants in La Mesita, a city whose school district educates a largely Latino population. Yet, as we saw, somehow the school still failed to recognize her academic ability due to her initial monolingual fluency in Spanish. Evans had since found out that her situation was not uncommon; some of her peers faced the same fate. Given Ms. Evans's cultural map one can see why it was particularly frustrating for her when she was placed in an ESL class upon entering college. “It didn't feel good to be in class where you're learning grammar,” she said. “When I was in that class, my goal was, ‘Get out of here as soon as I can . . . This is not my class. This is not meant for me’ . . . I was going to get out of that class. I was going to graduate.”

Describing herself as “ambitious” and “determined,” Ms. Evans expected the same from the center's students. Suggesting that they too might be placed in ELD classes that would block their way to higher education, she stated, “They will have to work very hard, and I want them to be OK with that.” In the same interview, she suggested that students' use of Spanish at home and in the community could contribute to them having difficulties with language use, difficulties even more severe than she had experienced growing up in an English-only household. For instance, she tied her students' reading struggles to this use of Spanish, saying that the kids were

“struggling with school because they just don’t understand why they’re not learning or they can’t read. And I think a lot has to do with that language flip-flopping.” And asked about the kids’ writing proficiency, she said, “A lot of them are more comfortable in Spanish.”

Evans attended our selective university, UC Irvine, where she minored in Chican@ Latino@ Studies, which she described as her “fun degree.” Recently, she enrolled in a master’s program in higher educational counseling, and when she finished she hoped to guide college students through their academic careers. Rightly, she saw the facility with written English that she arrived at as crucial to her past achievements and future aspirations. But with English tied to reading, to schooling, to “success” as defined by college attendance, and to this country, Spanish was tied to the opposites of those: to housework and caretaking, to paid work, to integration within this community of workers, and ultimately to a desire to preserve ties to Mexico.

In another interview, Ms. Evans developed at length her sense that the center’s mission was to remedy the deficits that students experienced in the home. She said:

I think that’s where it helps to be here [at the center] because I did grow up in a community, I did go to school with students where college wasn’t—reading, going to school, being read books—wasn’t normal . . . [A] lot of them didn’t speak English, didn’t know how to write, and that’s just part of, college wasn’t something that you thought about.

In contrast to those homes where Spanish speakers didn’t think about college, the center employed her and other mentors who could tell the students, as Ms. Evans put it, “to think about college and read.”

Thus, language use was tied to ethnic affiliations and their corresponding ideologies, which helps to explain what was at stake in the conflicts Ms. Evans described between her and her students’ parents over its use. Though Evans was perfectly capable of conducting a conversation in Spanish with the parents the center served (I witnessed as much during our final

interview), she sometimes found herself denigrated once again for her language abilities—this time by parents who disrespected her for speaking with an accent. Ms. Evans said, “A lot of them [parents] get upset with me because I don't speak Spanish. They're rude to me. They laugh. I should be rude too. I should say, 'You don't speak English.' But I don't.”<sup>47</sup> However, though Ms. Evans did not tell parents that their Spanish was out of place in their kids' lives, the English-only curriculum of the center (and of the local public schools) implicitly did. It rejected the parents' perspectives and ushered students into an American academic culture where Spanish had, at best, a secondary place. This despite the fact that 750,000 people in Orange County alone speak primarily Spanish in the home.

Whatever the origins of her assimilationist belief system, and however urgent the academic demands that Ms. Evans saw the center as meeting through assimilationist practices, it had its costs, particularly in its focus on English, which Evans accepted as a demand of the students' schooling. Although a consensus has emerged in composition studies that bilingualism in one form or another ought to be encouraged (see, for example, Kirklighter, Cárdenas, and Murphy) the debate over bilingual K-12 education is still raging (for a progressive perspective on that discussion, see Gandara and Hopkins). This is not the place for an in-depth review of bilingualism's virtues, but suffice it to say that many studies indicate that students who become highly literate in their home language, what Gee calls their primary discourse, gain rather than lose English language fluency by such efforts (see Hornberger; García, Zakharia, and Otcu). As mentioned earlier, in today's connected and globalized world, the era of the immigrant has been superseded by that of the migrant (Schmidt Camacho). This was a reality at Barrio After-School

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<sup>47</sup> Ochoa explains that immigrants who speak Spanish do so partly to revalue the language, which is often devalued in the United States, and that some of them are unaware of the sustained pressure schools exert on students to assimilate into an English-only culture. They therefore perceive Latinos who don't speak Spanish fluently as having elected to reject their mother tongue. It may also be, as Abraham Romney suggested when he read an early version of this chapter, that the parents of Barrio were particularly ill disposed toward a principal of this after-school site speaking only English because the center was literally downstairs from their homes.



Center, whose students were able to communicate more regularly with their families in Mexico than were the immigrants of earlier generations, not leaving them behind for a new life but incorporating them in their current decisions and plans. Not just parents but also students were, indeed, as Evans says, “tied to their home countries,” but rather than see those ties as a limitation Evans might better have acknowledged how Spanish-language literacy could have served those goals. If we remember Brandt’s notion that literacy sponsors not only invest in others’ literacy opportunities but also “regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy,” then we can focus on how the English-only tests that drive curriculum – directly at the schools and indirectly here at the center through the sponsorship of Ms. Evans – “suppressed” Spanish language literacy and thus “withheld” from students the connections they might have formed with family and peers through that literacy.

One might expect that Evans’s focus on English was compulsory, that due to its responsibility to taxpayers or funders the center could focus narrowly only on those skills that show up on (English-only) standardized tests. And it is true that Evans reported that those who organized the center did not provide her with any materials that were specifically designed for English language learners or that drew on students’ Spanish-language skills, even though she believed that every student the center served spoke Spanish in the home. Yet when I inquired about the curriculum at this after-school center from someone higher up in the organization, I was told the following:

These community site programs are designed to meet the immediate local neighborhood needs for a range of supports, including the most urgent needs that are most often social/emotional. They do this by providing consistent and positive adult and peer interactions and supports, which, of course, indirectly lead to greater student engagement in school. They are very different than the bulk of our programs, both programmatically and financially, and are designed to be more flexible to the community and student[s] . . . who often need a positive and safe place where they feel like they belong.

Note that there is nothing above referencing standardized tests, and that whatever academic support the center provided was expected to impact students' school performance only "indirectly." In other words, Evans was free to design Barrio Center's educational program in any way she saw fit so long as she attracted and retained students. That means that had Evans wished, she could have sponsored literacy work that encouraged students to read in the Spanish they used at home and to put their substantial Spanish vocabulary into writing. I would argue that such work would indeed have made the center even more of a "place where they fe[lt] like they belong" by providing for the students' "urgent social needs."

Contrast Ms. Evans's toward Spanish with that of another sponsor whom I worked with at the second community center, Orgullo, and it becomes clear how Spanish can be understood as a resource rather than an impediment. When I held my workshops, Orgullo, who had a master's in bilingual education, oversaw all educational programming at the center where she worked, Dios. She had begun her career as a classroom teacher, and when a local school was looking to begin a bilingual program in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, she had been tapped to set that program up. Two years later, she took the same class into a 5<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual program. When I last interviewed her, her daughter attended an elementary school that used dual immersion throughout the school day.

When I asked Orgullo why the students at her community center did so well in my poetry workshops, she gave several answers. She noted that the kids were honors students and that they'd had good teachers. She had also "sold" the poetry workshops to them, talking up their value. However, perhaps the best explanation, Orgullo thought, was the kids' bilingual education:

It's amazing, the level of language that they have. I listen to my daughter speak and I'm like, "What did you just say? How did you say that?" . . . [I]f these kids are learning the regular Spanish, when they transfer, they're transferring into a higher level of tiered English, which is where all the testing is and [where] all the higher vocabulary words [are].

In the comment above, Orgullo suggests that when students learn Spanish cognates whose English counterparts would normally not be taught until later grades their scores in English increase. That's a good rationale for those who are sponsored by the state and must meet its metrics, which measure kids' language development only by English-language standardized tests and translate those measurements into Academic Performance Index (API) scores that parents use to compare the quality of schools. With the current push for teacher's performance to be evaluated with these same tests, and for their compensation to be rationed likewise, it is growing harder and harder for any K-12 educator to ignore those metrics.

However, not being on the basis of those tests, I have the liberty to argue a more contentious point: the political benefits of mastering literacy in what Gandara calls a "forbidden language"—Spanish—and particularly for doing so in what Rodolfo Acuña calls "Occupied America."<sup>48</sup>

Just what discourse community such mastery would allow students to enter is an interesting problem, raising the issue of the role of Spanish in the "public sphere." Whereas Richard Rodriguez's biography *Hunger for Memory* and similar work would relegate Spanish to a "private," "home," or "heritage" language, one version of Chican@ activism pushes for dual language immersion in the public schools, a practice that would reorient Southland students, promoting dialogue between Chicanos, transnational Mexicanos, and Spanish-speaking migrants from Latin America and elsewhere.

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<sup>48</sup> See Planas for a discussion of the banning of Acuña's and other ethnic studies books by the Arizona legislature.

Speaking politically, institutionalizing language gives it power, as the English-only crowd knows full well. Even scholars can forget that Spanish was once the *lingua franca* of the state of California, that our state constitution was drafted in English and Spanish, and that our state's founders promised a respect for Californios' rights and titles that was almost immediately violated. From my perspective, encouraging literacy in Spanish is a means of allowing Spanish speakers to once again share in the hegemony over a region in which their ancestors have worked and lived for centuries.

More practically for these students, learning to read and write in Spanish enables better communication between them and the millions of Spanish-speaking residents of our state, and more flexible job opportunities as well. It urges the students to see such people not as clinging to a forsaken homeland but as participating in the culture of the hemispheric Americas. To my mind, then, though both Evans and Orgullo were Latina educators at community organizations, their contrasting attitudes toward Spanish-language literacy meant that Orgullo better harnessed the unique linguistic power that her students brought.

One experiment that bears on this topic in a context relevant to HOT's poetry partnership with a secondary students is the Bronx *Power Writers* spoken-word poetry class sponsored by teacher and poet Joseph Ubiles memorably documented by Education Professor Maisha Fisher. Chapter 4, "We Speak in all Tongues: The Politics of Bronxionics" is particularly useful as a reminder of the power of "non-standard" English to name the communities in which we live. Bronxionics, we learn, includes elements of both African American Vernacular English and Puerto Rican- and Dominican-inflected Spanish. Fisher argues that this linguistic "gumbo" contains not just a lovely "magic" of rhythm and tone, but also the "money" that young people need to make their way through the day (45). Fisher reminds readers that the "civic" space of

civic engagement does not always accept academic language as currency, and stresses “how important it was not to leave our students 'naked' when putting them out into the world,” by stripping them of their home language (44). My argument is that the more we draw on the “magic” and “money” of the languages students bring with them to these centers, the more our efforts at literacy education prosper, be they the clubs like those Ms. Evans supervised or literacy partnerships like the poetry workshops H.O.T. enabled.

In her rejoinder to Gee’s argument about Discourse, Delpit notes that educators fail in their duty if they teach students “to develop literacy *solely* within the language and style of the students’ home discourse” (“The Silenced Dialogue” 551), and I am not arguing that the community center ought to have instructed only in Spanish, for this would have marginalized not only Ms. Evans but also the center’s English-dominant students. Rather, I argue that students were already members of discourse communities that included Spanish speakers, and that encouraging and, when possible, teaching literacy that allowed students to more fully participate in those communities would only have heightened their respect for the usefulness of the written word in securing their social ties. I mean to say that the center, and other sites where Spanish-speaking youth are educated, would benefit from the kind of “Spanish for Spanish speakers” curriculum that has already been successfully implemented in other schools. Such a curriculum would capitalize on the overlap between many students’ primary discourse (the Spanish that students speak in the home) and what is actually a secondary discourse: written, formal Spanish. This formal, literate Spanish is language the students are likely find useful in the careers that interest them, and it is one that students ought to have a chance to learn, especially in an after-school setting.

## **V. Family Literacies: Families as Sponsors**

### *A. Introduction*

But exactly what languages were the Barrio students speaking, reading and writing at home? As a literacy scholar, I needed to dig deeper than what I could observe in the center's daily activities and the poetry workshops I ran if I was to understand the discourse communities to which the younger students belonged.

Why do this work? First, to assist the community center with its own literacy education. As a scholar of literacy who had devoted time to reading about current best practices in literacy education, I was able to understand the potential uses of the literacies the students told me about in these interviews and to make recommendations to the on-site staff, including Ms. Evans, regarding the activities they ran there. Second, by better understanding these students' home and school literacies, I was better prepared to design future collaborations between them and my undergraduate writers in future writing workshops. Knowing what these younger students already knew, we found ways to solicit that knowledge in the workshops. Finally, to the extent that the students in my university classes hailed from working-class and immigrant homes, schools, and neighborhoods in which they shared these students' experiences, I came to understand my own students better as well.

Thus, as part of this study, I conducted interviews with seven of the students at the center, each of whom had participated in my poetry workshops in 2012. To get a fuller picture of their at-home, in-school, and community-based literacies, I asked them a series of open-ended questions (Appendix D).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For this section, unless a word or phrase is particularly telling, I have edited the students' words to delete redundancies and pauses and to render them in standard American English. I do not wish their points to be undercut by the stigmatization of their language. In this rationale I follow Brandt (*Literacy*, Chapter 1).

What the young people said contradicted Evans's notion that they didn't read or write at home; for many, the process of acquiring written Spanish skills was already underway, and all of the students reported engaging in some literacy work that complemented or supplemented their in-school efforts. This is not to say that Evans's comments on the challenges students faced at home were off-base; what I found in the interviews supported her assessments of the pressure posed by economics and the loss of family members. For instance, when one young man's mother began working nights, she was no longer able to read him children's books in Spanish. Another student's comments agreed with Ms. Evans' observations about the detrimental impact of the lack of male role models for the center's youth. JT, whose words on pride and respect helped bring Ms. Evans to tears in Chapter 2, said that her uncle's passing had cut off her development as a writer: "He was like a father to me. I wrote him a father-daughter thing, and it was pretty much the only time I wrote. I've stopped writing since then." Obviously, losing a family member had a deep impact on not just on her writing, but also her character.

However, as I noted in the section above, Evans's characterization of students' homes as a non-literate and work-oriented space left out important literacy activities sponsored by family members in those homes. It is important to illuminate those activities because, like Ms. Evans, many teachers continue to imagine students' home lives as literacy-poor, particularly teachers who work with youth of low socio-economic status (Purcell-Gates; Teale). This is not to say that literacy researchers who have taken the time to conduct literacy inventories in such homes report uniformly high literate activity; instead, as might be expected, even within cohorts of students sharing the same demographic variables of income and ethnicity researchers have observed a wide variation in the frequency of literate behavior from home to home (ibid). Thus, it is important that the findings from a small sample such as mine not be generalized. Nonetheless, a

qualitative study such as this can use students' reflections on their own literate lives to illuminate how literacy arises in multiple forms and through diverse practices, some of them held in common with middle-class, English-only families and some of them unique to working-class, language-minority homes.

Even today, scholars continue to note the dearth of research available on immigrant families' home literacies (Kim and Deschambault). They suggest that qualitative descriptions of home literacies can help to expand our conception of what constitutes literacy, urging us to look beyond the most obvious scenes, such as those depicted above of parents reading with children (Van Steensel). Though modest in scale, this research attempts to fill those gaps, not so much to suggest changes to classroom teachers' practice but to envision how outreach and engagement programs can reference and draw on home practices when doing literacy workshops in after-school settings.

My research into these family literacies would draw particular attention to the role of affect, specifically as it pertains to the *motivation* to read and write. Much work on this topic has been done in the English classroom—from elementary school to the university—all pointing to the crucial role of motivation and interest in young writers' development (Boscolo; Bruning and Horn; Del Favero and Borghetto; Driscoll and Wells; Hidi and Boscolo Mikkonen, Ruohoniemi, and Lindblom-Ylänne; Magnifico; Pajares; Troia, Shankland, and Wolbers). One finding emerges from this work that is relevant to my present study: writing (as well as its counterparts reading, speaking, and listening) is always a meaning making activity between socially embedded actors. Families thus have an advantage over classrooms as sites for literacy acquisition. Whereas classrooms must forge a community out of dozens of strangers and must encourage those presumed to have the same level of skill to learn new skills along with one



another, families allow for one-on-one language exchanges between older, typically more skilled relatives and younger learners. It is thus intriguing to speculate how families might be mobilized to better support students' learning of academic English; however, I would argue it is more pertinent to consider the uses to which families put their existing literacy knowledge and the development of younger family members' literacy within that social field. For those who would seek to motivate student writers, families offer models of social networks in which reading and writing come to matter for communicants involved in mutually rewarding relationships.

### *B. "Para" Phrasing or Language Brokering*

One example of a practice unique to language-minority homes was the young people's interactions on behalf of Spanish speaking relatives in English-only public spaces. Such interactions sometimes required that these teens work as translators or "literacy brokers," a practice that has drawn the attention of literacy researchers (Orellana et al.; Eksner and Orellana; Weisskirch).

Marjorie Orellana has called the practice "para-phrasing" as a play on the Spanish "para" (*for*) in order to emphasize that the adolescents she studies translate materials *for* older family members and *for* a practical purpose. In the first study I discuss, Orellana's team suggested parallels between the paraphrasing students were expected to do of assigned texts in school and that which they did at home in translating English-language information for their parents and in conveying their parents' thoughts to others. The study also made clear that older relatives as often asked their children for translations of texts as they did for translations of others' spoken English. This finding is relevant to my study; my interview questions asked the teens specifically about reading and writing, so I was unlikely to uncover instances of the teens brokering face-to-face encounters.

In the later work, Orellana addressed how such paraphrasing shifted children's authority vis-à-vis their parents, a topic also engaged by Robert Weisskirch, though he found no conclusive data on whether the brokering was seen as a usurpation of parents' authority or as simply another chore for the kids. Speaking more specifically to my research interests, Weisskirch's quantitative study followed up on earlier researchers' questions about the emotions involved in language brokering. The students he surveyed, Mexican-born and Mexican American 7<sup>th</sup> graders at a public school in California, were far more likely to report positive emotions than negative ones when language brokering. Students were two times more likely to report that they felt happy, happy, proud, trusted, or good while language brokering than they were to report that they felt anxious, ashamed, scrutinized, guilty, or angry (553). Students' language proficiency also played a role in their answers, with students who were more fluent in Spanish being more likely to report positive emotions while brokering. The demographics of the students in the Weisskirch study were similar to those of my students, and his findings led me to hypothesize that those I interviewed would take pride in the translating they did for their parents. Granted, Weisskirch noted that his own group's positive emotions may have derived from the acceptance of adolescents as translators in the particular immigrant community in which they lived; had my students translated for their Anglo neighbors they might have met with increased scrutiny and decreased pleasure.

Just how the students I interviewed felt about their own roles as family interpreters I can only infer from the tone they took as they described that interpreting, for due to privacy concerns when researching on minors, I did not ask directly about their emotions. But I will say that their descriptions of their interpretive acts were generally fairly matter-of-fact. Fidencio, for example, described the following routine for managing the information the school sent to his house in the

form of envelopes containing flyers: “It mostly comes in English, not in Spanish. I have to read it to my mom. I just open it. If it’s in Spanish I just leave it and tell my mom. If it’s in English I read it and later tell my mom when she comes home.” He was similarly matter of fact about his job on road trips of reading signs to his relatives. When the world arrived in English for his Spanish-speaking relatives, he translated it for them as a matter of course.

Esperanza, however, seemed a little frustrated as she described how a simple trip to the park with her parents required translation:

We call it a duck park. There's the sign, and then my dad asks me, “Why is that sign over there?” It's in English. It says not to swim in the river and not to jump in or throw trash. And then I have to translate it. [It's] difficult because the words in English aren't the same in Spanish.

Weisskirch suggests that students with a still developing vocabulary in English may be frustrated as they attempt to convey the necessary information to her parents, and Esperanza’s comment that such translation was “difficult” suggested that the same was true for her.

A third student I interviewed, JT, laughed in embarrassment as she talked about the language brokering she did for her mother. The community center would send home permission slips in English, in this case about an upcoming college field trip, and she would convey the information to her mother:

JT: I read them to my mom

LL: How come?

JT: She doesn't understand English.

LL: Well sometimes they have them in Spanish, or no?

JT: Well sometimes, but I never take a chance and ask for the Spanish one. Well the backside has it [Spanish], but my mom just likes me reading because she wants me to get fluent in my Spanish. And then when I get stuck I just [inaudible; JT waves her hand].

Me: You don't read other stuff to her, no magazines, newspapers?

JT: Only the permission slips.

Me: Does she correct your pronunciation?

JT: Yeah [laughs]

This transcript presents some intriguing ambiguities. The first thing to note is that JT saw asking for Spanish-language materials as “taking a chance.” Possibly, the risk was that such a request would allow the center mark her out as a Spanish speaker. This interpretation would agree with many other comments made in the interviews and observed in the field that students were aware of the stigmatization of Spanish (on stigmatization, see Monzó and Rueda). However, it’s also possible that requesting a Spanish translation was “taking a chance” because the mother could then have read the permission request for herself and possibly denied JT permission to go on the trip.

JT’s comments also show that she sometimes was asked to do something quite different: read the Spanish-language versions of the school forms aloud. It’s ambiguous, however, what exactly she did when she “g[ot] stuck,” presumably on an incomprehensible piece of vocabulary. At the time, I interpreted her gesture and her mumbled word to mean that she would flip the page to the English-language side. But it’s also possible that JT simply *made up information* when she didn’t understand the Spanish information, that she improvised so as to alter the message to suit her own purpose, which was to get permission to go on a fieldtrip. Such a practice would agree with what some research on language brokering has found of adolescents’ information management. Weisskirch, for example, suggests that their ability to work in both languages allows them to control what information does and doesn’t reach their monolingual parents. He goes on to note that “this amount of autonomy and individualism is consistent with American values and may put them in conflict with their more traditional value-holding parents” (558). Whether that was the case or not in this instance is unclear, but it’s certainly possible.

It’s also worth asking what role JT’s mother had in this exchange. Why ask her daughter to read aloud in Spanish? It’s possible that JT’s mother could not read well herself in Spanish

and asked JT to do the reading to cover that liability and maintain her authority. Or perhaps she was simply busy and preferred to have JT read while she did household tasks. However, it's also possible that the mother had taken an occasion of school communication and turned it into an opportunity to encourage her daughter's Spanish language literacy. Admittedly, when I asked JT if her mother corrected her pronunciation, that was a leading question. But the laughter that ensued, which I interpret as embarrassed, corroborates one of the emotional possibilities Weisskirch suggests in his study: students who describe themselves as less fluent are more likely to describe themselves as embarrassed in their roles as family translators. I believe pronunciation would be particularly important to how students perceive themselves in such an exchange because, as I'll discuss in a moment regarding another student's Spanish-language performances for her mother, whether or not one is perceived as part of a Discourse community turns on the question of pronunciation.

### *C. Parents as Spanish-Language Sponsors*

Another line of research relevant to this study isn't on language brokering specifically, but on the in-home literacy practices of Mexican Americans. Evans asserted that parents in this community didn't stress reading, but that wouldn't prove to be true here, nor has that claim been borne out by research into other transnational Mexican@ homes. Farr, for instance, finds that Mexican@ parents often take opportunities to teach kids about literacy in both languages, as do other older relatives. This, too, agrees with what my students said in the interviews about learning Spanish language skills from their parents.

Esperanza's parents, for example, took time from their busy work schedules to school her in proper pronunciation and in Spanish language vocabulary. She said, "They tell me, 'Oh write me this word in Spanish.' It's like little lessons in a day, like how to read, how to write." One

such lesson, which Esperanza demonstrated for me, involved the alveolar trill, commonly known as the rolled or rolling R. In what follows here, I transcribe that sound as “erre” when it stands alone, and “rr” when it forms part of a word.

Esperanza described for me what typically happens when the school sends her mother a form in Spanish: “She tells me to read it. She always corrects me. I used to get the ‘erre’ wrong, like air-eh, air-eh. But she says, ‘No it’s not [that], it’s erre, like that: rrosa.’” Esperanza trilled the r sounds loudly, accentuating them. As she did so, I echoed her, struggling to match her performance. But my sputtering erre paled in comparison with her accomplished trill. Clearly, I could never pass for a native speaker. It’s likely that it was precisely to enable Esperanza to do so that her mother emphasized the rolled r. As Gee pointed out in speaking of interviews as a gatekeeping practice in which language is measured, whether one is judged in or out depends on such fine distinctions.

Still, whereas Ms. Evans foresaw the students entering a world where they’d put the language of their parents’ home countries safely behind them, Esperanza foresaw a Spanish-speaking future for which her alveolar trills hadn’t fully prepared her. She said of Spanish, “I can speak it. I can write it a little bit, and not read it at all. I worry, not knowing if we’re going to go to Mexico and I’m going to fail the classes.” Thus, it was she as much as her parents who was driving the Spanish lessons: “I asked my parents and they said yes they might teach me.” And indeed, the last time I spoke with Esperanza’s older sister, who was graduating from high school that spring and had earned a scholarship for college, she told me that Esperanza was spending the school year in Mexico, with their mother. Whether she’d mastered the trill, the sister didn’t say.

Though Evans wasn’t correct about parents’ in-home literacy education efforts, her comments on the dual pressures on her female students of economic survival and the gendered

division of labor did agree with Esperanza's experience. She knew that her parents wanted to teach her more than they had time to: "Because my dad is always working. My mom, she takes care of this girl. She doesn't—she does have time, but then she gets tired. She has to cook and do chores. So it's a lot of work." However, what Evans said would not have led me to anticipate what Esperanza described of her father's role in teaching her Spanish. He instructed her by asking her to read aloud to him the contracts required of him in his house painting business. From them she had learned several terms: cognates such as *textura* and *esprayando*, but also vocabulary that would befuddle monolingual English speakers, like *tapando* for the covering of furniture and windows. During our poetry workshops, Esperanza wrote a poem to her father that addressed her father's work:

My dad's hands are rough like a rock  
He quickly moves the paint brush across the wall  
Italy is an ocean full of wonders.  
Por que siempre te rompes el lomo por nosotros?  
Trabajo pintando casas.

The last two lines translate as:

Why do you always break your back for us?  
I work painting houses

If the appearance of Italy in the poem is a bit mysterious, and if the final line doesn't quite answer the question asked in the penultimate lines, that is part of the poem's design; the poem prompt called for disjunction in order to create tension. But to address what the poem shows about Esperanza's bilingual literacy acquisition, I will first say that the undergraduate teacher-poet who guided Esperanza in writing the poem told me afterwards that for the final lines Esperanza "wanted to write all the words in Spanish but she didn't know how to spell them." So Esperanza asked this teacher-poet to spell each one out for her verbally while she transcribed

them. One can see, then, how Esperanza's parents' knowledge, and their valuing of Spanish along with her own valuing of it, and the teacher-poet's bilingual expertise—she could read and write at about the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level, she told me later—all combined to support Esperanza in producing this work. Still, it's inarguable that Esperanza's parents' education in Spanish was essential. Clearly, Esperanza's father's work is just that “fund of knowledge” for her language that Franquiz and Martinez-Roldan have illuminated in working-class Latino communities, a fund from which students can draw in their schoolwork if and when their curriculum is culturally relevant.

Other times, parents' Spanish-language instruction was more straightforward, even if the benefits of that instruction were harder to trace to particular products to which I had access. Fidencio, for example, related the following about his mother: “When we were smaller she would read me books in Spanish. She wanted me to learn to read and write in Spanish. . . She would get them from my aunt . . . little kid books . . . We'd reread them until we learned it.” Similarly, JT, a high schooler now, recalled how her uncle (whom the reader will recall has since passed away) taught her to read and write as a child. JT and her uncle used books that contained Spanish and English versions of the text on facing pages, books that brought them together because her uncle understood Spanish better than English and her language strengths were the reverse. In her interview with me, JT related how these lessons centered not just on the words on the page but on her proper comportment, and not just with writing: “He taught me how to use my pencil right and read. I used to have this weird way [of holding the pencil].” She showed me how she gripped the pencil with her whole hand. Laughing, she continued, “I used to pick my nose. And he used to be like, ‘Don't do that. It's not the right thing.’ . . . He brought me a book about how not to do that. It wasn't just about not picking your nose. It was about manners.” Stories like



Fidencio's and JT's suggest that many students in language-minority homes do ample literacy practice, albeit not in this country's dominant language.

#### *D. Families as English-Language Sponsors*

If the above sections emphasize how students are schooled in Spanish not just as a heritage language but as one integral to the practice of their lives, this is not to imply that all familial sponsorship in this Latino community involves Spanish, nor that all the reading and writing opportunities family members provide involve them acting directly as teachers. Those students who are 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation use English or a mix of English and Spanish in literacy activities sponsored by families. In describing such sponsorships, it's important to address not just the materials older relatives use to teach but also those they use in day to day activities such as shopping and those they help procure for themselves or for other children, some of which get circulated within the family.

The utilitarian uses to which families put literacy involve mutual effort accomplished through print toward a common goal. Two students mentioned planning family activities—birthdays, school events—by writing on calendars that were posted in a common space like the kitchen or family room. One mentioned using a family cookbook to prepare food. And fulfilling Brandt's dictum that more and more reading and writing is used in buying and selling, other literacy activities the kids described pertained to their and their parents' joint activities as consumers. The kids described reading the labels of goods in the stores, looking for ingredients, or calculating the per-unit cost of pricier items. Sometimes a simple shopping list helped organize the trip to the store. Joel, for example, said, "Me and my mom, at the end of every month we sit down and we figure out what we want to buy." She agreed to most of the items he requested, but not without asking for an explanation of why they were necessary. Ella had a

similar shopping routine with her mother, also writing up lists, though she decorated the margins of hers, whether as a means of persuasion for desired items as to indulge her own imagination she didn't say.

Other activities within the families I asked about followed the top-down structure more natural to Brandt's term "sponsorship." Brandt uses the term in part to address how wealthier patrons bankroll literacy projects. One English-language sponsorship a student related to me fulfilled this description in a striking manner: an older relative paid her in cash for her writing. Specifically, McCartney's grandfather, a bilingual veteran who had served in Vietnam and who preferred speaking English to Spanish, paid her \$20 to make a songbook including the lyrics of thirty Beatles songs. When I asked why he did so, McCartney replied that he used the songbook as a reference while singing. "Give Peace a Chance" was his favorite, she said, followed closely by "Michelle." She went on to describe a whole world of literacy pertaining to her current Beatles obsession, an interest that gives much credence to Renninger's and Lipstein's suggestion that interest in a topic can play a crucial role in learners' enjoyment of writing about it. McCartney reported that she frequently visited YouTube for Beatles songs and lyrics and that she enjoyed reading coffee-table anthologies on the Fab Four and debating with her grandfather about the relative merits of Paul McCartney and John Lennon (It's no accident that she chose the pseudonym "McCartney." John, she judged, was cute before he became a "hippie.") Her grandfather's sponsorship had also inspired her to write on her own. The summer before her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, she'd composed a series of love letters to Paul McCartney. She'd never sent them, though, and was very upset when she found one addressed back to her with a note scrawled in her sister JT's hand: "Keep dreaming."

Clearly, McCartney's grandfather sparked her Beatles interest in an example of a direct—even remunerative—literacy sponsorship. Yet parental sponsorship for the youth in this study did not always take the form of direct instruction or the purchase of literacy materials. Parents also provided materials by borrowing them from friends and neighbors or by buying them for students' brothers and sisters. To again use Brandt's terminology, McCartney's mother "subsidized" her literacy when she brought her coworker's gossip magazines into the home and let McCartney read them. Fidencio disclosed that he did likewise with his sister's magazines, though he admitted to being uneasy about what his male friends would say if they found him reading them.

Indeed, siblings offered networks of readers and writers in which these teens involved themselves, sometimes as sponsors themselves but more often as the recipients of sponsorship. These literacy collaborations tended to overlap with schoolwork. Esperanza's older sister, for example, recommended books for her to read, and Esperanza was quite pleased when that sister took up her recommendation of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Esperanza in turn helped her younger sister with her reading and writing, and even took pains to impress upon the easily distracted 7-year-old the importance of school, telling her that she needed to finish in order to pass the grade and, in Esperanza's words, "be successful in life." The field of family literacy includes some intriguing scholarship on sibling sponsorship (Obied; Gregory). Though more work needs to be done, my research corroborates the idea that siblings, like mentors, can be effective sponsors because of their understanding of the contexts in which the learners they assist are reading and writing.

### *E. Writing Honoring Mothers*

It might be stretching Brandt's notion of sponsorship a bit to describe the students' parents as sponsors when they are the *objects* of students' attention, but this was a common occurrence for these adolescents. We have seen Esperanza's poem, which told her father what he meant to her, but more often students reported that they had written letters and poems that recognized their mothers. Sometimes the impetus for that writing came from the students themselves, and sometimes it came from school.

JT described a touching example of the former. She'd written her mother a note that told her how much she loved her and attached to it a red paper marked "urgent." Then she fixed it to the door of her mother's room, knocked, and waited. When her mother read it, she cried, perhaps not just from gratitude but also from relief that the "urgent" situation had been resolved so painlessly. Today, it's likely that this note sits alongside a similar one written by her sister, McCartney, in their grandmother's keepsake box. Her grandmother has promised to show the contents of the box to the sisters only when they turn 18. This practice points to the value of literacy in, as one student put it, "making memory."

Fidencio demonstrated that honoring one's mother in a piece of school-sponsored writing need be no less meaningful. He hesitated at first to tell me the story, but then, explaining, "A lot of people have gone through this," he shared how he'd written an essay to show his respect for his mother's trials as she attempted to resettle in the United States. Of the essay, which he'd orally translated into Spanish for her so that he could communicate his admiration, he said,

I put her as brave because she came to this country illegally. She actually had a lot of struggle when we came because she couldn't find a job. When she came we were already going to school, well, except for my little sister. My other sister and I, we would be in school, but she would be out there looking for a job. She would be up at six in the morning and be out until five in the afternoon.

Like Esperanza's poem, Fidencio's note brings together several of the themes from this study. First, his translation of the document from English to Spanish points to the value of students as bilingual language brokers. Too, the essay itself acknowledges the long hours of labor that characterize the daily routines of so many of the working-class parents in this neighborhood, a point made by Evans and confirmed by the young people's reports. And Fidencio's hesitancy about sharing the letter shows that the horizons of his hopes, like those of millions of American youth raised by undocumented parents, are clouded by fear – fear of being outed and having his family broken up. Yet he was also able to overcome that fear and to take pride in his mother's achievement because he knew that she was one of many, part of a larger community of undocumented immigrants –most of them Latin@ – living in the borderlands. Finally, I wish to say that I do not think Fidencio would have shared that story with me had I not spoken to him in this safe space. It was in an after-school center near his home, in a meeting that Ms. Evans and Gustavo encouraged him to attend, that Fidencio felt comfortable discussing in English his bicultural, biliterate experiences.

#### *E. Family Literacies Conclusion*

This research points to the relevance that school curriculum can gain when it allows students to speak not just to their experiences as individuals but to those of the most important social network in which they're involved: their families. "Funds of knowledge," a theory often used to address Chicano/a students' unique abilities and needs, stresses that learners can take discourse and knowledge acquired from one setting, such as the parents' workplace, and apply it in another, such as science class (Moll et al.). Taking up its monetary metaphor, I'd say that "funds" imagines literacy practices as cultural capital that students acquire and maintain, spending it where they will, whoever makes the initial investment. Taken together, the family

literacy practices I outline above offer a number of promising leads to educators who would capitalize on these funds.

The question still remains, however, of how best to make school assignments and after-school workshops speak to students' family relationships. In considering such projects I suggest that we take as a metaphor the location of this after-school center, which sits underneath the apartments rented by a few of these families. This location stresses that the young people who make their way down to the center each afternoon are only secondarily students; they are first daughters and sons, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, cousins and godchildren. It also suggests that whatever literate practices they accomplish in what we might call the public space of school will take on a new slant when they walk through the doors of their homes, which in this case are more often than not linked across national borders to Spanish speaking relatives living there and abroad.

## **VI. Conclusion**

### **Writing in the Community: The University Researcher as Resource and Learner**

It's important to step back for a moment and remember my position as a university partner to this organization rather than a local administrator of it. Except for the workshops I was able to carry out on my own or with my undergraduate writers, my job was not to implement education at this after-school center, bilingual or otherwise; that task fell to local sponsors like Gustavo, Orgullo and Ms. Evans who organized and supervised the younger students' day-to-day activities. However, I do follow Parks, Goldblatt, and Cushman in pointing to the comparative wealth of time that university sponsors have to devote to research. Ours can be the task of gathering models of unconventional literacy education and researching how local contexts might

influence their successful transplantation. Unlike our counterparts in community agencies, who are pressed to deliver an education as best they can given the information they have on-hand, researchers can dig into multiple alternatives before committing to a program that we think most benefits both the community and any university students involved. I would argue that it is precisely the job of a scholar of literacy to bring that scholarship to these community programs. If, for instance, bilingual education has been shown effective in stimulating students' engagement with reading and writing, then we ought to speak on behalf of that perspective to those working in the community under an English-only perspective.

But it would be foolish to ignore the perspective that *community* educators can bring to that research. In my case, Evans's four interviews provided me an understanding of the nuances of Mexican American ethnic identity from a local perspective. She had worked closely with a Mexican@ community that was at times suspicious of her assimilationist orientation and critical of her own intermediate abilities in Spanish. With the help of her and the other staff members, Mike and Gustavo, I developed a richer and more nuanced sense of how Latin@ college graduates negotiated a place for themselves in an after-school center serving primarily transnational Mexican@ youth. I entered this study with less clear distinctions between identity American-born Latinos and Mexican-born migrants; those came into focus as the study progressed, not least through Evans's patience and interest in explaining these relationships as they were relevant to her literacy work. Though I did not end up finding her students' literacy learning to suffer from all of the deficits she anticipated, I would not have known what questions to ask of this community without her guidance.

A few decades ago Ellen Cushman called for community sites to be places of research as well as action, and she has since followed up on that injunction in ways that have broadened the

field of writing studies to include the Cherokee Syllabary, a project that would have been unimaginable to those who pioneered this profession. Following the lead of Cushman and other engaged scholar-teachers of civic writing – Linda Flower, Elenore Long, John Ackerman, Paula Mathieu, the list could go on for some time – I argue that community-engaged research is the best tool we have to push the boundaries of writing studies. When we engage with curiosity and openness those whom our entrance exams might mark as deficient, when we re-assess what our current rubrics exclude, when we sit down to listen to people like Ms. Evans and Fidencio, Gustavo and McCartney, staffers and community members navigating difficult systems in unexpected ways, we broaden the funds of knowledge from which we draw and offer a chance for our colleagues to do the same.

For those of us teaching English in what once were Spanish colonies, lands that today are home to millions of Spanish speakers, justice requires that we face up to the place of the Mexican people and the Spanish language in our heritage; that we acknowledge and learn to speak about the racial hierarchies Gustavo references when he asks Mexican@ students if they feel like they're treated different; that we stop neglecting the language that names so many of the places amongst which we live; and that we ensure as respectful and generous an education for working-class Latin@s as that enjoyed by their more privileged counterparts, so that everyone is “well-received” and respected, and no-one has to beg for what they deserve.



## CHAPTER 4: TEACHING POLICE DISCOURSE AT BARRIO CENTER

### I. Introduction: Police Discourse

[I]t started when I met Mr. Mike. He always talked about, “Why do you want to be a cop?” “Because I just want rights,” that’s what I said. I just want rights for everyone, you know? . . . Everyone who does bad, they need to pay for what they do.

– JT, Two Cities Resident

Like any police force, they exist to protect the property of the rich and to keep down the oppressed.

– Elizabeth Martinez, *500 Años del Pueblo Chicano*

Middle-class children who grow up in Orange County quickly learn to rely on Mexican@s to provide the services that support their lifestyle: landscaping, crop harvesting, house painting, home repair, food service, childcare, and countless others.<sup>50</sup> It is this division of labor, in which Mexican@s are relegated to putatively “unskilled” jobs and members of dominant groups are encouraged to pursue mental work, that leads me to understand the young people at Barrio Center not as marginalized but as oppressed. As Victor Villanueva puts it, “Talk of margins and borders” allows the American middle class to deny “its dependence on the underclass to maintain its level of comfort” (57). At the same time, the word “oppressed” calls up Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which lays out an education based in *consientização* (the building of critical awareness and consciousness). Such education involves the underclass in developing a written discourse that values “unskilled” work – work that includes the delicate emotional labor of deference among its many prerequisites. Even more crucially, *consientização* addresses the injustices that debase the standard of living of the

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<sup>50</sup> For a fascinating description of Orange County from the point of view of the working-class, see Frank Cancian’s *Orange County Housecleaners*. For a recent take on the historical development of Anglo-Mexican@ relations see Gustavo Arellano’s provocative *Orange County*, which also addresses the right-wing political movements that have lodged the OC in the nation’s consciousness as a bastion of conservatism, despite its shifting demographics and politics.

working-class, naming those in power and their history of abuses as well as developing action plans for achieving a true democracy, one in which all members of society have the power to speak to, and act upon, their individual and collective interests.

This chapter measures the police discourse Mike taught to the young people at Barrio Center against such ambitions. Mike – who described himself as Chicano – had started a Criminal Justice Club during his tenure as middle school supervisor at this center. By the time of this study, he had begun his training as a police cadet and was returning to the center in a volunteer capacity to oversee the club, which met weekly. Mike’s club initiated the Mexican@ teenagers at this center into the discourse identity of police officers, a position at once productive and troubling given the oppressive racial landscape of this barrio within Two Cities. In what follows I argue that the police discourse Mike taught was neither a symptom of Mexican@ oppression nor a solution to it, but some combination of both, and that the language of police work and the identities it facilitated were sites of productive contradiction. Employing James Paul Gee’s theories of discourse and identity, I demonstrate how Mike’s club enabled the teens to shed the identity of at-risk youths and inhabit the identity of future cops, a transformation that secured their future within the linked institutions of law enforcement and the public schools. Yet I hesitate to describe this transformation as simply “success” because it occurred in institutions that continue to oppress the youths’ working-class Mexican@ community.

Indeed, the question of what constitutes success is taken up productively by Octavio Pimentel, who juxtaposes WEA (White European American) and Mexicano standards of success in order to displace the former and value the latter (“Disrupting Discourse”). I argue that Mike reconciled both sets of norms. Because he gave back to this neighborhood as a volunteer, he fulfilled a quality that Pimentel’s informants characterized as successful: being “buena gente” (a

good person; a contributor to family and community). Simultaneously, Mike sought middle-class status and wealth in a career as a police officer, which seemed to be what he had in mind when he said that education could help teens at the center to “be successful” and seek “something more” than what they could find in their neighborhood.

For Mike, this success had its costs. Taking on the institutional identity of a police officer (e.g. becoming a cop) necessitated a split from friends and family with whom he shared an emerging affinity-identity as a gangbanger, and it threatened to do something similar for the young people whom he instructed. Mike’s Criminal Justice Club asked the students there to speak as police subjects even as, I argue, he and they were hailed as potentially criminal objects. Mike and his fellow teacher were aware of this, and modeled how to think through this contradiction, guiding the young people as they took on vexed positions as officers-in-training in a society divided by language, race, and class.

To more fully draw out the social implications of the literacy practices at this community center I use the frame of discourse, as defined by Gee. He means by discourse “*saying-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*” (526, emphasis his).<sup>51</sup> Like the term “sponsors,” discourse emphasizes what we might call literate ecologies, those social and economic webs in which the acquisition of literacy is tied up. But discourse also suggests ideology, not in the sense of false consciousness but in the sense that speakers, readers, and writers use language to constitute the world through which they move and to position themselves in social roles within it. As Gee puts it, “Discourses are not just ways of talking, but ways of talking, acting, thinking, valuing” (“Literacy” 530). The notion of discourse thus allows me to link the rhetoric the students learn to the identities and orientations they take on with that rhetoric.

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<sup>51</sup> In this chapter, I consistently employ the lower-case “d” for discourse, whether referring to Gee’s umbrella term, capital-D “Discourse,” or to “discourse identity.”

Gee takes pains to depict discourses as tools to mark out identity, suggesting that those who would use a given discourse must also adopt the appropriate ethos if they are to be accepted as members of a discourse community. He offers the following example:

If I enter my neighborhood bar and say to my drinking buddy, as I sit down, “Gime a match, wouldya?,” while placing a napkin on the dirty barstool to avoid getting my newly pressed designer jeans dirty, I have said the right thing, but my “saying-doing” combination I nonetheless all wrong. (525)

To my reading, the point of this story is that the carefree drinking buddy will not accept the speaker’s overly fastidious demeanor. Class is in play too: the designer jeans do not match the presumably working-class bar. The speaker may be saying the right thing, but he is the wrong kind of person for that space, for his values don’t match those of the character he is playing.

In what follows I also bring to bear insights from Gee’s work on identity, which has turned from discourse as an all-encompassing category to “discourse identity” as one of four kinds of identities: nature identity, institutional identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity (“Identity”). Roughly speaking, Gee argues that institutional identities are tied to jobs, discourse identities to language and other signs, and affinity identities to group *practices* (“Identity” 3). These three are all relevant to Mike’s Criminal Justice Club, for that club was quite effective in getting students to recognize themselves, and be recognized, as a certain “kind of person”: future cops.

Following the earlier work of linguists Krashen and Terrell, Gee posits a difference between learning and acquisition. He suggests that discourse communities work not by teaching novices the rules of the discourse explicitly – that would be, in Gee’s terms, learning – but by allowing them to work as apprentices under and alongside those already fluent in the discourse in a process of acquisition. The Criminal Justice Club did the latter. When Mike taught the students

at the center to read, write, speak, and act like police officers, he was also asking them to *see* and *value* like them. He was, as the club's pledge will make clear, asking them to discipline themselves to carry out the law even when it conflicted with their personal loyalties; after all, Mike had them practice writing up traffic tickets for his own sister. When Mike taught the kids the discourse of policing, he was teaching them not so much to know *about* police work but to acquire it and accomplish it.

Mike's Criminal Justice Club attempted many of the same learning objectives as my poetry club: we would both explicitly familiarize the kids with a new discourse, law enforcement or poetics. Furthermore, we both drew attention to how we had been sponsored by universities in developing our expertise; we thereby imagined ourselves as college-going role models for the students we taught. Mike's cadets also did a good bit of reading and writing, and in the course of that work he modeled habits of mind that also happen to be essential to poetry, such as curiosity and analytical thought.

My poetry workshops drew on knowledge of the public schools that I had gathered during my years as a secondary educator and aimed to orient the students toward success in those schools. Mike, however, taught students how to grapple with the two local institutions he knew best, institutions whose influence on this street was clearer and more immediate than that of the schools: police and gangs. In Mike's club students learned not rhyming words but words to describe crimes and police procedures. When they analyzed news stories, they didn't look to diction for clues on the writer's tone or examine rhetorical structure to determine the writer's purpose; instead, they scanned the prose for probable suspects, and they identified the legal channels through which further evidence might be obtained.

Initially, I found Mike's approaches to literacy training troubling, not least because prison literacies scholarship draws attention to the structural racism and classism endemic to our criminal justice system. Such scholarship teaches us that police are pitted against the working-class and people of color. However, as I have indicated above, these were facts of which Mike was well aware. He had lived through profiling, and with the help of another mentor he began to teach the teens how to live through double-consciousness as a member of the law enforcement body that racially profiled him.

Though critical literacy and Chicano@ studies had trained me to see "police discourse" as racist, I came to see how it could be under Mike's tutelage, if not emancipatory, then at least critical. Additionally, I saw how Mike accomplished what Delpit holds as a goal for educators who would school the marginalized in a dominant discourse: "wrest[ing] from it a place for the glorification of their students and their forebears" (553). Even as he shared with me how he'd had to leave behind those from his prior life who refused to abide by the ways of doing, speaking, and believing required of police officers, Mike showed by his very example and by his use of the local dialect that he could achieve a "successful" career in a middle-class workforce (i.e. WEA success) without forfeiting his identity as a Chicano or his role as a good neighbor in this working-class Mexican@ community (Mexican@ success).

## **II. Literature Review: Civic Writing and Law Enforcement**

Mike's hybrid and conflicted perspective adds a useful counterpoint to existing narratives of policing in civic writing, narratives that often leave the voices of law enforcement officers out of the discussion, presenting only the discrimination and harassment that community members suffer at the hands of the law. In reading through civic rhetoric's sustained attention to conflicts between oppressed minorities and law enforcement, I have not heard voices like those of Mike

and JT (cited in the epigraph): community members who believe wholeheartedly in police work even as they recognize the discrimination that can accompany it.

Certainly, scholarship in the rhetoric of civic engagement has addressed the criminal justice system, particularly in research involving those already incarcerated. Thomas Deans's *Writing and Community Engagement* sourcebook, for example, includes an article by Tobi Jacobi documenting a university capstone course and other literacy action projects that involve prisoners. The same collection also includes pieces written "from the community," by incarcerated authors Lori Pompa and Kimberly Hricko, each of whom participated in prison writing workshops. In a similar vein, Tom Kerr's scholarly work offers a critique of the criminal justice system as it addresses coauthorship with the condemned, a practice with which he is familiar. Another powerful example of such work is Deborah Appleman's "Teaching in the Dark," which illuminates her own efforts to run prison-writing workshops that call upon the voices of those incarcerated and without agency.

This chapter speaks not so much to these prison writers as to Linda Flower's work in community-based literacy, and specifically to her uptake of community members' appeals to pathos in the problem-solving dialogues (see in particular *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*). Like Flower's dialogues, this research is an attempt to get at the "story-behind-the-story," in my case at perspectives on police work beyond those found in the newspaper or even in radical academic critiques of social injustice. But whereas I focus on the ambivalence of the police officer and community member who leads this center's criminal justice club, Flower focuses on procedures for developing and circulating critiques of racist police work. Specifically, Flower involves Pittsburgh's college students, mostly middle-class and White, in problem-solving dialogues with younger students of color at the Community Literacy Center in

Pittsburgh. They do so with an eye toward illuminating the younger students' critiques of the legal and educational institutions that limit their opportunities. Thus, when these dialogues do address police work, they use pathos to encourage both the mainstream/White college students who participate in the dialogues and the community leaders with whom they share the texts to take on the emotional roles of minority youth. In other words, the White college students learn to *listen* to the Black teens, and in so doing develop empathy that would urge them to take responsibility for solving the problems the younger students present. And Flower pushes such rhetoric into a political public sphere by circulating the artifacts that the two groups of youths fabricate following such dialogues. Their transcripts, testimonials, and informational pamphlets find their way not just into Flower's national academic publications, but also – and arguably with greater impact – into local debates over schooling, policing, and other civic issues.

A testimonial Flower passes along will help to illustrate my point about the rhetorical and emotional positioning such texts attempt. Written by thirteen-year-old resident Shirley Lyle, the testimonial is titled “The Racist Cop in My Neighborhood: How I Deal With It.” The point of the piece, as I see it, is to get readers to feel the vulnerability and outrage of a resident who witnesses racial profiling. Specifically, Shirley watches police officers racially profiling Black basketball players in a local park and is then asked by those officers to assist them in finding evidence on the young men (Flower’s *Rhetoric*, 47-48). Flower summarizes Shirley's story as one of “a belligerent, apparently racist public force routinely sweeping in on you and your friends, violating your developing sense of justice, and pressuring you to turn on your peers.” Note how the 2<sup>nd</sup> person “you” situates the reader in Shirley's point of view, or as I'd put it, in the “emotional role” of the beset and outraged community member. Flower then makes explicit that those emotions aroused in the “victim” are key to the story's impact, to what makes it “the story-



behind-the-story” rather than an outsider's tale. Shirley's is, Flower says, “a story of stress, anger, and vulnerability, coupled with a burning need to respond.”<sup>52</sup> The urgency of what Flower describes as Shirley's “burning need” to respond would similarly move readers from a motiveless space of indifference into some action in solidarity with Shirley. We are urged to fear what Shirley fears: harassment, intimidation, jail, possibly even violence. Such emotional resonance is central to “The Rhetoric of Public Engagement,” as Flower titles her study.

As I have done in the second chapter on genre, I will use the terminology of “emotional role” here to describe the stress, anger, and vulnerability that Shirley shares through her testimony. “Emotional role” emphasizes how the emotions transmitted in Flower’s dialogues emerge from people assigned a given status and social dwelling according to race, class, gender, sexuality, and other differences. “Black citizen indignation,” for example, is a commonplace response to “White police contempt.” Whether these dialogues succeed or fail, it seems to me, depends heavily on how much participants from divergent positions in society are able to (re) fabricate and take on the “emotional roles” of other social groups as they solve common problems. That is, these problems only become truly common through the dialogues, which involve groups within the community who are severed by hierarchies solving problems together through mutual and ongoing conversation. My ambition is that Mike’s explanation of his dual perspective in this chapter will present his “emotional role” to those who struggle to understand the role of policing and law enforcement in working-class, ethnic minority communities like this Two Cities barrio.

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<sup>52</sup> Heidegger might observe that Shirley's rhetoric, as Flower glosses it, welds a readerly community to Shirley partly by calling us to feel with Shirley her “vulnerability.” Heidegger, whose “fürchten” encompasses both “fear” and “vulnerability” reminds us that it is only possible when what threatens is drawing nearer and is thereby a concern (D. Gross).

Before presenting that perspective, however, I must pay acknowledge the work of Ben Kuebrich, whose *I Witness: Perspectives on Policing in the Near Westside* also addresses police work, and in fact actually enacts the process of dialogue, one that remains only an ambition for this chapter. After publishing the text, Kuebrich literally brought police officers and community members together bodily to talk about the issues raised in it. That dialogue continued a conversation that had begun more acrimoniously, sparked by the police department's placement of surveillance cameras on a street corner known for drug deals in a working-class neighborhood. Residents resisted that decision, and their voices are heard along with those of local leaders and of the police in Kuebrich's collection. Even in Kuebrich's text, though, the police officers who speak are – with one notable exception – explicitly marked off as outside of the communities they serve and do not suffer divided loyalties, as Mike did.

That exception is Lori Billy, who grew up in the home where her grandparents had raised her parents years before, in Syracuse's troubled Westside. Billy served 20 years as a police officer in Syracuse, from 1978 to 1998, and at the end of her career was involved for several years in community policing on the Westside. Because her Czechoslovakian heritage marked her as White, Billy does not speak to the same issues of racial profiling as Mike does. But she does understand how residents of the community might feel targeted by police. Admittedly, given that police officers, in Kuebrich's terms, "have to see the worst side of people daily" (145), it's not surprising that Billy takes a dim view of many of her neighbors. But even as she attacks local drug dealers and abusers as "shitheads" and writes off renters as "transients," she also suggests – using her own relationship with a mentally challenged neighbor – that living in a community and knowing the people there helps police officers become "a little bit more tolerant" and develop "a little bit more compassion" (144-145). When Billy describes residents who come to her for help

with more minor crimes, she is able to identify with their fear of the police. However, her fellow feeling has its limits. When Kuebrich sympathizes with residents' indignation at the surveillance cameras, and at her fellow officers' flouting of traffic laws, for instance, Billy defends the officers by explaining their perspective. Her "emotional role," then, while it bridges both sides, takes up the officers' perspectives more consistently.<sup>53</sup>

### **III. Mike's Path**

#### *A. Finding a Clear Path*

Mike offered his students a more ambivalent perspective, one rooted in his onetime identity as an at-risk youth and shaped by his current one as a police officer in training.

Mike grew up on the street housing Barrio Center, but two miles north. Both sections of the city are still today under the same "gang injunction," which in the name of safety abbreviates the rights of residents by making illegal many activities that gangs engage in, such as group assembly. Once when I asked Mike about how his neighborhood compared to the one that housed the center, he said, "It's the same." In the other interview he said that where he grew up was possibly even rougher, with more graffiti and alcohol abuse and a more pervasive gang presence. Mike said that his male cousins had gotten involved in that lifestyle, and he too was on his way. In high school he bounced around to four different schools, including the continuation school. He said,

I didn't really have a lot of good role models. Growing up in a neighborhood like this all you see is the older kids hanging out with a bad crowd. So, you didn't really see a lot of going to college. Or anybody really talking to me about college period. So you really didn't have a lot of

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<sup>53</sup> In sociology, Karen Glover's "Police Discourse on Racial Profiling" uses interviews with eleven patrol officers and a survey with sixteen more to uncover how police speak to the issue of race in a "post-racial" era. However, the dominant narrative Glover finds them telling – "White boy in a no White boy zone" – obviously speaks to their roles as racial others to the communities they police.

motivation . . . I flunked out my whole freshman year. I just didn't see the importance of education.

When he was sixteen Mike's father wanted his family to move out of the neighborhood because he saw that Mike was "messing up, getting into fights." His parents, who both work – "My dad's a handyman and my mom cleans houses," he said – were fortunate enough to have the means to buy a home. I was able to visit that home when Mike invited me to the party his parents threw him when he graduated from the police academy in the spring of 2012. The house is just a mile away from the Two Cities after-school center, but in a different world. In his interview, Mike emphasized the peace of his new neighborhood: "I don't hear yelling in the middle of the night. I don't hear fighting. I don't hear the cops at night. I don't hear the music blaring at every hour." Mike was happy that his sister was growing up in this new neighborhood, where she didn't have to understand what he did growing up.

But it wasn't only the move that provoked Mike's change in direction. A teacher at the continuation high school also tapped Mike's potential. "He was like us," Mike said of the man. He treated his students like human beings, had respect, and tried to relate to them. It was while taking this teacher's class that Mike found *Two Badges: The Lives of Mona Ruiz*, which recounts Ruiz's life as a "gang chola, high school drop-out, disowned daughter, battered wife, welfare mother, student, and policewoman" (publisher's description). The book offers a helpful counterpoint to the critiques of policing offered in civic writing, Chicana@ studies, and critical pedagogy; like Mike's story, Mona Ruiz's reconciles the conflicts in the emotional roles of criminals and police officers even as it demonstrates their affinities. The memoir showed Mike that law enforcement was a respectable outlet for him to seek the action he otherwise would have found as a gang member. "We're not really that different," he said. "We seek adrenaline, we play with guns, we look for drugs." With his teacher's help Mike completed his work at the

continuation school and returned to graduate from the school where he'd begun as a freshman, determined to become a cop.

In fulfilling that dream, Mike moved on from the community center where I had found him, joining the police department in a nearby city. But he returned to lead the Criminal Justice Club and to mentor younger students, whom he counseled against forming affiliations with those in this neighborhood who were headed for trouble. On the afternoon of one of our interviews, for instance, Mike noticed young men gathered together in the alley behind the center, drinking. He commented that the students “see the twenty year-olds drinking alcohol . . . the graffiti, the tagging . . . and they want to do that, they want to imitate that.” However, he said he guided the teens toward a different path:

I try to tell them. I shared my experience with me being at the lowest of the low: going to continuation high school, being kicked out of regular high school. I told them . . . I know what it feels like to not have that path toward a good education.

When he spoke at the graduation ceremony held for Barrio students, Mike explained that his college ambitions had saved him from life as a criminal. He recalled, “I try to tell them from my experience that education does benefit you one way or another.”

### *B. Detour and Landmark: Gangbanger Discourse*

Before Mike changed paths, he learned to talk like a gangbanger, a discourse that would serve him well both in his job as an educator and in his budding career as a police officer.

Mike knew “what it fe[lt] like to not have that path toward a good education.” And he also he used that feeling to establish his credibility when he reached out to kids in order to guide their life choices. He said, “I try to tell them from my experience.” One could say that Mike was particularly effective as a role model for the Barrio Center students because he took pains to emphasize his commonalities with them. If discourse is, as Gee says, based on “*saying (writing)-*

*doing-being-valuing-believing*” combinations (“Identity,” 526), then Mike convinced struggling students to follow his path not just because he *understood* them, but because he *had been* them and could still testify to that history by remembering his own orientation, in terms of values, beliefs, actions, and, I would emphasize, feelings.

It’s no accident, then, that Mike put the most attention into those students who seemed most like his prior self, most likely to enter gangs. Importantly, Mike argued that his language, which once allowed him membership in the discourse community of the gangsters, now allowed him to reach kids who were being apprenticed into that identity. At first, when I asked Mike about what resources he could point to in the linguistic repertoire of his fellow community members, he dismissed what he knew as just “slang,” “bad language” not fit for an interview such as the one I was conducting. But he went on to share stories in which he’d surprised students at the center by using this slang and thereby taken on the gangbanger identity, if only for a moment. Such group membership could be displayed in a single word. For instance, Mike described how, when he first arrived at the center, he used the word *hyna* as a token of his street credibility and thereby initiated a friendship with a would-be-gangster:

I remember one time this kid was here. He just saw me as another supervisor who worked here. His name was Piedra, really gangster. And honestly when I saw him, he really reminded me of me. And I remember he was texting, and I was new here – he didn’t know me. And I was like, “Oh wassup man. Is that you’re hyna you’re talking to or what?” And he was all like, “Did this guy just talk to me like that?” He never heard that from a supervisor. Hyna means girlfriend . . . He was like, “Oh.” And that opened up and we became really cool friends.

For Mike, such words were a means of identifying himself as not just another supervisor, another outsider who would tell the young students what to do, but an insider to whom they could open up, I would argue because they could assume a certain affinity of experiences and orientations, a certain shared discourse.

Mike took pains to point out that whenever he interacted with students using what I'm calling gang discourse it was a deliberate choice, that he wasn't *only* a gangbanger, a lesson he wanted to impart to the students at the teen center. He said, "I can speak that language. Talk, you know, like one of the gangsters if I had to. And [it helps] just talking to them like that, but showing them that you could be like that, but you could also turn that off, and be something else."

Talking demonstrates group membership, which is a way of being. As Mike put it, "You could be like that" by talking like a gangbanger, "but you could turn that off, and be something else." Indeed, we can all "be something else" by speaking in another way if we have mastered another secondary discourse, the vocabulary, intonations, and perhaps most importantly the attitudes (or the appearance of them) necessary to be accepted as a member of a given discourse community. Gee notes, "We all have many discourses" ("Identity," 526).

In another conversation Mike noted that switching in and out of the gangbanger discourse wasn't just something he did for the benefit of the kids he mentored. At family parties, he said, he was glad to talk with the college-going crowd and then walk across to the table with his gangbanger cousins and converse with them. Mike didn't want his choice to go to college to mean he would lose access to the discourse community of his neighborhood, though he admitted that some of his cousins wouldn't forgive him for going to the other side.

Yet, oddly, though his association with gang members as an adolescent had helped to bar him from his first attempt to enter a local police department a few years before, it had actually contributed to his eventual success as a student and officer. Mike told me that in the criminal justice classes he took and at the police academy, the class would look to him for guidance when gang-related topics arose:

[A] couple of tests that I had, they were based on gangs and narcotics and how to identify somebody, and I kind of grew up seeing that, so I didn't have to study as much. And I remember in my class, whenever there was a gang officer or a question that was asked they'd go, "Oh Mike, Mike."

Mike's experience in these classes suggested some overlap between the discourse of the gangs and that of the cops who chase them. That makes sense, for police who are fluent in the signs their targets use to communicate are more likely to understand whom they're facing, even if ultimately officers choose to "turn that off" and "be something else."

#### **IV. "I Got Them Thinking Like Little Detectives": Criminal Justice Workshops**

Mike had no interest in teaching Barrio Center students gang discourse; he assumed they knew it already. Instead, his club was about training young people to take on the institutional identity of the police officer, though not yet completely. Institutional identities are defined by the exercise of power, and it's important to note that at the time of this study none of the members of the club, Mike included, was invested with the actual power to act as a police officer cops (though Mike would be commissioned as an officer a few months later). Yet it was the existence of this institutional identity—the fact that people in Two Cities acted as police officers with all of the privileges and responsibilities of that job—that lent much of the appeal to the *discourse* identity that Mike led the young people in acquiring: that of future-cops.

So how did Mike acquaint students with the police discourse that made that future-cop discourse identity possible? To begin with, he shared forms used by police officers such as tickets for moving violations and arrest reports for adults and juveniles. The club read news stories about crime and examined a map outlining the boundaries of the local gang injunction. They wrote journals outside the club that reflected what they learned in it. The students learned about the legal processes through which evidence could be procured and suspects brought to



justice. Learning the vocabulary to describe these processes was key; in the club notebook, which Mike shared with me, I found outlined in 30-point font on 8.5x11 paper, terms such as “warrant”: “a document issued by a legal or government official authorizing the police or some other body to make an arrest.” The most common club activity involved Mike presenting these definitions and asking the students to use them to discuss a local news story about crime. Those crimes varied. I witnessed Mike deliver a lesson about the serial killings of local homeless men but I also found in the notebook incidents the Criminal Justice Club had discussed that involved police misconduct, such as the cover-up of evidence by a local police officer. After the club ended, I even witnessed Mike returning to help a student fill out a blood alcohol form that had been assigned in his criminal justice class at school (more on that class shortly).

As rhetoricians we can understand the police forms – the traffic tickets, arrest reports, and booking approvals that Mike brought in for the students – as specific iterations of the rhetorical genres that enable police discourse and law enforcement action. As such, these police forms elicit in those who fill them out a police subjectivity, an institutional identity that shapes one’s discourse and establishes one’s affinities. True, as Gee suggests and as Mike’s example will show, individuals can work within these institutional identities even as their discourse and affinity identities produce conflicts, but the *power* of the institutional identity is what makes action within that role possible, and that power requires one to interpret the world in legally legible ways. For a traffic ticket, one must, for example, list the code of the violation and list one’s name as an arresting officer. And one must fill out, along with sex, hair, eyes, height, and weight, a suspect’s race (on each of the forms Mike brought in as examples the suspect’s race was “Hispanic”). The police form offers a viewing of the world in which these categories are salient for marking out and identifying those one interacts with as suspects and criminals.

As Charles Bazerman and others have pointed out, genres are established forms of social action; they are, so to speak, the skeleton of the body of power. As such, they have their own motives and values, and by writing within them we place ourselves to some degree subject to those motives. For example, Anis Bawarshi demonstrates how the genre of the literacy narrative assumes as a truism the power of literacy to transform lives, and he suggests that even those students whose life experiences conflict with that conclusion find their narratives bending toward that resolution (Chapter 4). Similarly I argue that in the iterative process of using these police forms, students came to adopt the police gaze in filtering the unpredictable flux of life in their community. Specifically, they came to see their neighbors as potential criminals against whom they might bring the police powers they have practiced adopting.

The teens enrolled in criminal justice also began to see themselves as an affinity group, to some extent aligned against their community. A look at the membership chart of the club demonstrates how under Mike's leadership the participants imagined themselves already as a police unit. There we learn that "Squad 1" met "at 1630 hours" in the back room of the apartment. The two staff members, Mike and Gustavo, are listed as "Chiefs." Three of my poetry students were the "captain," "lieutenant" and "sergeant" respectively. But the artifact that best makes the case that Mike wasn't simply asking students to write like police officers but to think and value like them is the "Code of Ethics." Mike saved two copies of this code in the Criminal Justice binder he handed over to me for my study; each was copied down in the hand of one of his cadets. The students used impeccable spelling, and I quote from their transcriptions at length so as to demonstrate the seriousness with which they were asked to play their roles in this club:

As a Barrio Center Officer, my duty is to serve students. Whatever I see or hear of a confidential nature or that is confided to me in my official capacity will be kept ever secret unless revelation is necessary in the performance of my duty. I will never act officiously or permit personal

feelings, prejudices, animosities, or friendships to influence my decisions. I will constantly strive to achieve these objectives and Ideals & dedicate myself ~~before God~~ to my chosen ~~Profession~~ Role as a Barrio Center Officer. (Strikethroughs in original).

The last strikethrough and replacement shows the slight change needed to adapt police discourse for use at the community center, to render the “institutional identity” of police officer accessible to the teens, though of course the power of that identity would be deferred many years and granted only if the teens qualified for that role, as Mike had, by earning a college degree and remaining separated from any gang associates. In the pledge above, what was for the officers a moneymaking “profession” became a “role” for these teens. Were the subjects who took this pledge required to swear “before God,” we would say that the pledge required a commitment of their souls to the police officer’s role. As it stood, the pledge merely required that the initiate promise to remake herself, eternally, for the role—pledging to keep information “ever secret,” to sever friendships with others in favor of loyalty to the force, even to give up the guidance offered by her feelings and orientations as mere “prejudice.” One might say that the genre of the pledge exists to disrupt one’s affinity-identity as a member of a community (in which one is lodged by feelings that emerge from and feed affiliations), and to reinitiate one’s subjectivity in the police force.

In real life, Mike had, to some extent, given up his role as a community member when he took a similar pledge and joined the police department. “Some family members have stopped talking to me just for the simple fact that I’m a police officer,” Mike said. “You lose people along the way.” So Mike explained his estrangement from his cousins, who live in his old neighborhood and continue to associate with gang members. Of course, the teens who took this pledge did so merely in their imaginations, and clearly it didn’t carry the same consequences for them. Nonetheless, as an initiation rite into the club, this pledge clearly demonstrates how police

“discourse” asked not merely that students add police language to their existing vocabulary, but that they imagine how they might remake themselves by voicing this vocabulary and thereby realign themselves with respect to their friends at Barrio Center and others in Two Cities.

Mike was direct about the way that the Criminal Justice Club taught the teens to think like police officers, to develop what writing administrators today are calling the “habits of mind,” but for the police profession. Mike described this process as follows:

We try to take a law enforcement approach to it. And we actually try to solve [the case]. We would actually make a little board. What kind of evidence should we be looking for? What should we do next? If there's an outstanding suspect we'll say, “Who do you think the suspect is? Why do you think he did it?”

In the other interview, he elaborated:

We would post up different terms. I remember using the term of the week . . . something to do with law enforcement . . . like, “parole” and then I would have one of the students kind of explain to the group what it was. We had a little crime blog going. We'd talk about different crimes that would happen in the area . . . .

There's a lot of different things that the kids would see in the news. And I can remember them just coming up to me, [saying] “Can we talk about this this week, can we talk about that?” I'd kind of help them out understanding the process, what happens now. We've got to look for this guy. [I'd say,] “Hey what evidence do you guys think they'd use?” And then they're like, “Well I would use this or I would use that.” So it got them thinking kind of like little detectives . . . [W]e would write down evidence that was found at the scene. And how they're going to look for [the suspect.] And we would guesstimate when that person would be arrested. One was the homeless guy that was killing people. There was [also] a Hollywood beheadings one that they were trying to guesstimate.

Clearly, Mike's Criminal Justice Club taught critical thinking skills that many literacy educators would value, all in the real-world contexts that our research suggests makes those skills “stick.” He developed students' vocabulary. He urged students to use the media to take notice of current events and to suggest topics of conversation, thereby making the club speak to the events that

shaped their world and to their own interests. By getting them to understand how the information from those stories would be processed given police procedures, he gave them a schema with which to read. This meant considering what tools law enforcement might use to get permission to collect evidence (warrant; affidavit) and to make a case for the criminal's degree of culpability (*mens rea*). Thus, the students were not just passively reading, but reading for a purpose, interacting with the text not just to comprehend but also to analyze. This analysis required them to “close read,” to sort the news stories for specific details relevant to a given schema. Finally, based on their understanding of those details and the total picture they form, Mike asked the students to make well-supported predictions.

The teens also engaged in the *practices* of police work that for Gee establish the last identity category: affinity-identity. (Gee argues that this category is increasingly relevant in a postmodern society in which institutions and discourses, and the identities they enable, are ever more in flux.) It's true that Mike did not take this action-oriented approach as consistently, perhaps because it is difficult to enact the actual practices of police membership without first obtaining the institutional identity of the police officer. That is, one can't act like a cop until one has been commissioned as a cop. Nonetheless, it appeared that the teens came not just to talk like police officers, but to *feel* themselves to belong to that group (hence “*affinity*”), not least because they engaged in a few of the practices of police: handing out tickets and applying handcuffs. One afternoon, for instance, Mike and the teens filled out the moving violations together, a process local cops call “ripping bluesies” due to the color of the form, and practiced handing them out to drivers in the center's back lot, including Mike's sister. On another occasion, Mike brought in his police gear and showed it to the dozen students and staffers who were gathered in the center's front room. Mike talked about what he was going through at the police academy: the push-ups,

the tests, the drills, the hazing that was meant to weed out cadets. The center's coordinator, Ms. Evans, asked most of the questions that elicited this information, but students engaged too. Katie, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student, tried on Mike's duty belt, and after Mike was done talking he showed her how to use the dummy can of pepper spray on the duty belt and she used it to mock-spray another young man in the face. These actions helped secure Katie's affinity for Mike and her inclination toward police work, an affiliation that would bear fruit when she later led the club in Mike's absence.

Indeed, judging by Katie's example, Mike was successful in encouraging the students to take on leadership roles, his stated goal for the club. Mike noted that toward the end of his time there at the center the teens would run the club themselves. This allowed them to meet frequently, not just when the site principal was able to relieve Mike of his supervision responsibilities for the other teens at the center. After Mike departed, Ms. Evans urged Katie, who had been a sergeant in Criminal Justice Club, to lead the first meeting in Mike's absence. "Don't you think if Mike came back he'd want you to keep going?" she asked. Katie agreed. That day, she led a discussion of the case of Trayvon Martin, the young Black man shot and killed by self-appointed neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman on his way to the house where his father was staying. As I watched Katie prepare for that club meeting, it was clear that Mike's lessons had made an impression. She first looked up the case on one of the computers at the center, using the victim's name in a Google search and finding an article on the Fox News website which she proceeded to read to me, surprised that I had not been familiar with the case. Katie then successfully used the criminal justice textbook Mike had left behind as a reference, finding key terms in the glossary and presenting them to the other adult who had run the sessions with Mike. We'll remember that Mike believed the Criminal Justice taught leadership skills;

even if one grants that the leadership Katie showed in picking out the news topic and leading students through it wasn't a *result* of the CJ club—Katie had shown herself to be a self-starter in poetry club as well—it's certainly true that the club built the confidence in police discourse that was necessary for Katie to feel comfortable *exercising* those skills.

Mike's club seemed to have a similar effect on many young people at the center, but it also created a more direct effect that Mike had not foreseen, but that in retrospect seemed inevitable: the teens wanted to become cops. I had designed my interview questions to find out about the students' home and school literacies, the literacy activities they did at the center, and those they utilized in neighborhood activities like trips to the market. I also asked them about college role models. What I had not expected was that over and over again, I would find them discussing law enforcement. Indeed, perhaps what's most notable about the police discourse offered in Mike's workshops was its power to shape students' identities: when I last spoke with them, several of the teenagers attending the center not only had ambitions to enter law enforcement, but were already taking steps to complete the formal education necessary to achieve that goal.

Once I began asking around at the center about why so many students shared these ambitions, I found that Mike wasn't alone in orienting students toward a career in law enforcement. While some students were inspired by extended family members who worked in the criminal justice system—one had an uncle who was a parole officer, for instance—others were influenced by their formal schooling. Criminal Justice, it turns out, was now a class offered at both high schools attended by the community center students. One graduating senior at the center had chosen to commute to a local community college five miles away rather than go to the

closer school because she had been inspired by a criminal justice class at her school taught by a former police officer.

## **V. Race and Policing: Identities in Conflict**

### *A. Law Enforcement as Justice*

Perhaps none of the teens was more touched by Mike's work at the center than JT, who remembered sharing one of her daily journals with Mike, “a question about ‘What do you want to be in life?’” When she answered “police officer” Mike became interested in reading the journal, and she let him. This was a prime example of how literacy practices about police work played a part in students' emerging identities as police officers.

In the same vein, the following excerpt from our interview together shows how JT has retained some of the vocabulary of law enforcement as part of that identity, months after Mike's departure:

JT: I learned a lot. I learned a lot of new words. Yeah. Grand theft auto, I thought it was a game, but it means like stealing cars. I think we learned about assault. Degree. Oh yeah that you need a, a, what's it called? An affidavit, an affidavit, and then you need a... I'm think it's, I'm just going to say permission.

LL: Oh, a warrant.

JT: Yeah a warrant. That's the word.

LL: Why did that stick in your head?

JT: That's something I want to do.

LL: You want to go in people's houses?

JT: I just want to be the one who finds the clues.

With a developing social vision – JT was the one who said in her poem “I dream one day racism will stop” – this young woman sees law enforcement as a career in which she could do mental labor (looking for clues) to help rectify the injustices in her neighborhood. When I asked her why she wanted to become a police officer, she said, “I just don't like seeing people have to



pass through bad stuff that people do to them, but they are just too scared to get them in jail.”

That is, the victims are too scared of the criminals to bring them to justice. Later, JT elaborated,

“I just want rights for everyone, you know?” She slowed down to emphasize her point:

“Everyone, who, does, bad, they need to pay for what they do.”

What are we to make of these efforts? Partly, I’m writing this to honor Mike’s work in the Criminal Justice Club in orienting the teens at the center toward the mentality of the police. I find parallels between that work and progressive work advocated by educators of other students of color. For example, Lisa Delpit quotes Bill Trent in pointing to teachers who successfully promoted their minority students’ acquisition of dominant discourses. Trent says of those teachers, “They held visions of us that we could not imagine for ourselves. And they held those visions even when they themselves were denied entry into the larger white world” (549). Here at the community center, Mike *had* achieved entry in the larger world of the police force, and there is no doubt that his vision that these students could do the same influenced the futures they saw for themselves. His success supports Delpit’s point that teachers’ lofty goals, when coupled with their support of students’ skill-building, can be a sustaining force for disadvantaged students.

The material and social benefits for the students of a career in law enforcement are not to be dismissed. It is even worth taking a moment to honor the work of the police in keeping communities safe—not just for pulling guns off the street and risking their lives during violent confrontations between gang members and drug dealers, but also for completing the dull, daily work of haggling and cajoling local residents into compliance with all the inconvenient laws that grease the wheels of peaceful interaction. But this chapter also addresses how ethnic identities play into the literacy activities that staff members at the community center sponsor, and in a

society where race divides people, it's worth investigating what Mike's club taught the students about the role that race plays in whether one is counted as a criminal and or a victim.

### *B. Mike's Ethnic Affiliations*

By illuminating Mike's ethnic self-identification, I hope to demonstrate the complex role he modeled for his law enforcement students, not just when they explicitly dealt with race, but any time they engaged in a police Discourse that is, like all American discourses, situated against what Gilda Ochoa names as our country's "enduring patterns of exploitation, racism, and discrimination" (70).

Although on balance I would describe Mike as a Mexican American who aimed for assimilation, Mike's ethnic identification was complex, and his degree of identification with the students at the center complicated. In our discussion about his identity and how it shaped his work with the students at the community center, what Mike referenced several of the categories that Ochoa names as important in forming ethnic identity: family, traditions, and the experience of discrimination. Of Ochoa's major categories, Mike left out only Ochoa's last one: power-conflict. Thus, while Mike's career choice, his preference for speaking English with staff and students, and his opinions on Mexican students' need to "understand" mainstream American culture ultimately lead me to characterize him as assimilated, the total picture is more complex.

For instance, at many points in our interviews, as well as in the graduation speech he made to the high school students, Mike emphasized what he had in common with the kids who attended the center. Describing himself as "first generation American," the child of immigrants, Mike noted that many students were the same: "[T]hey're first generation here. And I have that. The way you talk to them, you kind of know what to say and what not to say. You understand, kind of, their upbringing." Also like many of the students he supervised, Mike spoke Spanish in

the home and was placed into English learner classes throughout elementary school and into high school. “It was hard for me when I was in the ELD classes,” he said. “To go home, speak nothing but Spanish. And then go to school, speak English.”

Culturally, this meant that he saw himself and the students as Chicanos, both linguistically – “The Spanish is a little different here than if I was to go to Mexico,” he said – and culturally: “We call ourselves Chicanos. We're not really like the Mexicans over there, but we're not really American.” Ms. Evans had minored in Chicano Studies, so she certainly would have used the term “Chicana” to self-identify had she wanted to, and Gustavo or Orgullo could have done the same, but it turns out that Mike was the only staff member to describe himself explicitly with that word, at least in our formal interviews. Part of that decision, I suspect, was that Mike saw himself as simultaneously Mexican American and working class. That, at least, is how I would understand his statement that he had encouraged his younger sister to volunteer at the community center to that she would stay “humble,” a word he also used to describe himself.

But I would be distorting Mike's comments if I only pointed toward the commonalities he mentioned with the working-class Mexican American kids at the teen center. For instance, when Mike said of himself and his fellow Chicanos, “We're not really American,” he swallowed that last word, “American” seemingly unwilling to fully place himself outside that category. And at other times in the interview, Mike stressed his difference from the students and argued that what his job called for was not so much identification with the kids as *understanding* of their difference, a term he repeated several times, as in the following passage:

[J]ust understanding and respecting that others who all come from different backgrounds, and being open to different cultures, different people, just that comes a long way, I think, as an individual. I don't think it's so much relating, or being the same as someone.

“You don't even have to be Mexican,” he said, to understand the students at the center. He proceeded to tell me a story about a Middle Eastern kid who had enrolled for a time in the community center, how he surprised the kid when he spoke to him in the Farsi he'd taken the time to learn as a child from an Iranian neighbor. Mike's advocacy for intercultural understanding falls in line with a “salad bowl” multiculturalism. That is, Mike speaks to “difference” and calls for mutual understanding, but even though he recognizes how wealth separates middle class Anglos from the working-class people of color, he does not choose to adopt a power-conflict perspective by emphasizing differences in the two groups' power or access. Whereas I would stress the regrettable racial and ethnic *hierarchies* in Two Cities and question to what extent Black and Latino students are *segregated* into underresourced schools, Mike spoke of people who need to understand one another's *difference* and described those same schools as more *diverse*.

His comments about a racist event at an Orange County school may help make the distinction clearer between my power-conflict and his multicultural perspective. Not long before I interviewed him for the first time in the summer of 2012, graduating seniors at Canyon High in Anaheim Hills had dressed up in Mexican costumes and conducted a “Seniores and Señoritas Day.” According to the AP, their caricature of Mexican culture included “students who dressed as gang members, a U.S. Border Patrol agent and a pregnant woman pushing a stroller.” When I suggested to Mike that this event proved that Anglo students needed to be educated to respect Mexican culture, he agreed, but noted, “I think it goes both ways . . . This used to be Mexico or whatever, but things are different now.” I take this to mean that Mike is aware of what Ochoa calls oppositional discourse, the sense that Southern California is, in Acuña's terms, “occupied America,” but he chooses a more multicultural approach. Perhaps it is oversimplifying things to

call such an approach assimilationist. But I continue to believe that simply calling for mutual understanding within institutions that were created by and are largely maintained by a White power structure isn't enough. The practical result of such a call is that White students who do not learn to respect their Chican@ and Mexican@ neighbors suffer fewer negative consequences than students of color do for failing to respect dominant (White) culture. I would argue, in other words, that to ignore hegemony allows it to maintain its momentum, to the detriment of the oppressed.

*C. Racial Profiling: "I Understand It Both Ways"*

For African Americans and Latinos, skin color is a significant predictor of many social and economic stratification variables including income, education, housing, occupational status, spousal status, poverty rates, criminal justice sentencing, and rates of depression.

– Faught and Hunter, *Latinos and the Skin Color Paradox*

If Mike's prevailing perspective was multicultural, even assimilationist, the lessons in his Criminal Justice club were not always so. The club adopted a critical edge when it took up the question of race and power. Given Mike's own experiences as a young man growing up in this area, the racialized way in which he'd been interpellated by the police gaze and police discourse, that perspective wasn't surprising.

When I asked Mike why he'd started the Criminal Justice Club, he said he wanted the students

just to understand law enforcement. Because law enforcement, here in this area, there's a gang injunction. So there's a lot of stipulations that teenagers have to go through. And a lot of, well, let's just say they get talked to a lot more by law enforcement than other kids in other areas due to the gang injunction. So, growing up, I had a bad perspective on law enforcement because of the way we were treated.

In a later interview, I asked Mike to elaborate on how he developed this negative view of the police. That day Mike invited a student named Omar to sit in on the interview. Mike told me

that Omar had been attracted to the gangster lifestyle: “I could tell he was not going the right path. The gang life . . . he glorified it. I would see him talking with . . . the wrong crowd . . . the gangsters.” On this day, Omar was able to corroborate what Mike said about residents’ attitudes were toward police:

LL: Do people feel harassed, do you think?

Mike: I would say some do, just from experience from where I grew up. [Turns to Omar]. I'm sure you can relate to that. You kind of get stopped or something, police just want to talk to you. Just because of the way you're dressed, who you're with.

Omar: What time you're walking.

Mike: Or what time you're walking.

Police, Mike argued, are more likely to find a crime if they detain and question youths that live in this neighborhood, dress in cholo style, hang out with the wrong crowd, and go out at night, presumably after curfew. Yet by owning up to these behaviors himself, Mike demonstrated that the role he once took on, the same one that Oscar now inhabits, did not necessarily equate to that of gang member.

Take that style, “the way you’re dressed,” as Mike put it. In another part of the interview, Mike said that it was to avoid being labeled the “weakest link” in his neighborhood that he adopted that style. This suggests that gang styles help to define the fashion of the area, even for civilians. Put another way, cholo (gangbanger) style is what is available to youth who would invite the respect of their Chicano working class peers—respect Mike argued is necessary to survive—but it simultaneously provokes the scrutiny of police. There's the double bind. Urban youth in Flower's problem-solving dialogues identify the same issue: what's simply “style” to the teens is interpreted as “gang style” by the law.

Mike and Omar’s comments indicated a similar dynamic is at work in the unwarranted attention police give to teens in this neighborhood for other everyday behaviors. Just hanging out

with friends at night in public draws law enforcement attention. Such attention adds up to a constant, nagging conflict with hegemony, and, for Mike and Omar, to a feeling: being harassed. It is no wonder that the Trayvon Martin case struck home for Katie and merited her attention in the Criminal Justice Club.<sup>54</sup>

Others in community literacy have drawn out how rhetoric, including poetry, can be used to articulate the feel of such harassment and respond to it. Korina Jocscon's *Youth Poets*, for example, presents an impressive poem by an eleventh grader she calls Jaime. Titled "Los Pacos Gringos" (which I translate as "White Pigs") it contains these lines:

We was only walkin downa block or 2  
We was hella rowdy because/Chile tied Italy 2-2  
...  
When 5-0 showed up on us!!Que wea!! [What the fuck!!]  
...  
They pinned us on the wall/and gave us a pat down  
...  
And they threatened to arrest us.  
!No les tengo miedo a los milicos de mi pais y te voy a tener a bo?!  
[I don't fear the soldiers in my country and I'm going to fear you?!]  
(118–119)

With this final line, as Jocscon points out, Jaime recalls his mother's *dicho* to liken police in the States to soldiers in Pinochet's Chile and thereby to argue that the neighborhood where he lives amounts to a police state. And as Jocscon also notes, the poem in both title and content launches a charged and irreverent critique of police work, venting all the anger that Jaime so prudently kept bottled in during the interrogation.

To circulate such critique is essential, but this study has a different ambition: to show how Mike voiced two affiliations, at times edging toward such critique and indignation but at other times adopting a police stance. As a street kid come cop, Mike understood the perspective of both parties in such situations.

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<sup>54</sup> At the time of this writing, the Trayvon case had turned into a national media blitz.

At one point in the interview, he took up the police perspective, offering two possible motives for such shakedowns:

Mike: It's just, some, I don't want to say racial profiling, but that's the only thing I can really call it here in Two Cities.

Me: Why do you think that happens?

Mike: I see it both ways now that I'm on the other side. One, you're trying to prevent crime. You're trying to prevent a kid going in the wrong direction. You might want to talk to him, talk some sense into him. The other way I see it is some opportunity to get some kind of recognition. If I'm going to stop this guy and he has something on him. [You can say] "Hey I stopped this guy and I found this amount of dope on him." In law enforcement you take pride in what you find in the field, your own observation.

Though Mike explicitly called this practice "racial profiling," and thereby communicated his alliance with raza youth who would object to it, in these comments when he said he saw it "both ways" he was talking about two different *police* perspectives rather than a police and a community perspective. First, the officer might be driven by philanthropic motives, by *empathy* for the teens' difficult predicament of belonging in a local culture that runs them afoul of the law. Note that this is the orientation that Mike made in volunteering in the after-school program and steering at-risk teens away from trouble. But second, the officer might be driven by his own institutional motives, by his affiliation by a law enforcement apparatus that builds within-group esteem and recognition by criminalizing youth, instrumentalizing their behavior as crime. In depicting this as an emotional role, we might call it a police officer's ambition and pride. With ambition, one anticipates advancement in the fraternity of police officers by adhering to its values; with pride, one takes ownership of the one's accomplishments and garners esteem from one's police peers.

Later in the interview, even as Mike continued to offer the police perspective on this racial profiling, he critiqued it by noting how police had profiled and detained him more than



once even when he had committed no crime. In speaking of these incidents, he acknowledged both the resentment he had felt toward the police as a Latino growing up in this barrio and the suspicion he would now feel toward those who occupied the same social role:

LL: Do you think harassment still happens?

Mike: I think it still happens. Sadly, it does. I know because I've been pulled over a couple of times where, they use the excuse of you know tinted windows. They go up to my car, I talk to them, and they know my situation, and [they say] have a good day. But in reality they see a Hispanic, no hair, bald, in a tinted window car, which with my training now I understand it could be a little shady. I understand it both ways, like I said. And I see things two different ways.

What's fascinating about Mike's perspective is that he saw himself as a suspect. Mike's race, his tinted windows, his shaved head, all added up to him being, in the police gaze he had taken on as his, a "little shady." In a neighborhood like this one that suffers from gangs and the gang injunction, Mike articulated how simply participating in the local (gang-influenced) culture made one "a little shady," in a language that also carried the freight of racism, in which darkness of skin, a "shade" of color, is associated with evil.

In an 1897 article titled "Strivings of the Negro People," W.E.B. Dubois noted that for a person of color in a White supremacist society, one's sense of self is divided by "double consciousness," saying, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." It is telling that this 19<sup>th</sup> century concept still applied to a Chicano man serving as a law enforcement officer in 2013, albeit it is not so much pity and contempt that Mike the cop felt upon examining Mike the Chicano, but suspicion.

The effects of such profiling, and of other forms of race discrimination in the criminal justice system, have been amply documented in community literacy but they bear repeating. The

data summarized by Faught and Hunter suggests that not just style or neighborhood but skin color itself plays a role in youths' life chances, for our society's racialized gaze, writ large, results in more arrests and fewer opportunities for Latinos of darker complexion. Prison abolitionists such as Angela Davis draw on such statistics in critiquing incarceration as "the new Jim Crow," emphasizing the role that race plays in distributing a whole segment of the U.S. population into the embrace of parole officers, judges, the courts, and the like. Under Governor Schwarzenegger, the state of California for the first time spent more on the prison industrial complex than on colleges and universities, and Brandt points out that the same was true in Wisconsin nearly 20 years ago. Such facts make it clear that the war on drugs and other legal frameworks exacerbate the racial inequalities of our society, and are continuing to have an impact in working class communities of color like the one housing this after-school center.

Yet this is not a story of police abuse of power on a passive sufferer. Instead, I would argue that Mike's shaved head and tinted windows were rhetorical gestures, that they performed identity and (dis)affiliation in a space that Cholos and police fight to control. Cintron demonstrates how Latino gang rhetorics in Chicago play upon the tropes of institutionalized power, so that the "Latin Kings," for example, redraw themselves as sovereign with that moniker. Here in Southern California, the shaved heads of Latino gangsters mirror those of law enforcement recruits and military personnel. Mike's shaved head thus signaled ambivalently to the police who detained him. He inferred that they read it first as a token of his gang affiliation; once he told them of his police ambitions, it signaled his membership in law enforcement. The tinted windows were also a gesture, one that more emphatically aligned Mike with the population the police were meant to control. The windows kept out the Southern California sun, of course, but they also kept out the prying eyes of police, and moreover, they overtly *signaled*

that they did so; when the darkness of the tint exceeds the legal standard stipulated in California, that tint demonstrates that the person driving the car is willing to flaunt the law.<sup>55</sup> Implicit in the tinting, and in Mike's use of it, was a power-conflict perspective in which Mike affiliated himself with the cousins he left behind to join the police. Ironically, however, it was his current ties to the police that allowed him to pull off this gesture without penalty; Hispanics with shaved heads and tinted windows who cannot flash a badge are unlikely to be told to "have a good day" and go about their business.

*D. Navigating the Justice System: The Role of Chicano Mentors*

Thankfully, the Criminal Justice Club offered a chance for the students to hear from Mike and another staff member, Carlos, about the issue of racial profiling. By explicitly discussing the role that race plays in police work, they allowed the teens the opportunity to reflect on how they could be racialized in their own interactions with the police, to consider the justice of that eventuality, and to form appropriate action plans for that event.

Carlos, a senior staff member who works at the regional level, is a 40-something father of two with a gentle, steady demeanor. On this particular day of the Criminal Justice Club, Mike began a discussion regarding the gang injunction, which Carlos helped to lead. I must admit that my expectation was that as an older man and an administrator, Carlos would justify the police perspective. Perhaps I had grown used to his conservative haircut and business dress and profiled him myself. However, it turned out that he too had been detained by police as a youth, and that this experience had tempered his support for the wider police powers possible with the gang injunction.

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<sup>55</sup> California Vehicle Code #26708 calls, for example, for any materials on the front windows to have "a minimum visible light transmittance of 88 percent." (Legislative Counsel of California)

To begin the meeting, JT read an article on a recent arrest of a gang member; the article included a map of a gang injunction that covers the neighborhood in which the teens live. The students held onto the map and identified a few places on it. Mike explained what a “civil injunction” was, and at Mike's request McCartney presented definitions of a few of the words from the previous lessons: “warrant” and “affidavit.” Mike explained how the requirements for these could change under a gang injunction. Carlos then asked the kids what they thought of the information that Mike was giving. One or two of them said that they thought the injunction was necessary to keep everyone safe.

Carlos then testified about a time twenty years before when he had been pulled over by the police. “I was in a car with three guys with shaved heads,” he said. “Two of the guys in the car, they had just come back from the army. And the third guy, his head was shaved because he was in football.” None of them had been affiliated in any way with gangs, so Carlos believed that race had played a role in their being stopped. He asked the students to consider this event in weighing whether the civil injunction would affect them positively or negatively and whether or not it was just. Responding to Carlos’s comments, Mike said that while most police officers were fair, some would do what Carlos had described.

I did not ask the students or Mike directly about this event in my interviews, so it is difficult to say where the students came down on the issue of the civil injunction, or indeed what their perspective was on racial profiling, a practice that obviously conflicts with the ideals of police justice that JT voiced. What was evident was that Carlos’s presence at the meeting enabled the students to hear from an adult who could testify to police-citizen interaction from a Latino perspective. I would submit that his personal presence and words had an impact that text alone would not have had on the students. And I would point out that by articulating himself as a

racialized subject in the community space of the after-school center, Carlos helped to create a shared Latinidad. That Carlos and Mike both shared similar stories about being targeted suggests that such spaces do necessary work for students growing up in a society in which race continues to matter a great deal in their chances for avoiding incarceration and pursuing a successful future in civil society.

Unfortunately, Mike's lesson was likely to be of more practical use to these teens than the college-oriented poems my student-teacher-poets and I led them in writing. The experiences Mike shared, my own observations, and statistics on the numbers of incarcerated people of color suggest that few if any of these kids would escape their teenage years without some conversation with the police; most likely, knowledge of the laws those police enforced and the vocabulary they used to do so – warrant, affidavit, *mens rea* – would prove useful in those conversations. In this neighborhood, police discourse was a major factor in how residents were understood by the state, and as a result in how they viewed one another. That is, Mike's club helped students to acquire a live discourse.

## **VI. Youth at Risk in the Police Gaze**

In this section, I back off a bit from the discourse specific to the Criminal Justice Club in order to place that club in the context of the overall mission of the teen center. In fact, taking an even wider vision, I examine the action of the center amidst larger trends in education and criminal justice. For the literacy activities Mike sponsored were enabled by the very existence of the center and constrained by what its funders and administrators understood as its proper projects. This section would thus address these questions: How was the center meant to situate the kids as subjects in this society and how did that situating play itself out in practice? What

were to be their fears and aspirations? And how can this situatedness be most effectively grappled with for those who would foment the after-school center's potential as a site of possible change and transformation for Latin@s and other persons of color?

To begin to answer these questions, I want to document the limited opportunities available to these students, how intervention programs pushed them off the streets and, perhaps uniquely for this space, how educational programs pushed them into law enforcement. I take a look at how tightly the teens were controlled in this neighborhood, both by the police who owned the streets and the center that directed their ambitions. I will trace one student's story to bring into focus what was lost by these efforts (independence, resistance) and what was gained (adjustment to school, effort).

#### *A. Schools as Prisons, Students as (Potential) Criminals*

There were moments when this federally-funded after-school center seemed like a detention facility and the street of apartments that housed it a police state, times when the only choices for the students seemed to be to join the police or be locked up by them. One such moment was the afternoon I witnessed the questioning of a young man who had been doing community service at the center that day as a condition of his probation.

It was just after the closing of the center at 6:15pm, and I was sitting on the front porch speaking with a teenager about his progress in auto-shop. A police car cruised by the center at walking speed. The officer on the driver's side eyed both of us along with the other teens who were hanging out on the front patio. Not used to being inspected, I was immediately uncomfortable. Apparently so was my conversational partner. He stopped talking to me and disappeared up the road. Most of the other kids from the center did the same, making their way

down the street or into their apartments. The squad car stopped at the driveway to the center ten yards up the road. I waited, curious and uneasy.

Meanwhile Ms. Evans and Gustavo approached the car to speak with the police. When they returned they informed me that the officers had questioned a young volunteer for violating his probation. He had been tutoring the elementary age children on the other side of the center during their reading time. However, because he was barred from associating with others on the street, when he had left the center but not the neighborhood at 6:15 p.m. he had broken the law.

This incident, it seems to me, points to the center's ambiguous role in the landscape of a neighborhood in which too many youth are understood as potential criminals. While in the center, the young man was on the right side of the law, charged with helping to educate the younger children. Had he been helping Mike or helping the students with their criminal justice homework I could make the case that he was directing the young students into a career in law enforcement, but since he was tutoring the younger students and not the teens it's fair to say that such an education would have to wait a few years. At any rate, the young "delinquent" was forced to attend this space; he was, in a certain sense, jailed there until 6:15 p.m., at which point he moved, not freely through the neighborhood, but monitored. In that way he was pressed to stay away from other neighborhood youth, some of whom are gang members already or in the process of becoming so. It may be that the young man committed some crime—robbery or assault—that merits such close surveillance. Given the numbers, it's at least as likely that he was arrested for petty theft or drug possession. But whatever he had or had not done, my being with him on the receiving end of that police gaze brought home something of what Mike talked about in his interview, the sense that one must choose two socialization routes in this neighborhood: criminality or police work. One can avoid one or the other but not both.

Pushed farther, the after-school center isn't just analogous or parallel to the carceral space, but an extension of it, a youth facility for youths who haven't (yet) crossed the line. Indeed, the sentiment that these centers exist to steer kids away from trouble, that they save the kids attending them from gang life, is arguably central to their rhetoric, or at least to the rhetoric of their public relations. One local center explicitly links its literacy education efforts to crime prevention on its homepage, where several pictures of the youth it serves are accompanied by pleas for donors and volunteers to intervene on their behalf. For instance, a picture of a Latino child looking shyly into the camera is accompanied by the caption "U.S. prisons forecast their population growth based on illiteracy rates in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade." Below him is an icon of a hand, next to which is another caption: "Help him stay on the right path."

At least these centers are effective in that mission, not least due to efforts like those of Mike and Carlos to orient the kids to their danger given the race/class configurations of our penal system. Local schools are not always equally successful. A few recent developments in the nearby Los Angeles Unified School district, which employs its own police department, bring home how schools can both function as detention centers themselves and actually direct students to "the wrong path" of incarceration by too readily delivering them into the criminal justice system proper.

Cagnolatti's "Battling to be Heard," recently published in *Reflections*, depicts the literal carceral spaces in his Los Angeles area high school. According to Cagnolatti the school houses a student body "mostly comprised of Black and brown students who come from the surrounding areas" (128), and it monitors its students not just with the patrol officers and metal detectors that have become ubiquitous in stressed schools but with actual jail cells staffed by police officers.



He writes, “Because we were students, it was assumed all too readily that we were subjects to be contained, restricted, and policed.”

Indeed, the imbrication of the criminal justice system in LAUSD schools has gotten so pervasive that activists in 2013 successfully agitated against it. At a spring 2013 community engagement event at our university, I spoke with a student from one of my past poetry classes who'd since gotten involved in organizing an alternative spring break. For a week she had led thirteen of her fellow undergrads in passing out flyers on Los Angeles buses urging residents to confront the school board over its disciplinary policies, which had allowed schools to issue “willful defiance” suspensions for infractions as minor as refusing to take off a hat or put away a cellphone. These schools too often criminalized students engaging in such inappropriate, but hardly criminal, behavior by handing them over to police. Indeed, the efforts of my former student and those of like-minded petitioners did help shift district policy: “willful defiance” suspensions and expulsions, which had made up 54% of suspensions statewide, were banned in LAUSD that spring (Frey).

Like these public schools and those I worked in, Barrio After-School Center was funded by the kids’ daily attendance.<sup>56</sup> The goal then was to have kids “check in” and log time in the facility. (Nor, in fairness, can I say that I did not do the same in requiring those of my college students involved in service learning to log in using the same log.) It must be stressed that kids at this center, unlike students in school, could leave at any time, and that they remained enrolled so long as they logged a few afternoons a week. Nonetheless, a critical literacy perspective leads one to question how such spaces discipline their inhabitants. I’m particularly interested in how

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<sup>56</sup> It’s worth remembering that under Education Codes 48900 and 48400, school attendance is compulsory for Californian students under the age of 18 (with a few exceptions for 16-year olds who have completed graduation requirements), a law that was given teeth in 2010 when parents were deemed liable, with a possible penalty of jail time, for their children’s K-8 attendance (Guzman-Lopez).

the center, staffed by caring educators who wished to nurture students career ambitions, nonetheless might—like the public schools—have urged students to adjust to the roles available to them as “junior partners” in a society bearing the continuing imprint of the white supremacist patriarchy of its founders (Wilderson).<sup>57</sup> I’m arguing for critical literacy, in other words.

Bluntly, I continue to be suspicious of the police discourse Mike taught the teens there inasmuch as police work urged these students to see their neighbors as potential criminals and to accept laws that support a society in which they have limited access to other professional paths. Put another way, in a more democratic society their schooling would equally prepare these students and their neighbors in more affluent suburbs to be lawyers, doctors, business leaders, engineers, and the like. It is unfortunate that where Mike saw himself as a college-going role model who urged his students to strive for something more, they saw his job as the only available one and judged that striving for something more could only mean striving to join the police force.

However, once I began asking around at the center, I found that Mike wasn't alone in orienting students toward a career in law enforcement. While some students were inspired by extended family members who worked in the criminal justice system – one had an uncle who was a parole officer, for instance – others were influenced by their formal schooling. Criminal Justice, it turned out, was now a class offered at both high schools attended by the community center students. One graduating senior had chosen to commute to a local community college five miles away rather than go to the closer school because the farther one had a criminal justice program. She had pleasant memories of the day her high school criminal justice teacher, a retired police officer, had placed a “body” and “blood” on the floor of her high school classroom

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<sup>57</sup> Wilderson argues that whereas African Americans are positioned outside the possibility of subjectivity in American civil society, “junior partners (i.e. immigrants, white women, and the working class)” enjoy some of that society’s benefits, albeit at the cost of their own oppression within it.

and had the students file and analyze the evidence of the “crime scene.” After they were done, he put on gloves and showed them what mistakes they had made and how such an investigation could be carried out properly.

*B. Getting a H.O.L.D. of McCartney*

Some of these pressures came to bear locally on McCartney, the Beatles fan of El Salvadorian and Mexican heritage; this is the same student who, as I described in the last chapter, stormed out of my workshop one afternoon.

McCartney had come to the attention of the Heading Off Lost Delinquents (H.O.L.D.)<sup>58</sup> program that school year because of her low grades. As two of the community center’s senior staff members explained to me during an interview, the goal of the H.O.L.D. program was to get troubled students with academic or behavior problems—particularly those who were drifting into gang activity—on track so that they were coming to school and earning passing grades. To do so, H.O.L.D. brought together teachers and police officers along with social workers and medical providers in large meetings with the families in which they set an action agenda that would redirect kids.

McCartney’s perspective on H.O.L.D., and on law enforcement more generally, shifted considerably over the course of my study, in ways that I think are suggestive of how students might feel being on the receiving end of such interventions and such rhetoric.

I got a hint of McCartney’s initial attitude during the Criminal Justice club meeting in which the gang injunction was discussed. One of the staff members was explaining H.O.L.D.’s anti-gang efforts when McCartney interrupted, shouting something like, “I hate H.O.L.D. That lady yelled at me.”

“Which one?” another girl asked.

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<sup>58</sup> A pseudonym

“She had blue pants,” McCartney said.

“They’re not all bad,” Ms. Evans said. “I’m in H.O.L.D. too.” McCartney grimaced and went quiet, and the staff member proceeded with lesson.

McCartney’s initial dislike for law enforcement applied not just to H.O.L.D., but also to Mike. Primarily, it seemed to me, this was because she and he got into disagreements about her behavior. Mike’s main job for most of his six months there was to supervise the junior high students, and as I experienced in the poetry workshops McCartney was most happy when she was getting attention, either from staffers or from other students—whether positive or negative it sometimes didn’t seem to matter. When Mike judged that McCartney had broken a rule or been disrespectful he had, on a few occasions and after consultation with Ms. Evans, sent McCartney home (or “asked her to check out” as Ms. Evans put it).

Like the teens Flower describes in her work in Pittsburgh’s Community Literacy Center, McCartney did not think that those disciplining her were listening to her side of the story. Indeed, she asserted that Mike had called her stupid and had lied about what she said to other students. I told her that I was sure if she approached Mike calmly and told him what she felt, he would listen. (In retrospect, I probably should have facilitated that conversation myself.) But the bottom line was that by the time Mike left the center to go to work for the police department, McCartney neither liked nor trusted him, though she dealt with him every time she came to the center.

One interaction made it clear that McCartney had adopted a stance against the police more generally, though whether it was caused by her interactions with H.O.L.D. or those with Mike, or by additional factors, I can’t say. On this occasion, McCartney had requested that Katie accompany her for a joint rather than an individual interview and I accommodated that request,

asking the two girls about their reading and writing habits. We were distracted momentarily from those questions when Katie picked up a Chican@ Studies book I had brought with me: *500 Años del Pueblo Chicano/500 Years of Chicano History*.<sup>59</sup>

LL: That's revolutionary stuff. You better watch out. [If] the police see you with that, I don't know.

McCartney: Really? If the police see you with that? You get arrested?

LL: No, you won't get arrested. They might not like it. They talk bad about the police in there, so.

[Katie giggles]

McCartney: [imagining]. Just like go right there, wait for a cop, and just rub it in their face

Part of what makes McCartney a compelling poet (and what made me sometimes question the accuracy of the information she gave me in her interviews) is her vivid imagination. Here, she used it to construct a situation where she was taking power away from the police by flaunting their authority. And while she was unlikely to understand the full implications of the book's radical politics (she was, after all, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade), she had caught on to the notion that ideas in a book can be reason enough to anger police, that they can be used as a weapon. Thus, I see potential in her perspective, her "problem with authority," for more than adolescent self-assertion. Civil disobedience is based on actions similar to what McCartney imagines doing with the book: standing in public to confront the law. I'm not arguing that McCartney was imagining civil disobedience, but I am arguing that her orientation at this time against authority was raised to higher stakes given the presence of law enforcement in the educational spaces in which she spent so much time: school (where H.O.L.D. intervened with her) and the center (where Mike, a policeman, told her what to do). And as a liberal academic, *I* can imagine a community organization effort that would direct McCartney's opposition toward a productive change, perhaps first by setting up what Flower calls a "problem-solving dialogue" not just between

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<sup>59</sup> This book, from which I pulled the police quotation at the start of this section, has also been banned by the Arizona legislature for fomenting ethnic nationalism. Again, see Planas.

McCartney and Mike but also between other students like McCartney and the school. That is, I can imagine a meeting where it wouldn't just be H.O.L.D. setting the agenda for an individual student who wasn't toeing the line, but a group of students speaking to the school about the ways in which discipline, even curricula, do not suit their needs. Of course, Flower is right to point out that teenagers need guidance in getting from the oppositional stance in which they would simply react and flaunt authority ("rub it in their face") to a problem-solving stance in which they see themselves as social actors with the capacity to influence adults' decisions with their input. Nonetheless, McCartney clearly had the energy for such an interaction, and the after-school center was in a unique position to facilitate it.

In real life, though, McCartney's story ended differently: H.O.L.D. brought her around. A little over a year after I heard her say "I hate H.O.L.D.," on the same day that I conducted my final interview with Mike, I learned that McCartney had earned an award from H.O.L.D. for turning her grades around—from Fs to Bs. "A complete 180," Mike said. The captain of the city police had attended the H.O.L.D. meeting where she had been recognized along with others, and local school board members and her mother had also been present.

Sitting on the same front porch where I had witnessed the patrol car the previous fall, I asked McCartney about what turned things around for her. It wasn't Mike, she said, or not primarily, though she acknowledged now that when he "told her not to do bad things" it was because he cared about her. Nor was it the intervention a volunteer named Alice had enacted through the Girls Club, which for a time had consisted solely of one-on-one meetings between the younger and older woman. Instead, McCartney pointed to the importance of family, saying that she was making an effort for her mother, trying to make her proud and not worry her so much. In the last chapter I documented the literacy interactions between McCartney, her sister

JT, their mother and their grandfather, and I suggested that we as writing studies researchers, even community literacy researchers, have not fully appreciated the importance of families in driving literacy. McCartney's story makes a point that ought to be more obvious: when it comes to students' emotional roles, whether they take an oppositional or assimilationist stance toward the state – here represented in all its facets by H.O.L.D. – depends on family and peers as much as it does on the state's actions.

At Barrio Center, once again, it was the law enforcement branch of the state that guided McCartney, in this case not Mike but another mentor: Ms. Evans invited a female FBI agent to visit the center just to speak with McCartney about her career in law enforcement. On the day we spoke on the front steps about McCartney's plans for the future, she wore a bracelet the agent had given her, and she had already spoken to the agent once over the phone. When the time came for McCartney to apply to college, the agent assured her, she would guide her through that process. Whether McCartney too will set her sights on the Criminal Justice program in the local community college and on Mike's alma mater or whether she'll choose another career path is anyone's guess, but should she decide to pursue a law enforcement career she'll certainly have plenty of support along the way.

## **VII. Conclusion: Listening for Truth while Partnering for Justice**

McCartney's story is one example of how the police and the school system combine to socialize these "at-risk" students into non-criminal social roles within their communities. I would argue that the discourse of law enforcement plays a conflicted role in this landscape.

I hope that the frames of discourse and ethnicity have allowed readers to better understand what was at stake as Mike taught the teens literacy. Whereas "teach" and "literacy"

might lead us to imagine Mike imparting discrete reading and writing skills through lecturing or exercises, I more often found him encouraging the students to speak, read, and write in the service of translating themselves into the role of police officer. That activity was always inflected by their mutual positioning in the larger socioeconomic realities of the community, specifically law enforcement's demands for law-abiding citizens. "Discourse" helps to keep those relationships in view, and to understand literate practices at the center as one means through which students constituted their social identities, identities that were partly shaped in the center but that were understood to translate to social and economic spaces beyond it. For the criminal justice club, literate skill was not, as it was for my poetry workshops, the central educational objective. Yet in some ways that makes the criminal justice activities more compelling, for they foreground the embeddedness of literacy in social practices. They thus reveal, more directly than the discourses in language arts classrooms—which often cover their ideologies under the fig leaf of "skills" – how literacy is always already tied up in social life, in Discourse. In shedding light on how the kids at this center were taught to speak, think, and feel as racially conscious police officers rather than potential gang members, I hope to provoke readers' reflection on how vocational literacies come to be sponsored, and for those of us who teach at universities, how we might encounter the off-campus students with whom we work as already embedded in such discourses. In my case, the critical race studies perspective I brought from Chican@ studies was by turns received by students and staffers at Barrio with skepticism, disdain, excitement, and fear. Each emotion emerged from students' and staff members' already existing relations with law enforcement, both as objects of police discourse and as subjects who were learning to use it. Those working in community literacy would do well to listen for such community takes on university discourses. If they do, they're more likely to make the university



discourses relevant to community partners, and to learn something themselves from the community members.

What are the particular costs and benefits of police discourse? On the positive side, I cannot ignore that Mike donated his time to the education of children in this neighborhood, to guiding them, in the terms he chose for the graduation speech he delivered that spring, from a “blurry path” to a “clear picture” of their life, and to pursuing their dreams for “something more” than the limited career opportunities available to them in their neighborhood. And as this chapter has followed the drift of critical literacy particularly and the more general radical slant of academic work in the humanities, it has ignored the considerable good that police work does in protecting peaceful, law-abiding citizens in low-income communities from their violent and transgressive neighbors.

However. To the extent that Elizabeth Martinez is right and that police protect private property however unjustly it is acquired, police work is not just a career that offers a way out of oppression, but a return to the neighborhood in the role of the oppressor. The same law enforcement that protects nonviolent citizens from their violent neighbors places *any* member of a youth culture whose style is influenced by gang style under heightened police surveillance. And statistics suggest that law enforcement and our criminal justice system continue to judge culpability for crime too often by simple skin color. Mike's experiences with racial profiling suggest ways in which he continues to find such a critique valid.

Yet a full look at the criminal justice club reveals he and Carlos discussing the issue of racial profiling and civil rights along with the students. The club thus speaks to local politics much more directly and practically than anything I did in poetry club, and with a more moderate political perspective that the center's students are likely to find far more persuasive as they seek

to realize their goals within society as it exists rather than how we might imagine it to be. Villanueva writes that the word revolution “conjures up frightening pictures: not acts of criticism, but acts of violence, undertaken when there is nothing left to lose.” But for the students he discusses as well as these, “there are things left to lose here. There might still be pie” (61); that is, though the system is canted against students of color, it will yet reward some of them, enough of them to make faith in that system something more than bald self-delusion. Freire enjoins us as language instructors to pay attention to oppression, to consider the word as a tool to denounce the present and announce a new future. Yet in less prophetic moments kids must also find ways to speak to the discourses that exist and that govern their lifeworlds, and to speak within them; as I learned in the two years in which I was an intermittent guest at the center, police work is one of the most evidently powerful of these.

## CHAPTER 5: THE EMOTIONAL LABOR OF OUTREACH

We are, at this point, being shielded from the reality of the classroom in a low income environment, provided with articles of why society has wronged these schools, and how stereotypes have robbed them of quality education . . . We are constantly being provided with a problem larger than the classroom, and [told] that we must embark on a hopeful mission to change it with bright and, from my opinion, naive eyes; however, not once are we told about the emotional aspect of it.

–Jasmine, HOT Tutor

### I. Introduction

When so many teachers burn out early in their careers, and others who may be interested in teaching turn away from the profession before they get started, it's important that we understand pre-service teachers' emotional experiences in the classroom, for these play a crucial role in teachers' decisions to enter and remain in the classroom (Carroll; Chang). This is particularly true for schools serving underresourced communities, as these schools often serve as on-the-job training for new teachers who move on to wealthier districts after gaining a few years of experience (Carroll). Only if we understand what's involved emotionally for pre-service teachers struggling to meet the challenges of teaching working-class, ethnic minority students can we offer proper support.

This study describes the emotional labor of a group of tutors in my university's Humanities Out There (HOT) program, tutors who were responsible for leading small groups of high school juniors through reading and writing activities in a mainstream English classroom at City High<sup>60</sup> in 2012-13. It is based on a discourse analysis of the asynchronous discussion boards (ADBs, i.e. online discussions) of eleven tutors whom I supervised, and on follow-up interviews with seven of those tutors—four through a face-to-face focus-group administered by my

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<sup>60</sup> A pseudonym

colleague in Education, Huy Chung, and three over the phone. These students released their writing and granted interviews in the fall of 2013, about six months after the conclusion of the final tutoring session.

Though some of the HOT tutors were English-language learners themselves, and had graduated from public high schools in low-and middle-income neighborhoods, all but one of them had come up through the honors track in those schools on their way to UC Irvine, which (as mentioned in the introduction) is a selective, four-year, research-intensive, public university. As a result, the tutors were largely unfamiliar with the needs of the students they would teach at City High. About half of the City High students we taught had only recently transitioned out of sheltered English classes, and all of them were enrolled in a mainstream (i.e. “college-prep”) English class. As a result, most City High students we taught did not have the reading and writing skills necessary for the grade-level or above-grade level English literature and rhetoric lessons the tutors brought from the HOT program, and few of them intended to go to a university where such skills would be necessary. Similarly, HOT tutors did not have the ESL and multicultural pedagogy training typically required of teachers in such classrooms. Thus, many of them did not understand how to scaffold lessons with the basic reading and writing skills their students needed to manage the lessons. This study documents the emotional labor the tutors engaged in while resolving this impasse.

I divide the results into two halves—Parts I and II—each with their own theoretical concerns. Part I, Section A offers an explanation of “Emotional Labor,” a theory I borrow from Arlie Hochschild and Rosemary Sutton, used in this half of the chapter to depict how tutors regulated their emotions and communicated with them. Section B consists of an analysis of the ADBs. In these journals, the tutors aired their frustrations and doubts and voiced their confidence

in, and respect for, one another. I consider how the prompt I created for the discussion boards shaped the communication through which these pre-service teachers talked themselves into a professional identity. In sections C through E, I then move into three case studies. The first illuminates how the non-prescribed emotion of frustration troubled one tutor's understanding of herself as an educator. The second addresses the surprise and puzzlement another tutor felt, but made an effort not to show, when confronting the educational inequality that structured HOT's outreach. The third discusses the burden of responsibility felt by a third tutor who shared the disadvantages of many of her students and empathized with their anxieties and hopes.

Part II shows how the tutors found ways to motivate the students by paying attention to their interests and responding to their ideas—that is, by showing care for them as people. Section A suggests that the small-group configuration of HOT is key to this success. Section B argues that trust and care, facilitated by that small-group setup, are essential to writing as meaningful communication; it presents scholarship on those emotionally-inflected topics. In Sections C through E, I discuss how tutors communicated using emotions in these small groups, addressing their enthusiasm (C), their development of trust through discussing extracurricular topics (D), and their attempts to convey authority while remaining vulnerable (E). Section F concludes the findings by demonstrating how the high school students reciprocated this care and thus confirmed the tutors' emergent identities as teachers.

Together, sections I and II describe a progression of emotional labor from frustration to care. In reality, this was less a progression than a recursive pattern, one in which—as Kolb's experiential learning cycle teaches is fitting for reflective practitioners—the tutors continually shifted their approach as events unfolded. That is, frustration could be followed by resolution one day only to be followed by puzzlement and frustration again on another day. But though the

story isn't "true" in the sense of reflecting the day-to-day flux of tutoring of each tutor—one master narrative simply can't do that—it does mirror the narratives of progress through which many of the tutors made sense of their experiences with HOT, and through which they recommitted to the work of teaching. It is for that reason that I title the two main sections of this chapter, which is a kind of bildungsroman, the "Hero's Journey" (Campbell).

My hope is that others engaged in outreach and other literacy networks that cut across class lines will be inspired by the structures that allowed this program's success, such as the ADBs. I hope too that they can learn from the program's shortcomings: insufficient tutor preparation, a curriculum of questionable relevance. Most importantly, I wish to open up readers' understanding of the emotional labor of outreach. "Outreach" implies partners who are initially unfamiliar with one another, high school students and university students meeting for the first time. The emotional aspects of this interaction are formative, setting a pattern for each group's future interactions with the other. If we on the university side are to prepare teachers adequately to process the emotions of outreach, to appraise and regulate them in productive ways, then it's crucial that we anticipate what those emotions might be, and that we listen to the experiences of those who communicate using them. Below, in both case studies and hermeneutic readings of patterns in the ADBs, I make steps toward that goal.

## **II. Tracking**

From the start, HOT tutors used the ADBs primarily to discuss a problem: City High students' apparent apathy toward the HOT lessons. This section supplies a structural explanation to that problem, one that required much of the tutors' emotional labor. I argue here that the

younger students' "lack of motivation" is natural given the racial and class divisions of the public schools and the culturally irrelevant curriculum that is offered in them.

That schools track, as does American society as a whole, along socioeconomic class and ethnicity is not news to educational researchers (Mantsios), nor is it surprising that such tracking creates students who are unmotivated (Rose) or at least read so by middle-class, mainstream White and Asian educators (Valenzuela). On the national stage, one of the most trenchant critiques of tracking is that made by the 1991 New York State Teacher of the Year, John Gatto, who traces the roots of American high schools to an educational system designed in Prussia by capitalist elites and forwarded stateside by their American counterparts, a system designed to train students first and foremost in conformity, and to sort the mass of workers from the few owners and to train them in disparate skill sets (Gatto). Jean Anyon and others have termed the differentiated training in such an education, which consists of drill for low-class students and critical thinking for high-class students, the "hidden curriculum" (Anyon).

In a society in which whiteness has long meant privilege, race often determines one's academic track. Kozol, for instance, has traced American public schools' reversion to a state of near apartheid in the most stressed urban neighborhoods, in which working-class Latinos and Blacks attend schools, some of them ironically named after Civil rights leaders, in which few affluent students or Caucasian students enroll (Ch. 1). Within schools, Black and Latino students are shunted into vocational and "college-prep" education (ironically named), and White and Asian students to honors courses.<sup>61</sup>

Of particular pertinence to the schools with which HOT works in Orange County, Latin@ educational researchers have made a persuasive case that educators and the curriculum denigrate

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<sup>61</sup> Concerning caste, which usefully foregrounds how racialized groups are oppressed in America, see my gloss of Villanueva in Chapter 3; for a take on how this tracking works in the Bay Area, and how culturally responsive curriculum can challenge it, see Jocson's *Youth Poets*.

and exclude the language, history, and culture of Latin@ students (see the Introduction to this dissertation). This happens both in the segregated schools of the kind Kozol describes (remember that HOT's first host district served 95% Latin@ students) and in integrated schools like City High, schools that do serve working-class Latin@ students as well as their middle-class White and Asian peers, but which often recapitulate segregation through ability tracking that in practice separates English-language learners from native speakers and low-income from middle-income students.

As the HOT name indicates, we sought to stoke underserved high school students' passion for the humanities, to view them as "hot," even as we increased their college readiness. But in the year I served as their English workshop coordinator, my tutors struggled to adjust to the fact that many of the high school students had a different agenda. Many were not interested in studying college-level work in their 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> period high school English class. For the present, it's sufficient to explain this disconnect as a result of the in-school tracking detailed above. The high school students we taught were enrolled in a non-honors track within a school that sent only a small group of its honors students on to universities like ours. Asked whether the high school students in the particular classes we worked with would be headed to the University of California system, their teacher at City High said:

I feel that they don't necessarily see it as an option, that it's just this entity out there that's probably out of reach for them, or maybe it seems intimidating, just the requirements. Because I'm in just the general education population. I'm not doing honors, I'm not doing the AP. Because I'm working with the general student body, I fell that they—some students don't even consider it.

As we will see, many of the tutors made clear in their journals that they had been prepared to teach classes like those with which they were familiar—honors classes—and that they were challenged to adjust their approach for this unfamiliar population of students.



## **II. The Teacher's Journey, Part 1: From Frustration to Empathy**

### *A. Emotional Labor: A Theory*

My concern is with the emotional dynamics of this outreach situation, with the emotions tutors used and suffered from as they struggled to understand their role in bridging UCI with City High. To get at those dynamics, I use the theory of “emotional labor,” considering how emotions figured into tutors’ conceptions of themselves as teachers and their students as learners and tracing how tutors used emotions to generate the high school students’ motivation.

Many educators have written on the topic of emotion in pre-service or in-service teachers’ training. For example, Sue Lasky focuses on teachers’ experiences of vulnerability both in their interactions with students and in their handling of district and state demands, and emphasizes teachers’ use of common cultural tools to create the connection with students necessary for student engagement. Conversely, Michalinos Zembylas approaches teacher emotions from a poststructuralist, Foucauldian perspective, understanding emotions as a discourse of power, one in which teachers exert agency even as they are subjected by forces beyond their control. However, Rosemary Sutton’s research on emotional labor has been the most immediate inspiration for the first portion of my analysis (Sutton, “Goals”; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight; Sutton, “Anger”). In making use of Hochschild’s concept of “emotional labor,” Sutton is most concerned with what teachers *do* with emotions, including the decisions they make about what feelings are and aren’t appropriate to feel or display. She investigates how those judgments relate to their goals for students’ academic achievement. To accomplish this research, Sutton asks hundreds of Ohio middle school teachers what they consider to be the proper emotions for their profession, and she categorizes these responses in relation to prevailing cultural notions about the control and display of emotions (what I have called “emotional roles”).

### *B. Becoming Co-Teachers through Supervised, Online Conversation*

I begin by examining how tutors used the asynchronous discussion board (ADB) required for their reflections as a platform through which to reconcile their ideal emotional roles with the emotions they actually experienced while teaching. These ADBs were located in our university's proprietary electronic communication system: eee, the "electronic educational environment"—an internally developed system roughly analogous to Blackboard). An example of one such ADB appears in Figure 3.

UCIRVINE | EEE

Hi, Lance David Bennett Langdon! [Logout](#)

Search:  [Search](#)

[MyEEE](#) [Toolbox](#) [Class Websites](#) [Help](#) [Workshops](#) [Contact Us](#)

Winter Qtr 2013 [Change Term](#)

[MyEEE](#) > [MessageBoard](#) > [High HOT Reflections, Winter](#) > [Lesson 4 Reflection](#) > [Reflective Blog #2](#) [Help & How-to](#)

[MessageBoard](#) [Posts](#) [User Tracking](#)

[Post a Reply](#)

[All message boards](#) > [High HOT Reflections, Winter](#) > [Lesson 4 Reflection](#) > [Reflective Blog #2](#)

Email me updates: **Disabled** [Enable](#) [Manage](#)

**Reflective Blog #2** Post #1  
 by [lance.david.bennett.langdon](#) on February 23rd 2013 at 4:15pm [Reply to post](#) [Delete post](#)

3. Abstract Conceptualization: I found that while I definitely have to approach these students differently than I would myself, the English classes I have taken in college and even high school have helped a lot. In high school my English teachers were pretty amazing; they were difficult but it really prepared me for humcore at UCI. I learned close-reading and analysis and college-level essay writing at an early start, and I found that I'm able to go back to the basics and teach my students the methods my own teachers taught me. The difference might be that some of my students aren't very interested in this while I loved it, so they might not be as engaged and desiring to learn. In high school when I studied *The Great Gatsby* I was held to a much higher standard and expected to analyze everything much deeper, but I do remember having to go back and think of the basics often, and work my way up from there. I'm trying to do this with the students at [UCI](#) and so far they seem interested once the analyses make sense to them.

4. Planning: I understand more wholly the meaning of outreach, in the sense that it not only means putting yourself out there and exposing yourself to different experiences and opportunities, but taking it one step further and immersing yourself in the culture of the situation you are in. For example, when I connected to the students and engaged with them they were so much more receptive and participated much more. This is applicable to almost everything in life; when you connect and relate to someone, they are much more likely to be amicable and receptive to what you have to say.

**Re: Reflective Blog #2** Post #2  
 by [lance.david.bennett.langdon](#) on February 24th 2013 at 9:56am [Reply to post](#) [Delete post](#)

I had a similar experience where in high school, my 12th grade AP Lit. teacher was just amazing and really gave us a taste of college level analysis/writing, which helped me grow as a writer/reader so much in a matter of one school-year. Like you, I also go back to the basics and try and use the methods that best worked in understanding the reading material; but, it is definitely more challenging to teach when the students don't share the love for the subject. I've found that however much the tutees may dislike the lesson, we have to show that much more excitement for it and hope that some of our passion rubs off on them, which surprisingly happens more often than not (from my experience).

Figure 3. Electronic Educational Environment (EEE) Screenshot

We'll recall from earlier chapters my assertion that genres provide help to participants in literacy networks with emotional roles. Service-learning blogs elicited defensive anger, empathy, or indignation (Chapter 4); poetry called for wonder and personal letters invoked enthusiasm (Chapter 2); journals fomented ethnic pride (Chapter 3) and police forms required a racialized mistrust (Chapter 4). Similarly, in this chapter, I portray these ADBs as a form of scaffolding for the emotional role of the caring teacher. Through them, the tutors could achieve the emotional benchmarks of teaching. Put another way, the comments the tutors posted on those boards acted as constitutive rhetoric, as speech-acts through which they created themselves as properly functioning emotional laborers, as teachers who felt what teachers ought to feel: care for their students, hope for their futures, a certain ironic distance from events that frustrated them. The boards encouraged these identities by offering a conversation space, one in which to share not just the normative feelings listed above, but also those that challenged their sense of themselves as tutors: frustration, confusion, disaffection. The ADBs were, as one tutor put it in an interview, a conversation space in which one could be emotionally "vulnerable" without being attacked. Remembering that we are never more vulnerable as professionals than in our first year of teaching, we can see how necessary some such forum is for new teachers.

Providing such an online discussion forum in semi-public, where every tutor could, if he or she so desired, read every other tutor's comments, rendered the conversations professional; that is, the conversations kept tutors oriented toward identities as fellow teachers. In Chapter 3, I suggested that when Mike asked the young people at Barrio Teen to write tickets using police forms and take pledges using police language, he guided them into the institutional identity of police officers. Here, I show how the ADB space did the same for these future teachers, allowing them to rehearse that subject position.

A few caveats on these results. First, if we imagine tutors writing privately—in diaries, say—or speaking to one another informally about their efforts, we might expect less sanguine assessments of their own teaching abilities. We might also expect a franker discussion of the political unconscious: race, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of power that shape daily experience in ways often unaccounted for by hegemonic ideology. As I noted in Chapter 1, Lester Faigley, among others, has noted that informal discussion spaces often elicit sexism and racism even as they forward democratic conversation. Conversely, this analysis addresses discussions completed in an online space, discussions sponsored by the institution and assessed by the teacher (albeit on a credit/no-credit basis). Thus, it would be particularly unwise to ignore how the teacher-researcher’s power shaped students’ discussions. To wit, when I once suggested that tutors record conversations in their carpools as a way of completing their reflections, they laughed at me and told me, in effect, I didn’t want to know what they *really* thought. Finally, I speculate that students who were the most uncomfortable with their emotional labor as teachers, or resistant to their identities as teachers, were less likely to release their forums for this study. The ADBs I analyze thus constitute a specific subgroup of the total program, those tutors who were successful in taking on the “occupational discourse” of teachers.

Lacking access to the unprompted speaking we might imagine taking place in the carpool amongst tutors who chose not to take part in the study, I explore the ADBs of tutors who did. In doing so, I keep in mind Bawarshi’s observation that students don’t write after the prompt, they write in the prompt. My prompts asked the tutors to emphasize their frustrations as tutors rather than, say, celebrate their successes. Take the first question from the reflective section: “What was the most difficult part about working through the lessons with the students?” Or the last

question: “Is there advice that you can offer about the [tutor]’s plan for the future?”<sup>62</sup> Combined, these established the subject position tutors were to take on in the discussion boards: members of a mutually supportive group who understood each others’ difficulties and were willing to help one another through them.

Accordingly, tutors took an empathetic stance in these ADBs and offered proactive advice. For instance, when one tutor wrote about his difficulty in keeping discussion moving in his small group, Leia responded by sharing her own difficulties and the emotions they produced: fear and self-doubt. She wrote, “I too felt that my groups discussions were bipolar. It was scary sometimes, because you felt like you failed, but in all honestly when stuff like that happens it’s not a failure. The best way to think about it is that it is the material that is tricky and not you.” By admitting fear and self-doubt, Leia exemplified the open, vulnerable stance that hooks advocates for teachers (qtd in Douglas). By offering a means to reconceptualize the situation (“the best way to think about it is”), she modeled how to re-approach the next day’s challenge.

Sometimes, the tutors’ mutual encouragement took the form of a gentle critique of the students, a subtle friend/enemy distinction that formed group solidarity by suggesting the tutors shared common emotions on the common foibles of their students, as in Jamie’s entry: “It’s always slightly amusing to see the students’ reactions when they’re asked to regurgitate what they had just learned even after they claim that they understand it.” Other times the tutors were more self-deprecating, seeking to boost their fellow tutors by sharing their own failures and contrasting

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<sup>62</sup> The prompt for peer-to-peer comments is below. The complete prompt for the ADB reflections appears in Appendix E.

1. (Sections 1 and 2) Did you have similar or different experiences or reactions to those experiences?
2. (Sections 1 and 2) How might your experiences shift, expand, or focus your fellow tutor’s observations?
3. (Section 3) Do you have any insights for your fellow tutor based on your other writing and English classes here at UCI or at your high school?
4. (Section 4) Is there advice that you can offer about the person’s plan for the future?

them with their peers' successes, as with Leia's comment: "I am glad you had a great discussion, for me it was a bit tough, because I too had students who were really soft spoken, or did not want to say anything at all." Clearly, the discussion space allowed tutors to share that they hadn't met the feeling and acting goals that they had set for themselves. They thereby established an affective community in which they boosted one another's morale as they faced up to the demanding work of the tutoring sessions.

In some ways the ADBs for this course parallel other online social networks; let us take the example of mommy blogs. Both that genre and this one allow the writer to emerge from what can be a solitary, difficult experience and to communicate with others who have shared that experience, thereby generating a discourse community. In both cases, participants reach affective benchmarks, such as the feeling of self-efficacy. Both are, in a sense, "writing to learn" genres. In these ADBs, new tutors figure out how to deal with students even as they write about those students. Through these boards, participants didn't just relay existing affect; they generated an affective community. Put another way, the prompts for the ADB reflections facilitate the tutors' "deep acting," in which the tutors reorient themselves to communicate the normative emotions of enthusiasm and joy and to adopt the normative ethical stance of caring. Whereas tutoring in the small groups could be frustrating and identity destabilizing, the ADBs allowed for teaching to become an intersubjective experience in which tutors found ways to reach these emotional and ethical norms, both by conveying empathy for students and for one another and by encouraging one other to support—both emotionally and cognitively—their students' learning.

This is not to say that only in such discussion boards did the tutors' mutual support take place. On the contrary, when Dee found herself facing the challenges that I present in the next case study, she turned to her fellow tutors for help as soon as she could, in the few minutes

between classes. But she felt assured enough of her tutors' trust also to communicate that event in the discussion boards, in which she described her trial as an "out of body experience" in which "everything was spiraling uncontrollably downward" and she was "left feeling very discouraged," but also described how she was able to reorient herself by "consulting with [her] fellow tutors" during passing period. Afterwards she reported: "I felt a reassurance that I was not alone in having had difficulty."

The whole point of the discussion boards, arguably, was to formalize such discussions, and thereby to reassure the tutors that they were not alone, or rather, that they weren't linked *only* to the students whom they taught, but also to each other. I am not surprised that other researchers have found such discussion spaces to be essential to the training of new teachers (Ajayi "Asynchronous"; Ajayi "An Emploration"; Hutchison and Colwell; Ebenezer et al.). For the particular disorientations of outreach tutoring, these boards are wonderful instruments for constructing the confidence, humor, and commitment needed to engage disenfranchised students in the literacies they would need if they were to one day attend universities like ours.

### *C. Dee's Trials: Despondency, Frustration, and Shame*

While I had anticipated tutors' difficulties (hence the discussion prompts), I had not expected that the particular difficulty the tutors would comment so consistently on would be their tutees' unwillingness to engage with the curriculum. Indeed, this was a prevailing theme of the ADBs, with tutors consistently describing the students as unmotivated and by turns throwing up their hands, showing a brave face, blaming themselves despairingly, and trading classroom management techniques and even inspirational speeches. Of course, not all of the high school students were disengaged from the HOT activities, but enough of them were to warrant this investigation of how tutors "dealt with it," emotionally and rhetorically.



How to begin to describe the tutors' emotional labor within such a framework? As we will see in this first case study, one part of that labor was overcoming their own despondency at students' lack of interest. Dee wrote,

In their confusion at my instructions, I noticed that the students were starting to lose focus. They would turn to the person next to and behind them. Even when I told them to stay focused and that soon class would be over, they began to fidget around in their seats and to blatantly hold conversations in front of me as I started [sic] in disbelief. What happened to my well-behaved students? Had I not been supportive enough of them? I felt very disheartened with the nonchalant behaviors of my Period 5.

To overcome her despondency, Dee had to think differently about the causes of the students' unmotivated behavior. Accordingly, this story begins, "In their confusion at my instructions." Because she was confused about the material, so were her students; thus, they began socializing. The rest of the above entry supports the notion that responsibility for the students' inattention lay with Dee. Dee, for instance, explains that she hadn't "been supportive enough," in which support was cognitive (clear instructions) and, perhaps, emotional (encouragement). By taking the blame, she rendered herself willing to re-approach the learning situation and provide more support.

But Dee found herself unable to solve her problem by providing more support. As she tells the story, after a brief respite during which students listened to her describe the parts of an analytical paragraph, they relapsed into inattention once more. It was only after this second attempt, Dee relates, that she communicated two new emotions: frustration and hurt feelings.

Dee wrote:

After repeated attempts at regaining their attention, my patience was worn thin. In my frustration, I told them that the exercises would prove to be invaluable to them when it came time to writing their essays and I stated that my feelings were hurt that they did not value my time for I valued theirs very much.

First, let's examine Dee's frustration. At this point in her story, it's indeterminate whether or not Dee is, in retrospect, judging that her frustration was warranted and that the students were to blame for their own inattention. "*In my frustration*" might be a kind of confession to the reader of this discussion post, an owning up to being overcome by an emotion over which Dee feels she ought to have had control. Or it might be that Dee has already reached the judgment that she had done all she was obligated to do as a teacher and that students were to blame, thus making the frustration appropriate. That would be supported by the sentence that followed the paragraph above: "At this, they began their work once more." This suggests that Dee's emotional communication worked; it brought students into compliance. Here we might remember Aristotle as glossed by Averill: anger enforces standards of conduct. Though Dee's reflections in the follow-up interview suggest that she ultimately found her feeling of frustration unsettling, her attitude at the moment of writing the blog is, judging by her phrasing, less decided.

However she felt about communicating frustration, Dee noted in the follow-up interview that she definitely regretted communicating her hurt feelings:

I felt like, "Wow! I can't believe how that actually came out. I can't believe I told them how my feelings were hurt." . . . I was left feeling very vulnerable. . . I'm a very reserved person when it comes to my feeling and I don't reveal them to strangers or people that I've only known for a couple of months. And I only met with them [the tutees] once a week, and I just thought, "Oh my gosh! The whole secret is out about myself." And I was frustrated.

As we can see, it's not just as a teacher that Dee values emotional reserve.<sup>63</sup> As a rule, she doesn't reveal her feelings to strangers, and this "display-rule" carries over into her understanding of the proper feelings to display as a teacher. The metaphor Dee settles on,

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<sup>63</sup> Dee's statement points to an area of future research, the normative display rules for these tutors *outside* of this teaching activity; one could look for patterns based on gender, race, and other factors, and consider how those emotional rules prepared tutors' differently for the emotional labor of teaching.

communicating emotions as telling a secret, indeed the “whole secret” of her identity, points to her understanding of emotions as internal and private, not subject to discussion. These “hurt feelings,” were particularly so, for they left Dee uncomfortably “vulnerable,” a position I’ll discuss later with reference to other tutors’ experiences. And they made her frustrated, with herself this time, for having put herself in that vulnerable position.

This brings us to the next point, how communicating these initial emotions in turn prompted subsequent emotions that had to do with whether or not Dee judged those initial emotions appropriate. We see this conflict begin in this excerpt from the ADB, in which Dee turns on herself in the final sentence:

At this, they began their work once more, but soon their eyes began to glaze over and they reverted to engaging in conversations with their peers. At this point, I began to ruminate why I should even bother? If they were not willing to help themselves, why should I waste my efforts and time to try to convince them otherwise? *I began to think of myself as a bad tutor in thinking these thoughts.* (emphasis mine)

Clearly, Dee had by this point stopped taking responsibility for the students’ difficulties and begun to blame them. But that judgment, in turn, made her feel ashamed. Indeed, both frustration and shame, Dee revealed in a follow-up interview, were combined in her statement, “I began to think of myself as a bad tutor in thinking these thoughts.” I argue that Dee’s explanation of this feeling in terms of both frustration and shame points to two separate theoretical models of the emotions, both at work in her learning to be a tutor.

The first emotional model pertains to “display rules” and “surface acting.” This theory shows us that Dee felt like a bad tutor because she hadn’t conveyed to the students the calm, professional demeanor required of good teachers. She said as much when I interviewed her about the blog:

T: I think why I felt like a bad tutor . . . [is] that I let it be known, my own personal feelings of frustration there . . . And I think a good tutor would probably keep it inside and still maintain a composure, without letting it be known that they were frustrated.

LL: I see . . . Why do you think that would be better?

T: I guess it's kind of like a professionalism that I really believe in. That teachers should maintain their—should be professional at all times.

Rosemary Sutton finds that teachers often down-regulate the display of negative emotions because they view the display of such emotions as unprofessional. Dee's response shows that she agrees with many of the teachers Sutton interviewed about emotional displays in teaching. Dee's description of her feelings as "personal" and her regret for not keeping her composure show that even as a new teacher she has internalized the model of cool professionalism. At least at this moment in the interview, Dee believes that teachers ought to remain calm, and that her own communication of frustration was a loss of control, a loss of professionalism that signaled she was not fit to be a teacher.

But it was also evident from other comments Dee made that it's not just her violation of the display rules but also her very feelings that bothered her. This is an important distinction. The problem isn't that she'd *shown* the feeling, but that she'd *had* the feeling. The problem was that she had even felt frustrated with the students. The problem is one of identity: she hadn't been feeling what a good tutor ought to have felt, and thus, she was a "bad tutor," even if she'd wanted to be a good one. Put another way, Dee wasn't just frustrated at herself for showing frustration; she was also ashamed of the hopelessness that followed her failed attempts to get the students' attention. As she explained it in the interview, "I didn't mean to call myself a bad tutor, but I just it's because *I felt bad that I had those thoughts* of frustration and I kind of wanted to give up" (emphasis mine).

The theory of “emotional dissonance” (Jansz and Timmers) gets at the mixed emotions at work in Dee’s experience of shame. It argues that in situations like Dee’s, one’s immediate, reactive emotion (here, frustration) is followed by a secondary emotion that pertains to the actor’s self-conception (here, shame). That is, as becomes clear in her interview, Dee wished to understand herself as a certain kind of person, a “good tutor,” an identity that required her not just to “maintain a composure” (a display rule) but also to retain faith that her efforts with the students would pay off with student learning (a feeling rule).

Clearly, someone who understands herself as a “bad tutor” is unlikely to remain in that position indefinitely. She will either need to change her appraisal of what constitutes the emotions of a good tutor (think differently), or change the emotions themselves (feel differently, through thinking differently of herself, the students, or the curriculum through which they interact). Either move would allow her self-concept to match her existing professional ideal. We can see in this ADB how Dee had begun to do all of these things.

In the follow-up interview she further pursued that project, reconsidering when it is appropriate for a teacher to communicate emotions. Almost as soon as Dee said she’d felt like a bad tutor because she showed her anger, she reconsidered in light of her *own* experience as a student, when she had experienced a (male) professor’s display of frustration at students who used electronics during his lecture. Reflecting on this model, Dee changed her mind, saying, “Sometimes I feel like students need to be, teachers need to be honest with their students. Because if teachers don’t tell students that they expect respect, then students won’t give it to them.” Interestingly, Dee was able to dispel the dissonance she’d felt earlier.

Yet I must also note that of the students I interviewed, only Dee has chosen not to pursue education in one form or another as a career (she currently works in finance). It may be

that Dee was amongst those we surveyed anonymously who said that after participating in HOT they were *less* likely to go into education.<sup>64</sup> If so, I suspect that Dee's frustration over her inability to enact what she understood to be the appropriate feelings for a teacher factored into her decision. Perhaps in the end, and despite the ADBs, teaching just hadn't felt right.

It is tempting to accept Dee's judgment as inevitable, to argue that only some people—extroverts perhaps—are suited to teaching, or at least to outreach. But I prefer to think that the conditions that led to Dee's decision constitute a fault of this and other common pre-service teaching programs: the under-recognition of the affective domain, and the consequent neglect of instruction that addresses it. Dee's ADBs and interviews attest that affect is anything but peripheral to the question of whether or not students choose to do their work and whether or not teachers feel successful at theirs. Yet HOT is not alone in underemphasizing the emotional labor teaching requires (see also Sutton, "Goals"). Many pre-service teaching programs would benefit from peer-to-peer and peer-to-instructor discussions of the full range of teachers' emotions: joy, frustration, ennui, guilt, compassion, and so on. Teachers in training would benefit from discussing what happens when these emotions are displayed or concealed, and what labor is involved in the attempt to display or conceal them. They would benefit from knowing that hopelessness and frustration are common reactions to student disengagement, and from thinking of ways to use those emotions. They could learn that in certain situations it's useful to assign blame to the curriculum, or to classroom conditions, rather than to themselves and their tutors. With the right training, teachers would have the chance to think through in advance what would happen if they were to admit, as Dee did, that students had hurt their feelings. Perhaps most

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<sup>64</sup> In the anonymous surveys I administered before and after the quarter, I asked the tutors to rate on a Likert scale how likely they were to go into a career in education. Post-HOT answers were slightly higher (3.85 vs. 3.65 on a scale of 1 to 5), but the difference was not significant ( $p=.25$ ). Either HOT had no impact on undergraduates' decisions about becoming educators or, as I prefer to think, HOT pushed as many people into education as it pushed out.

importantly, they'd have the chance to consider how the display of emotions—enthusiasm, frustration, hurt feelings, and so on—fits their own understanding of proper decorum in general and of teaching decorum in particular; they could consider how such a display would or would not fit their own teaching styles. Making space for the discussion of such topics, for scholarship about emotional communication, for case-studies demonstrating emotional rhetorics in action, would no doubt enhance our ability to retain talented young teachers like Dee. Given our society's persistent inequalities and the ever-rising literacy expectations of today's economy (Brandt), we desperately need people skilled in the labor of literacy outreach, both intellectually and emotionally.

*D. Crossing Tracks: Chelsea's Surprise and Reappraisal*

This section moves from Dee to Chelsea, offering her emotional performance as a model for how students of privilege can open themselves up to difference when teaching working-class Latin@ students (or students from any disempowered and underresourced group) in an outreach context. This section explores the role of the emotion of surprise, or wonder, in tutors' nascent understanding of outreach. One way to understand the role of surprise in prompting new thinking is to do what I do here, trace it through the stages of wonder and recognition (re-cognition), and to echo Aristotle's understanding of emotion as that which "moves us in our judgment" during that process. First, I'll address the secondary students' literacy needs through the eyes of the tutors, and the tutors' disoriented response to them. Then, I'll demonstrate how, by not displaying surprise and by staying with the desire to understand a rival perspective, Chelsea expanded her thinking and thereby created a space where students were engaged.

Neither in the recruiting nor in the practicum had I stressed that we would be teaching in a working-class neighborhood, though I had mentioned that the classes we'd be teaching were not honors classes. Still, the tutors had expected the students they taught would be as skilled in academics as they had been by their own junior year in high school. However, as the tutors led their students through small-group discussions of Jefferson and Thoreau, Miller and Fitzgerald, they found that the students did have different needs and desires. They needed help with the basics: spelling and decoding of 11<sup>th</sup> grade vocabulary, pronunciation of these new words and, perhaps most importantly and most difficult to teach, an understanding of the complicated patterns of syntax through which these authors drew relationships between phrases and clauses. Put simply, we didn't have time to break down more than a few sentences of such prose in one class period. That likely explains why, at the end of the quarter, the high school students cited "reading" and "confusing material" as the two components of HOT they liked least.

More importantly for the purposes of this study, which focuses on the tutors' experiences rather than the tutees', many of our tutors found themselves disoriented in guiding students through these difficulties. Juliana wrote,

I was a bit caught off guard this past week when I noticed spelling mistakes on the students' papers that would be more common among elementary school students rather than among high-schoolers; mistakes such as spelling "know" as "no", spelling "afraid" with two "f's", "describe" as "discribe"... to point out a few, not to mention a lack of coherence in sentence formation.

The other tutors weren't as specific as Juliana in cataloging the high school students' difficulties in mastering mechanics; instead, they made more general statements that these students demonstrated lower skills than had they and their peers in high school. Not many offered socioeconomic class as an explanation for this education gap, but a few did. Take Dee, whose previous experience tutoring was with students at her own junior high. Those students, she



explained “were from happier homes if you will. They were from families that were a little more affluent, families that were a little bit more supportive of them than the students at City High.”

In orienting themselves, however, it was the ability-tracking explanation, rather than class or race, through which the tutors more often explained the education gap. This was true for all of the tutors, including those who stated during the follow-up interviews that they too had attended underresourced schools, but in the honors track. Meg put it most simply: “In general, the lessons that we’ve been doing with the kids are much easier than the classes I took in high school, since I took many AP classes.”

Several of the tutors, however, went beyond identifying skill level differences between academic tracks to identifying a difference in attitude. Kelly wrote:

I took Honors and AP English classes all through high school so the dynamics in this class are very different than the dynamics in my own high school classes. The way the kids (especially those in period 6) talk while their teacher is talking is something my fellow classmates and I would never have done.

Liv wrote something similar:

One of my main assumptions would be that these students would be more eager to learn, and I can blame that on my college and honors program (in high school) experience. I have always been surrounded by academic people, so it was kind of weird to be with a group of kids who look like they really have no care to discuss things academically.

“Kind of weird” indeed. But what to do about it? I’m arguing that the first step was to recognize that difference was occurring, to linger in surprise and figure out what was happening. And in Chelsea’s case, to downplay the *display* of the surprise so as to encourage students to open up.

Chelsea in her ADBs had made comments similar to Liv’s description of the tutoring as “weird,” and I pressed her on the point in the interviews. She responded generously, outlining what life on the honors track had required of her, and how that experience had ill prepared her for our tutoring. She said that she had been enrolled in her high school’s magnet program of two

hundred students, which drew the brightest kids from a neighborhood she described as a little ghetto. She'd had it drilled into her both as a child by her parents and by her teachers that getting into a good college was the main goal of high school. That meant taking as many APs as possible. Some school days, she said, felt too short. She and her friends couldn't cram all they wanted to learn into the eight a.m. to three p.m. schedule of the school day. Conversely, Chelsea found that many of the City High kids couldn't wait to get out of the classroom and get home, and she confessed that she "probably [experienced] a few moments of frustration" during the interaction with one student that brought this lesson home:

It was our second session and we had this worksheet. And one of the kids just didn't care to write anything and he didn't have a pencil, and he just really really, really *really* didn't want to do anything. It was hard to understand that he was so lackadaisical because I was so the opposite in school. It took me awhile to embrace the fact that people weren't all crazy like I was in high school. Some people aren't interested in English. (Chelsea's emphasis)

This wasn't the only moment to take Chelsea or the other tutors by surprise. Chelsea was surprised (as was I) when one junior in her small group revealed that she was the mother of twins, with one child under hospitalization:

I found out that one of my students had two kids and was moved out and didn't talk to her parents and was living with her boyfriend. I was surprised because that's not something that you would know about anyone unless they told you. And she was like, "Yeah it was good. Went to visit ma' baby in the hospital with my other two-year-old." She was very open about it.

Rates of teen pregnancy are significantly higher among low-income teens than wealthier teens (Kearney and Levine) and about four and a half times higher for Latinos (the group to which the student belonged) than for Asian Americans (Chelsea's group). Thus, I'm going to call this exchange a cross-class and cross-cultural interaction. Whether Chelsea would characterize it as such I cannot say, though I do take Chelsea's "ma' baby" to be a representation of ebonics, or

African American Vernacular English, here used to mark the student's perspective as a "baby mama" racially (Black) and therefore, by association, socioeconomically (working class).

Working from that premise, I want to highlight Chelsea's emotional labor in registering this difference. We might recall Alex's response to Pilar in Chapter 4 as another example of a student coming to grips with the presence of a working-class student in his midst: "Wow, you actually grew up and went to school in Dios City." However, whereas Alex communicated his surprise, Chelsea sought to maintain her social connection with the student by being more polite. At the moment when the student revealed that she was a parent, Chelsea, in her words, "pretended not to be surprised." Judging the young woman on her pregnancy, or even showing that it was entirely unexpected, would have closed off an avenue of communication between them. It wouldn't do, in other words, to show that she had a different sense of what was normal family planning for a high school girl. As Chelsea put it, "I was more elated that she was able to open up and actually say something. I kind of wanted to keep her there and [let her] understand that I'd be OK with what she told me [rather] than to sigh in disbelief and never have her tell me anything again."

In this case, it's important that Chelsea's strategy of down-regulating her display of surprise worked. The face-to-face conversations that followed later between her and this student, as well as with others in her group, allowed her to get past, "Wow!" – to "keep her there" in an interpersonal space in which communication could occur.

In five short sessions, Chelsea tried to make the transition from surprise (we might even call it shock) to understanding. This was deliberate on her part. As an anthropology major, she saw HOT as an opportunity not to serve or even teach, but to learn, specifically by getting to know different people and beginning to understand their perspectives. In this case, she ended up

seeing students' lack of interest in the English lessons she taught as evidence that they had different reasons for going to school than she had had, even if she didn't claim to know exactly what all of those reasons were:

It's interesting to see high school as a place where you're required to go to graduate rather than a place you want to go to move on. At the same time, it was like, they didn't drop out. So it was interesting to see why they were there. They stayed in school for a reason. I tried to, *tried to*, understand why they were there. (emphasis hers)

*E. Jasmine's Dilemma: The Weight of Empathy*

Working with second-language learners from low-income homes didn't require the same reorientation for all the tutors; Jasmine's experience was different. She had grown up in a home where Tagalog, not English, was spoken by both parents, and she had come to UCI through the community college system because she hadn't been able to afford UC tuition. Though she too was shocked and disoriented by the City High students' rudimentary English skills, her emotional burden came from identifying with those students when it came to home language and family income. This identification led her to feel greater responsibility for the City High students' education. She said:

[B]ecause I kind of understand the background of the students I could be working with, I'm maybe a little bit more sympathetic to what they're going through, since I've been through something so similar. But that could also be a disadvantage because I might care too much about what they're going through and then that would affect me personally.

This is not to say that Jasmine identified completely with the students' struggles; note the qualifiers above: "kind of" and "maybe." However, as Jasmine related in our two interviews, she *did* relate to the extent that her childhood had been difficult, in some ways harder than theirs. She had grown up in a middle-class section of a major California city, the daughter of Filipino immigrants attending a middle-class school. But her family wasn't middle class, at least not after

her parents' divorce in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In the ensuing years, Jasmine shuttled back and forth between her old home and her father's apartment every three to six months, living primarily with her father but sometimes sharing a room with her mother. Jasmine's mom didn't make much in her job as a sales associate at a department store, and to hold onto the home she had to rent Jasmine's old room to a tenant. Unfortunately, Jasmine's father suffered from a disease that prevented him from caring for her and from providing for more than the most basic needs of food and rent. They lived on what meager amount was provided from his food stamps, but that didn't go well. "He would lock himself in the room for days," she said, "and he wouldn't come out when I was home." Materially, too, she suffered: "Sometimes we didn't have electricity," Jasmine said. "Sometimes we didn't have running water or our water was cold." When Jasmine was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade her father was evicted from his apartment and she moved in with her mother, who by that time had advanced at her job and met a boyfriend who could help with the rent. All of this, as Jasmine saw it, contributed to her being unmotivated to earn anything higher than Cs and Ds in school, the bare minimum needed to complete the necessary diploma.

But there were bright spots along the way for Jasmine, hints of her future career as an educator. In high school she was drawn to clubs that involved teaching and mentoring. She served as a counselor in outdoor education. She volunteered to observe and tutor middle schoolers in the library. Her junior year, like countless kids, she read *Fahrenheit 451*. But only she of all her classmates was fired up enough about the prospect of those books being burned to write a letter to Ray Bradbury, telling him she wanted to fight anti-intellectualism, to be a teacher. He wrote back: "Teach what you love." She passed along that message when she led

groups of freshmen through life-skills lessons, and later when she returned to teach sophomores study skills in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). And her senior year teacher, after hearing Jasmine present to this class on No Child Left Behind, encouraged her to start working toward her teaching credential right away.

Given her high school grades, Jasmine doubted whether she was even college material, but she intended to go to college anyway. In her family and in those of her Filipino-American friends, Jasmine explained, college was a non-negotiable. It was shameful not to attend, and those who didn't faced constant harassment from relatives. To drive home the point, Jasmine shared with me an offensive comment her brother's father had made to her brother when he dropped out of college: "This is worse than telling me you were gay."

However, though Jasmine was pressured to attend college, university wasn't a possibility. Cost prohibitive, her mother said; at that time, the difference between UC tuition and community college tuition amounted to about \$10,000 a year. Luckily, a few teachers at her high school had noticed her potential, despite the bad grades. They'd awarded her a scholarship that made community college a little easier to handle. Once settled in at school, Jasmine found she liked taking classes she could choose. She racked up a few A's, and soon she set her sights on the UC. She visited UCI (a school with a sizable Asian Pacific community) and felt comfortable there.

Again, her mother said no, but by that time Jasmine knew enough about financial aid for low-income families to realize they could make it work.

And she has made it work. This spring or summer, she'll be graduating, and she has already been admitted to the credentialing program. If all goes as planned, by fall of 2015 she'll be a credentialed English teacher starting her first full-time gig.

Still, Jasmine's opinion about her English proficiency, what researchers would call her self-efficacy, seesaws. It has since elementary school. Despite her interest in English, and the fact that she'd grown up speaking no other language, Jasmine had doubts. Her parents spoke some Tagalog to her growing up, but more often they used the language of their adopted country, English, not least because that was the language in which their daughter answered them. But graceful constructions eluded them. Shame crept into Jasmine's voice as she described for me the "broken English" she found in her father's correspondence. She'd proofread a letter he'd written to a lawyer in which he'd accidentally called the man an asshole. In texts her father sent her, she was "dotter" instead of "daughter." Jasmine's mother had done little better with the language, at least until she'd returned to college during Jasmine's high school years. Furthermore, Jasmine's school sometimes confirmed the message that Jasmine had progress to make, and not just with her low grades. Like so many millennials, Jasmine never learned formal grammar, and her teacher her senior year had handed out a grammar test that informed everyone in the class they were a few years behind. These doubts continued in higher education. Yes, she pulled down A's at community college, but she was only been able to eke out B's in her first year at Irvine.

Listening to her roommate's fluid English, her rich vocabulary, it was hard for Jasmine not to wonder if her parents' shards of broken English had scarred her native tongue. As she put it, "I write better than I speak. But when I'm speaking it somehow breaks. I'm kind of afraid of that being called out by a student."

Luckily, none of the students she was teaching with HOTS seemed to notice any errors; they had language problems of their own, more serious ones, judging not just by their teacher's reports but by my own observations of those students I taught. That disparity returns us to the thread of the argument, the divide I established at the outset of this chapter between students in

City High's general track and the honors students who would go on to become HOT tutors at UCI. In some ways, though Jasmine had not been enrolled in honors classes at her high school, her story lends further support to that portrayal. Jasmine was also amongst those in the preceding section who noted how little interest the City High kids showed in their classes, apparently less than even she had while earning her Cs and Ds in high school. Like Chelsea, Jasmine spoke of being taken aback by the stark differences she noticed between her high school and City High.

She said:

It opened my eyes to the reality of what's happening in a classroom, [that] not every classroom is the same as the high school that I went to. Because as we discussed, that [City High] classroom is underperforming. That was something that I was previously ignorant to or naïve about. I don't know how else to explain it but I have to say that I was shocked.

What shocked her was that the juniors we were teaching were struggling with skills and concepts that she and her peers had mastered by the third grade: metaphors, but also basic vocabulary and spelling. Jasmine may not have had much money growing up, but the high school she attended drew dedicated teachers and benefitted from updated facilities like a new science center, and its students and faculty came together in a full roster of clubs and athletic programs. At City High, on the other hand, students were being taught some afternoons by a student teacher, and every day they were crammed forty per class into portable classrooms whose best days were a few decades behind them. Then there was the language issue. Jasmine, along with her peers in the schools where she had grown up, may have listened to Tagalog at home, but in school they had achieved close to grade-level proficiency in English. Yes, Jasmine had known a few kids at school who had been born in the Philippines and struggled to learn English. But as far as she knew they hadn't been as far behind grade-level as these City High students, and at any rate their educational experience wasn't hers. In short, as we saw in her comment above, Jasmine's



education hadn't prepared her for teaching the underresourced English-language learners at City High; teaching there had been a shock.

Despite all these disparities, Jasmine had enough experience teaching to approach teaching City High's with more emotional equanimity than Dee could have. When the students stopped paying attention, Jasmine didn't take it personally. Instead, she recalled days at her high school when substitute teachers had run her classes and she and her friends had goofed off. Or she considered the curriculum itself to be partly to blame. Yes, she was willing to spend hours breaking down questions to make them more comprehensible to the students, but she was also willing to point out shortcomings in the materials, like the metaphor lesson from Gatsby's "Valley of Ashes" section. It was better suited to a college course, like the one she took the quarter after HOT that spent a few weeks on the concept. Jasmine made efforts to pull in difficult students, but she also let them know that it was their choice if they were going to be left behind by the group. She told me that approached the students with authority but without being overbearing, unafraid to put students on the spot for answers but also remaining comfortable when conversations hit a lull. Overall, Jasmine's prior experience leading classes meant she didn't have to progress through the doubt and despair Dee had felt.

But it wasn't just teaching experience that gave Jasmine the edge. Her own experiences of poverty and inadequate support, and her willingness to divulge details from that experience, meant she transitioned from shock to connection-building more quickly than Chelsea had. This was evident in one conversation Jasmine conducted with her group about college. She said:

What I did to get them comfortable is I told them about my experience first so that they didn't feel like they were being put on the spot. So, I tell them . . . my family, they don't speak English very well, they didn't go to college, so I was the first to go to UCI . . . I get financial aid because we don't make enough money to support [me] . . . So I told them these things and because of that they seemed to look and feel more comfortable with telling me that their parents want them to go straight

to work. [They say,] “My parents said we can’t afford it,” things like that. One of them said she wanted to go to fashion school and her mom told her that there was no way . . . [I] made sure to tell them that financial aid is possible.

When I asked Jasmine if she wanted to share the details of her financial situation me in the interview, she said that wouldn’t be a problem; she was “open.” She hoped her story could inspire others. Clearly, Jasmine took a different approach to managing both her personal information and her emotions than did the other tutors I have discussed above. I would argue that her openness, what Dee described as “vulnerability,” was an asset; it enhanced her ability to get students to listen to her advice, in this case about financial aid, but also, I’d suspect about English. Jasmine seized upon the common ground as a means to relate to students but also to push them to succeed, a strategy I’ll develop in more detail in section D, which concerns trust and care.

But as I mentioned at the outset, conversations like these required a higher level of emotional labor. They require involvement, in the sense of intensity and commitment that Averill and other psychologists give to those words (see his Chapter 1). The comment with which I began this section on Jasmine’s experience suggests as much. By revisiting the challenges of her youth in helping these students, Jasmine found it easier to relate. She talked about laughing along with the kids, developing a rapport. But she also took up a burden not necessarily there for tutors who were visiting it for the first time, a sense of ownership and investment. Jasmine spoke of how her experiences didn’t match with those of the students, but they did “resonate” with them. In particular, the prospect of getting low-income students to college was emotionally involving. As an example, she discussed her interactions with one student in her group who wanted to go to college but was enrolling in the military first in order to pay for it. Jasmine struggled to get the

student to talk, and when he remained quiet, it made her sad. Reflecting on this experience, she said, “I kind of felt invested in their futures. I think that’s where a lot of the emotion came from, just talking about what they wanted to do after high school.” In what follows I’ll show the benefits of such investment—of caring—but it’s useful to also consider the costs. Caring takes work, and in a relationship like this HOT partnership, one that’s necessarily short, it’s far from certain that the tutors will ever know just what impact their caring has. That creates a burden for those, like Jasmine, who are invested in these students’ future but unsure what that future will hold.

### **III. The Teacher’s Journey, Part 2: Enthusiasm, Care, and Trust in Small-Group Writing**

#### *A. HOT: The Small-Group Literacy Intervention*

With Jasmine’s connection, the story makes a turn toward a happy resolution. For what these tutors lacked in the training and materials necessary to pull off culturally responsive, or even basic, literacy instruction, they in some measure made up for with enthusiasm, flexibility and care. They all tried to understand why students were there in this classroom, and what interested them. Partly because their ability to make the content matter to students was stretched thin, they turned to making themselves matter to those students. Judging by tutors’ reports, though each group contained a few holdouts, most of the high school students responded.

Small groups were indispensable to this process of familiarization. In this section I move from individual case studies to reading across multiple tutors’ blogs, and I show how HOT’s small-group configuration for literacy instruction rewarded tutors’ efforts to build enthusiasm, rapport, and trust. The first part of this section continues to address emotional labor, documenting the tutors’ efforts to up-regulate their enthusiasm as compensation for students’

lack of enthusiasm about the curriculum. The second part of this section employs a different theoretical approach, that of writing as a meaning-making activity that requires trust between communicants. In that section, I build on work done by Carol Booth Olson and Kathryn Wentzel on trust and caring, as well as a comprehensive study of motivation for writing completed by Roger Bruning and Christy Horn. Using these approaches, I show how the tutors were ultimately able to demonstrate they cared for their students, and conversely how students demonstrated they cared for their tutors. Specifically, I show how tutors built trusting, respectful relationships with students by accessing their extracurricular interests.

A low tutor-to-student ratio was crucial to this caring, respect, and trust. This observation supports the intuition of many HOT observers, who consistently cite the small-group interactions HOT makes possible as crucial to the program's value. When summing up the then decade-long program in just a few sentences, founder Julia Lupton described HOT activities as "content-rich sequence of humanities exercises" that undergraduates "work with small groups of students to develop . . . through active reading, writing, and discussion" ("Philadelphia," 397). The teachers in whose classes we taught also promoted the value of the groups. The history teacher, for instance, noted that HOT provided a change because he was unable to use small groups very often in his classes, not more than once every three or four weeks. On their own, he said, City High students would lose direction quickly; HOT tutors, on the other hand, were able to lead groups and hold these students accountable. Similarly, a sketch by a UCI journalism student (Jillian Tempesta, not enrolled in the program) brought the importance of the small groups to life in an article titled "First Person Plural." Tempesta's piece focused on the narratives the tutors and students swapped as they worked their way through the day's lesson on Japanese internment, from students' jokes about the day's unusual weather to a tutor's family story about her brother's

experience of anti-Latino discrimination. The article closed with the image of the classroom's desks rearranged from the "crooked circles" the tutors and students had formed to talk together to the "rigid rows" of the classroom, suggesting that whereas HOT's groups facilitated meaningful conversation, this rearrangement into rows re-established the school's hierarchies and its ho-hum daily routines. My argument is that this meaningful communication *did* in fact arise in these small groups, in ways predicted by educational research into emotions and writing.

*B. Theory: Writing as Interpersonal Communication Requiring Trust and Care*

In scholarship on K-12 student-writers, only occasionally do emotions and writing form the focus of a study, and then the emphasis tends to be on positive emotions as a resource for both effort and cognition (see Graham, Berninger, and Fan). Unfortunately for a social-constructivist approach like mine, much of the literature that examines the role of motivation in writing, inasmuch as it considers emotion, does so in relation to the difficulties of the writing task (Graham) or of the cognitive and instrumental goals of *individual* students (see Hidi and Boscolo, "Motivation and Writing"; Hidi, Berndorff, and Ainley). The emphasis on "self" and "subjective" in the constructs that educational researchers use to describe motivation demonstrates that individualist emphasis; key researchers include Allan Wigfield on subjective task value, Albert Bandura on self-efficacy, and Barry Zimmerman on self-regulation. Some constructs within this literature take into account social emotions such as pride and shame (Conley), but they do not keep in focus the literate interpersonal *interactions* through which these emotions are made. Those interactions are the focus of this study.

Bruning and Horn's literature review on motivation to write, on the other hand, stresses a basic but important approach: writing is meaningful communication. That is, writing joins subjects in a conversation that conveys their perspectives on the world. In conducting my

research, I kept this observation in mind, along with Vygotsky's caveat that writing, unlike speech, displaces the speaker and listener into a more abstract transcriber and receiver (see Zebroski). As Walter Ong put it, "The writer's audience is always a fiction."

The concept that writing is meaningful communication, and that reading is a meaning-making process also facilitated by communication as one talks through what one understands of a given reading, translates to the emotional labor of tutors in the HOT program in two ways. First, tutors strove to generate student enthusiasm by exaggerating their own enthusiasm about the material and about student progress. This strategy worked particularly well in HOT's small groups, which allowed for group members to share emotions, a process that social psychologists have termed "emotional contagion" (Parkinson et. al, Chapter 4). Second, even as the tutors avoided being overly friendly and thereby losing their authority, they encouraged conversation about students' extracurricular interests. Together, these practices allowed the tutors to get beyond their initial surprise and confusion about students' needs and motivations, and to communicate to the students that they cared about what the students thought, said, and wrote.

### *C. Up-regulating: Selling the Curriculum*

Research has supported common sense in suggesting that teachers who are passionate about their material are more likely to generate passion in their students (Frenzel et al.). Indeed, such enthusiasm is a major component of teachers' emotional labor (Sutton, "Goals"). In a small group, this labor has the potential to have even greater impact on each student. It's far easier to make eye contact with four or five students when delivering a lesson than with forty; a smile communicates more up-close than it does across the room. In teaching literacy within an outreach program, the HOT tutors found these strategies to be valuable, adapting what they remembered from their own literacy learning for this new situation.

For instance, in understanding her emotions as an instrument for generating student motivation, and therefore student achievement, Juliana voiced the same strategy of “up-regulation” of positive emotions divulged by many of the more experienced teachers in Sutton’s study. When tutees’ resistance to the lesson was particularly strong (as might be expected given the mismatch between the students and the curriculum), Juliana suggested that tutors ought to up-regulate their own enthusiasm to compensate: “I’ve found that however much the tutees may dislike the lesson, we have to show that much more excitement for it and hope that some of our passion rubs off on them.”

It’s easier for that passion to rub off when teachers display not just enthusiasm for the material but also for students’ handling of it. When Jamie discussed up-regulating enthusiasm, she directly argued for making the kind of tutor-to-student connections that work best in small groups. In a conversation with Leia, she wrote: “It’s also amazing what simple gestures, such as a smile or eye contact, can do. Other cues that have worked for me include laughing more and perhaps even exaggerating your own reactions to what they say to reaffirm your interest in them and their progress.” Leia’s reference to “exaggeration” points to the utility of surface acting in teachers’ emotional labor. One way to read her strategy is as an attempt to communicate; just as one would raise one’s voice if one were speaking to someone in order to catch their attention, the tutor exaggerates her emotions to ensure the tutee is impressed by them, and motivated to continue.

A few tutors noted that they imitated the example of their own instructors when performing enthusiasm, suggesting that those instructors figured as emotional role models in their conception of teaching. Jamie followed the lead of her first-year humanities teaching assistant: “I tried to emulate his enthusiasm and somewhat laid-back attitude in hopes of

generating more in the students.” Leia said the same about her professor: “I try to mimic Dr. V’s approach-it was affective (speaking from personal experience) . . . I learned that showing genuine dedication and excitement are crucial in keeping the students completely engaged.” Whether or not she intended it, Leia’s comment suggests that “affective” pedagogy is necessarily “effective.”

While tutors’ up-regulation of enthusiasm for the students and for the curriculum could not on its own sustain students’ interest, it proved a useful first step.

#### *D. Lightening the Mood and Forging Trust: Extracurricular Topics*

The next step for tutors was to tune in to tutees’ feelings so as to open up lines of communication. Jamie showed how she did so, in a process we might call “attunement”: “I also started off discussions with asking generally how everyone’s weekends were and how they felt at the moment. I didn’t share so much of my own weekend, but I would relate to how my students were feeling.” Presumably, “relating” meant that Jamie gave students sympathetic feedback when they shared their stories about their weekends (i.e. “that sucks,” or “that sounds like fun”). At least one study of teacher’s emotional labor suggests that small gestures of sympathy like these go a long way, noting that female teachers are more likely to engage with students and that this empathy is beneficial: “being able to empathise with the student can enable a teacher to . . . [keep] thoughts focused on the child rather than feeling the need to convey instantly the subject matter” (Demetriou, Wilson, and Winterbottom 460). Jamie confirmed the benefits of her efforts to empathize, observing that her students were more eager to speak with her once she had showed that she cared how they felt.

Sometimes, tutors explicitly marked such exchanges of experiences and feelings as attempts to “lighten the mood,” suggesting that a dogged persistence to the material during



difficult lessons could actually backfire by making everyone feel dispirited. Juliana, for instance, wrote: “I asked how everyone was doing or if anything eventful happened that day, etc.... just to lighten up the mood a bit” (ellipses hers). On a similar note, Kelly reminds us that tutors working with a curriculum that students find uninteresting *must* make these side conversations if they are to wake students up and get them talking and thinking:

I also don't want the students to just think of me as a teacher, so I try to put in a few minutes before beginning the lesson or when class is about to end to just talk to the students about other things besides the lesson. I find that the students will like and respect you more if you talk to them about things other than the lesson that they have no interest in.

Such observations support the study just cited, in which female teachers’ efforts to “win the students back in order to re-engage them in their learning” are successful, whereas male teachers’ attempts to stimulate students’ interest by communicating enthusiasm only about the curriculum often fail” (461).

Many tutors spoke about how showing interest in the students’ extracurricular lives helped not just with the immediate mood but with their interpersonal connection, their “bond” with the younger writers. Jamie put this concept simply: “[T]he side conversations set a better mood for the entire lesson, and it creates more of the bond between the tutor and the student.”

Ellen anticipated what other tutors said when she wrote about this bond as an issue of “respect”:

I really wanted to keep them interested in the lessons, but more importantly I wanted there to be a mutual respect between myself and my tutees. I asked them about their days and lives and took some time from the lesson to talk to them about college life and answer their questions.

For there to be respect, the tutors must take the students seriously, must understand that they are full people with their own unique interests, that their lives do not begin and end when class lets out.

As we saw earlier when Chelsea's student talked about her young children, when students were given the right cues by the tutors, the students were willing to talk in quite serious ways about their lives outside of school. However, even more trivial conversation about students' immediate interests helped tutors to forge a connection, making the sessions less about the curriculum and more about the students who were finding their way through it. Chelsea, for instance, reported in the interview that she had a hard time soliciting the participation of two of her most difficult students, who would leave class every session to go to the restroom, until one day she showed an interest in football. Chelsea said, "[W]e started a conversation with a talk about football and they realized that I, like, understood what they were talking about. So they were like, 'Maybe she's cool after all.'" The students stayed in class that day, a decision Chelsea described, somewhat ironically, as "a miracle."

I can't recall whether I stressed the tactic of off-topic conversation in the practicum or if tutors initiated it on their own, but it was far and away the most common motivational technique they advocated in the ADBs. The tutors reported that this tactic worked, with a slow progression toward trust and commitment on the students' part. As Jasmine put it, "There was a little more respect that they paid to me each time I came back. There was a little bit of a relationship being formed." In the same ADBs, tutors also reported that breaking the ice in these ways facilitated conversations directly about the curriculum. Students who had been silent began to open up, to offer their interpretations of the texts and to relate them to their own experiences.

These experiences bear out what research tells us about the importance of relationship-building in the teaching of reading and writing, and suggests that even a short outreach experience such as this would benefit from more explicit tutor training about the *affective* components of small-group teaching. Nancy Atwell, for example, teaches us that classroom

teachers who spend the first weeks of the school year getting to know students and having students get to know one another are more likely to find their students taking risks later in the year in their conversation and writing. Similarly, Kathryn Wentzel writes, "Secure relationships are believed to foster children's curiosity and exploration of the environment" (302). To translate such research into terms currently addressed in postsecondary writing studies, research on trust and respect suggests that an environment of caring in a classroom allows learners to more easily embrace the "habits of mind" characteristic of proficient writers such as curiosity and engagement (CWPA, NCTE, and NWP). Though the time HOT tutors spent with students was short and the basis of their relationships was thus slight, even a few moments spent sharing experiences and feelings seem to have validated the students' perspectives and motivated them to learn.

#### *E. Striking a Balance: Caring and Authority*

However, even as the tutors tried to convey a personable persona by talking about students' lives and interests, as they tried to get students to say what Chelsea's students had—"maybe she's cool after all"—the same tutors reported being wary of being too cool, too much of a friend. Perhaps because they were newcomers to the classroom, or young college students, or women, they were careful not to let their vulnerability spill over into disrespect. Ellen summed up many tutors' efforts to strike this balance: "I think they respect me because I showed that I care while still maintaining authority." Jasmine said something similar, suggesting that it was important that tutors "laugh with them [students], relate to them, while maintaining that authoritative stance."

In practice, this meant that while Jamie listened to students share about their weekends, she didn't say much about her own. And she soon took on an authoritative role by calling on

students to report on their free time rather than waiting for them to volunteer to speak about it.

She wrote:

I decided to be a little more assertive the next couple lessons by asking the question for volunteers to answer first, and then singling out the ones who didn't answer and asking them the question again. Though I suppose I didn't particularly like the fact that I was essentially making them speak, I found that this was more effective later on during the discussion in that it made my students speak up a little more, since their voices had been heard already.

Note that Jamie consciously takes up emotional labor, braving the awkwardness following the power-grab of calling on people (“I suppose I didn't particularly like the fact that I was essentially making them speak”), and that she does so for a pedagogical purpose (“I found that this was more effective”).

Juliana's intervention strikes the same balance between authority and relationship-building:

Not often, but at times, the two boys I have in the group will have a little side conversation about football or baseball or something they're involved in outside of English class; when that happens I like to sort of cut in to their conversation in a friendly way, and make a comment relative to what they're talking about, to show them that it's alright to take a breather and also that their deviance doesn't go unnoticed.

Such comments suggest that while many tutors considered their vulnerability and personality as assets, they tempered these traits with the strength needed to move lessons along (as Dee, at least at first, could not).

#### *F. Reinvestment: Emotional Rewards of Connection Generate Tutor Commitment*

A full account of the tutors' experiences must contain the enthusiasm and joy they communicated, their sense that the experience was valuable and their encounters with the students in it transformative. They spoke of being relieved that they'd been given a chance to overcome their stage fright as teachers, moved by their tutees' intelligence, connected to them as

caretakers, obliged to them as role models from honors programs in the same underserved communities, proud of what they had accomplished together in picking apart the texts, and rewarded by their tutees' appreciation for those efforts. Going forward, they reported in the anonymous pre- and post-surveys that they felt more empowered to contribute to their communities and to promote social justice, even if their definitions of that justice aligned with the American Dream of individual opportunity rather than the policies of socioeconomic and racial redress that had helped kick off the HOT program.

In the end, HOT functioned for these tutors as an entry into teaching. Though most had tutored or taught before—in peer tutoring programs in their junior-high and high schools, or in after-school centers—many agreed that their placement in a mainstream classroom in an underresourced school had deepened their understanding of the public school system and given them valuable real-world experience. In the post-HOT interviews, every tutor but one (Dee) said she was interested in going into teaching and that HOT had moved her toward that goal. A few had taken up UCI's education minor after finishing HOT. Another, Liv, had graduated and begun a credential program; a third, Jasmine, would be accepted to a top credentialing program; and a fourth, Kelly was considering one in Philadelphia.

HOT affirmed their self-conception as tutors not just by giving them experience, but also, I'm emphasizing, through students' emotional response to their caring, a response that recognized them simultaneously as people and professionals. Kelly's interactions with one student, which she remembered fondly, highlight how the interpersonal connection went hand in hand with the academic mentoring role:

There were moments where I felt really good. There was this one girl in particular . . . she approached me a lot. And I was really taken aback by it . . . She was like, “Can you explain this to me again?” or “What do you do for fun?” That took me by surprise. I found it very sweet and endearing that someone would take interest in me.

This is not to say that such experiences were universal. HOT received mixed results from the high school students. It’s true that the two most common responses when we asked “What did you like about HOT?” pertained to small-group discussions: the discussions and the tutors themselves. But of the sixty-eight students who responded to the post-HOT-survey, while forty said that HOT had helped them with their reading, writing, and thinking skills, twelve said that HOT had helped with just one of those skill-sets, and sixteen said they had not been helped at all. However, the tutors who elected to interview with me and who did the focus group with Huy were more one-sided; they uniformly stressed the fond memories they had of tutoring, the bonding. Chelsea recalled with great happiness how one of the students had written in hugely conspicuous script on her final evaluation, “You’re awesome, you’re the best.” On a similar note, Kelly, who’d done the program for three quarters, told this story during the focus group interview:

The last day of HOT, the year before last, it was a very crowded classroom, so I got myself stuck in the group. Like the tables were stuck and I couldn’t move and I couldn’t get out, and I was like, “Oh no, I’m stuck.” And then, one of the students was like, “That means you have to stay with us forever.”

This drew a sympathetic “Aw!” and laughter from the other tutors in the group, after which Kelly explained, “It was the last day, so it made me want to come back, that’s why I’ve done HOT several times, because I wanted to come back.”

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

This chapter has highlighted the emotional labor that tutors undertook in HOT's outreach program, labor that helped to create the sense of group belonging that assumed physical form when Kelly sat trapped alongside her 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. Yet, as I have pointed to the success of the tutors in making this program work, I have shied away from critiquing the programmatic structures that shaped their labor. This conclusion would present such a critique, pointing out how negative emotions such as frustration and even despair can produce critical knowledge and productive action in literacy networks.

Teaching in HOT's outreach program required tutors to care for themselves and for their students properly. To do so, tutors were required to re-appraise situations so as to reconsider the causes of their emotions and thereby change the way they felt about them. This came home in Dee's story as she struggled to find a suitable explanation for her students' inattention, blaming first her own unclear explanations, then turning her frustration to her students' lack of regard for her, and finally feeling guilty for so blaming them. Dee struggled to find a way to perform the caring, the hope, the enthusiasm required of the outreach tutor.

To address how ADBs enable a tutor like Dee to succeed in the labor of outreach, or to show how other tutors performed emotions that allowed them to succeed where Dee failed, is to accept the particular configuration of this outreach and to imagine ways to improve it. But I would also, as one arbiter of this project did when I spoke of analyzing my HOT tutors' frustration, critique the preparation in English-language instruction that I gave to my tutors. Why *weren't* they prepared with readings on multicultural or ESL pedagogy? Such training would surely have better enabled them to make the curriculum manageable for City High students, and thus prevented tutors like Dee from ever becoming frustrated or dispirited to begin with. Had I

more thoroughly inquired about the needs of our partners before the term began, and taken the time to adapt the lessons in light of what I learned, I could have saved the tutors and students alike much distress. Once again, as with many literacy partnerships, the lesson is to strengthen the relationship between the university and its partner by increased communication and to adapt the university's approach in light of what's communicated.

If we don't address such concerns, if we simply consider how tools such as ADBs can help new teachers talk themselves into happy collaborators in the status quo, then we lose the generative potential of critical emotions studies, in which scholar-leaders like myself can align ourselves with stakeholders like the tutors and heed their emotions in critiquing existing practices and testing out new ones. Emotions provide essential and timely information. The students' inattention to the material – their checking out – is a crucial piece of communication. It prompted Dee's distress and reflection, which prompted my care and reflection. An old proverb is useful: "No one knows better where the shoe pinches than he who wears it." In this case, the end-user (the client, the student), "wore the shoe." It was students who *felt* first the impact of the curriculum. And that curriculum didn't quite fit. In the story I've told above, we found students and tutors making themselves happy once more by sharing off-topic conversations. But of course it would have been better for the workshop coordinator, for me or whoever was running the program, to design a more fitting curriculum, or to train tutors better to present the curriculum in a comprehensible way.

Unfortunately, HOT's attempts to assess the immediate impact of the program's academics on the high school students we served suggests that we didn't always generate in the secondary students' the wished-for academic growth, at least not in ways that we could track. This is not to say that the program had zero impact; far from it. As HOT founder Julia Lupton



told me in an interview, the small, immediate changes HOT produced could have a large cumulative effect. Jasmine and Liv, supported by HOT in entering a teaching career, will impact their students for decades to come. Similarly, the student teacher who observed our lessons rethought his lessons as a result, and he will impact hundreds of students over the years. The high school students who told us they were excited about English, the one who told Kelly she couldn't leave; isn't she more likely to envision herself sitting in a college classroom because she speaks with a tutor not much different than she is who's doing just that? Certainly, when it comes to the benefit of HOT for graduates like me, the gains need not be speculative. I am currently working on a research project in which I'm speaking with several graduate students now working on the faculties of colleges and universities from California to Florida, graduates who participated in HOT and whose approach to outreach, to K-12 teacher training, to scholarship, and to college teaching was transformed as a result.

It is true that, taken all in all, HOT alone could not meet the program's initial goal: making UC Irvine a destination for a large number of underrepresented students. Instead, that mission is being fulfilled by UCI's Center for Educational Partnerships, which has invested heavily in developing AP and honors classes, admissions counseling, after-school tutoring, and other Early Academic Outreach (EAOP) programming in low-income schools, as well as a residential summer bridge program at the university. But what I wish to stress with this study concerns a different set of goals for a different group of students. In its final years working in public schools, HOT recentered its mission around its funders, the School of the Humanities and the Departments of English and History. Those funders prioritized the education of *their* undergraduate students, and it's there that HOT made gains. We could and did provide what the undergraduates who enrolled in HOT were seeking; these were students interested in, but not yet

committed to, a career in teaching, and they found experience in real high school classrooms. Judging from the tutors' self-reports, from their anonymous surveys, from interviews with the host teachers, and from the anonymous feedback provided by the high school students themselves, this final year of HOT English was a success. Tutors connected with City High students, cared for them, and learned with them. Was the program ideal? Far from it. But it offered everyone involved in it an experience that can't be replicated anywhere else.

## CONCLUSION: “HOT” CIVIC WRITING: STRATEGIZING THE EDGE

### I. HOT and Civic Writing

To provide some perspective on the particular HOT partnerships that I have detailed in the previous chapters, I offer this conclusion, which puts HOT’s model of literacy outreach in conversation with recent approaches to the same issues within the field of civic writing.

To clarify HOT’s goals I begin with Lupton’s 1999 “Humanifesto,” which anchored *Humanifest*, one of HOT’s first published anthologies of student work:

The name [HOT] sums up my basic method of teaching classical and Renaissance literature to undergraduates: namely, to “make it hot” – to make it fun, passionate, exciting, rewarding; to make it “out there” in the sense of cool, hip, a little on the wild side. This seemed like a good stance to take “out there” to the community as well: to show K-12 students from all backgrounds, but especially disadvantaged ones, that the humanities are “hot” . . .

Our many workshops, more than forty this year alone, are united by the goal of teaching basic skills, especially writing, through the study of challenging primary texts and problems from the Humanities, including both foundational works of Western civilization and perspectives from minority and non-Western traditions.  
(7)

One immediately sees the parallels between HOT’s goals and the goals of those of us who practice K-16 partnerships today: a desire for student engagement (“make it hot”), a move toward social justice by enriching the education of disadvantaged students, and a focus on writing. However, HOT also departed decisively from current approaches to K-16 partnerships in civic writing in its focus on the foundational works of Western Civilization and its belief that the education universities offer to undergraduates could and should be brought to younger students. And the terms by which Lupton announced HOT’s success – the program’s institutionalization to scale, in this case to forty workshops – have also come in for critique by Paula Mathieu and

others who now question the wisdom of the strategic place for which HOT and programs like it fought so hard.

In teasing out connections between Lupton’s vision and recent scholarship in civic writing, I take up Mathieu’s critique of institutional strategies, Bob Moses’s notion of the *crawl space* of progressive education, and Steve Parks’s advocacy for *edge politics*.<sup>65</sup> Using these theories, I make the argument that HOT undertook three separate forms of partnership, all allowed for in the broad framework Lupton laid out in her early “Humanifesto,” but each quite different in the actual work it accomplished. We can call these three modes conservative (what Mathieu would call “strategic”), centrist (“the crawl space”), and radical (“edge politics”). The conservative version of the program attempted to incorporate students into the interests and projects of an Anglo-American educational trajectory that had not made room for the funds of knowledge of the Latin@ students HOT served. The centrist program drew on student voice but required that it be performed through academic genres for academic audiences. The radical program also focused on student voice, and linked students to community groups, however briefly. As mentioned earlier, HOT always attempted to reach out to and engage with underrepresented students, to make them UC-ready, but my contention is that HOT’s more radical partnerships offer a model of a better path toward those goals. (For a contrasting view, see Lupton’s “Philadelphia Dreaming.”)<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> My comparative approach is similar to that employed by Elenore Long in *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics*, a comprehensive of multiple community literacy projects through the lens of their guiding metaphors (e.g. the garden, the crawl space).

<sup>66</sup> Lupton argues that HOT curriculum was deeply progressive, pulling students into the analysis of original documents and making connections between the historical contexts for those documents and students’ contemporary concerns. Having looked over several other units HOT created in both English and History, I agree that many of them are more progressive than the American Literature unit described here and in Chapter 5. Those interested in a complete picture of HOT would do well to conduct the same primary-source analysis we required of HOT students, drawing their own conclusions from the curricula themselves. They are available through the UCI history department. Whether radical or conservative, the units remain valuable resources.

Before embarking on a lengthier description of each of HOT's three approaches, and an analysis of what lessons we might draw from each about civic writing, let me flesh out each of the above three theories, beginning with Mathieu's critique of institutions in *Tactics of Hope*. The quotations I drew from Mathieu in the introductory chapter of this dissertation draw out the thrust of Mathieu's critique: when partnerships focus on sustaining themselves, they too often fail to account adequately for the desires and needs of those they are meant to serve. In other words, university scholars too often form partnerships with nonprofit professionals that serve their own interests more than those of their clients. In mounting this critique, Mathieu makes use of Michel de Certeau's distinction between counter-institutional tactics and institutional strategy, arguing that successful engagement is tactical (*Tactics* 16). That is, successful partnership is timed to community members' schedules, which extend past semester deadlines. And it meets community members' expressed desires, which do not necessarily include college students' performance or satisfaction (typical metrics of service-learning), and which don't directly coincide with desires of professionals staffing community agencies for their own continued employment.

Mathieu's text has provoked much discussion amongst scholars in the field since it was published in 2005. Responding in part to Mathieu, Sharayana Douglas, Maria Lovett, and Paul Feigenbaum also critique the K-12 education system in which their university sponsors a partnership, beginning by noting that the state itself has labeled its own schools as "failing" and the students within them as illiterate. Based on that fact, the authors argue that what Mathieu would call the strategic space of this school system "*is itself unsustainable*" (34, emphasis theirs), yet at the same time they admit that no exit from that system is possible for those interested in quality education for all youth. Rather, in such terrain, they advocate for "working

*with* the system without becoming *of* the system, a process Bob Moses refers to as the carving out of a *crawl space*” (36, emphasis theirs). The authors demonstrate how students inhabit the “crawl space” with several stories concerning the Young People’s Project in Miami, a partnership in which Haitian-American youth enrolled in an innovative, university-sponsored math-literacy program at a local high school that was successful in sending many initially low-performing students on to college.

Parks takes such work a step further, using the concept of edge politics, also borrowed from Certeau, to specifically address how tactical, progressive approaches to K-16 partnerships can flourish in the hostile strategic grounds of public education, spaces designed increasingly around corporate models of accountability that fail to utilize the talents and interests of students or to meet their needs. Importantly, edge politics argues for empowering disenfranchised students by linking them to existing political formations, specifically to labor and activist groups within and beyond their communities that speak to their common concerns. Key to Parks’s approach is the understanding that the state, which impacts students at the level of curriculum and teaching, does not always make good on its promise of democracy and empowerment, and that students and educators must speak directly to those who set state and national policies on education if they are to ensure the well-being of underserved students.<sup>67</sup> Parks argues that the university can contribute to such conversations by lending its prestige to literacy that is done in conjunction with communities and that makes use of the vernacular through which young people name their worlds. That is, the university can guide these young people and assist their teachers in taking up the position of what Gramsci names as *organic intellectuals*.

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<sup>67</sup> Specifically, Parks notes how his organization courted GEAR Up money used to extend a literacy center at one school into a series of centers at several; however, while the single site had functioned for teachers and students alike as a site of resistance to test-driven education, the additional sites came to be viewed with suspicion by similarly pressed teachers at other schools where the centers were understood as district or state-sponsored, even though, simultaneously, the sites were not fully supported by the district and state.

Turning from these metaphors – tactics, the crawl space, the edge – to the metaphor Julia Lupton uses to characterize UCI’s K-16 partnerships through HOT, we find Julia Lupton articulating a framework that she calls the “literacy triangle,” which I also analyzed in Chapter 3:

H.O.T. aims to develop what I have called the “literacy triangle,” founded on the synergetic interplay between basic literacy (reading, writing, and critical thinking), cultural literacy (general knowledge of western civilization) and multi-cultural literacy (awareness of relations between different traditions). (“Humanifesto” 7)

As is evident in the quotation that opens this chapter, this triangle places an emphasis on the cultural capital that the university can deliver through “the classics” or “cultural literacy” (Lupton is, after all, a prominent Shakespeare scholar). But it also allows for “multicultural literacy” that, in practice, could include either the secondary students’ own funds of knowledge, or political content from UCI’s own ethnic studies programs.

The first of these – students’ own funds of knowledge, including the Spanish-language fluency of transnational Mexican@ youth – surely made their presence felt in the workshops I led at Dios and Barrio Centers, and in Grace Bernadette’s poetry collective, on which my workshops were modeled. My argument is that these configurations, which upheld all three legs of Lupton’s literacy triangle, most resemble Moses’s “crawl space.” I, too, was seeking to carve out a “crawl space” for multilingual literacy, for creative writing that included poetic world-making and narrative testimony, and for critical thinking that could critique not just texts but the world, all of this in a school system organized around monolingual fluency demonstrated primarily through multiple-choice exams. But given the tutors’ and my funds of knowledge in an Anglo-American poetic tradition, we had to compromise. That is, we brought in bilingual poems and engaged students in the production of their own voices, but did so in the margins, in the confines of a workshop that lingered in the “crawl space” of a public school system, and a

university system, that was oriented more toward students' uptake of cultural literacy than in their production of a literate culture that reflected their lives and advanced their interests.

Ultimately, I describe this practice (and Grace's practice) as centrist rather than as an edge politics because, as mentioned, though the workshops called for student experience, they required students to articulate that experience in a university genre, in this case poetry (or in other early HOT workshops, the short story). More importantly, while students sometimes drew from their own family and neighborhood networks in their writing (see my discussion of family literacy in Chapter 3), we did not make it a priority to contribute to those networks, for we were concerned with proficiency as demonstrated in academic contexts. Like those whom Moses names as carving out a "crawl space," then, HOT poetry worked in the institution without becoming wholly of the institution.

## **II. HOT Cooled Out**

Lupton had anticipated such a stance with her vision of HOT's literacy triangle, and when it remained balanced it could work quite well, as we found in Chapter 2, in which I document poetry lessons that connected with students and stimulated deeply emotional engagement with language learning (not least because of Stitch's fund of knowledge in spoken-word poetry, itself multicultural literacy). But Chapters 3 and 5 provided a critique of the extent to which we allowed mainstream "cultural literacy" to displace Chican@ students from HOT's curriculum, echoing Mathieu's observation that institutional strategies do not always respond to clients' needs and desires. This was particularly acute in Chapter 5, where high school students did not find HOT's curriculum to be "hot" and tutors were thus obligated to heat up student-tutor interactions using their own emotional communication.



Paula Mathieu’s critique of strategy helps us to understand the strategic logic of HOT’s support for “cultural literacy,” which is, after all, legible on state tests. HOT adapted to such Anglocentric notions not out of program design or university mandate, but from the desire to lodge itself in the schools in a sustainable program, one that could, following the logic of outreach, connect with as many underrepresented students as possible by taking up the testing-centered learning outcomes of the K-12 system, which at that time was driven by No Child Left Behind. But Mathieu also pushes us to tally the costs of adhering to that strategy. *Tactics* would highlight how HOT’s strategic success in publishing standard curricula should also be read as a tactical failure, a move that precluded young students’ efforts to seize upon their language as a timely and situated response to their own concerns. In so doing HOT followed a path familiar to scholars of civic writing.<sup>68</sup>

In my two quarters at City High I made use of lessons on canonical American literature created by previous HOT graduate students, lessons that the classroom teacher with whom I partnered had enjoyed when previous HOT workshop leaders presented them. They fitted comfortably in the “American Literature” framework of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classes in which we taught, which instituted a view of history and culture that was U.S.-centric rather than of the Americas. We began with Arthur Miller’s take on Salem, a play whose explicit subject is British protestant religiosity amongst colonists in New England. Next, we addressed Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence* (of those colonies from Britain), then Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience* (against the U.S. government within the U.S. legal system) and his *Walden* (rugged individualist nature writing in a [North] American wilderness). And we closed with Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (old money meets new money on Long Island). Many students in our classrooms – be

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<sup>68</sup> One parallel: Steve Parks’s Institute for the Study of Language, Literacy, and Culture, which struggled to maintain traction in Philadelphia schools through a GEAR UP grant that ultimately diluted the program’s impact. See *Gravyland*, Chapter 2.

their ancestors Native Americans, Spaniards, or mestizaje – could trace genealogies to those who had lived in Spanish California, and later Mexican California. However, the literature and rhetoric that grew out of California’s borderlands history wasn’t part of our curriculum. These lessons, I now realize, did not carve out our own “crawl space” within the school system; they were simply part of the system, a system that succeeded for too few of the students enrolled in it. In terms of the literacy triangle, these literature units were supported by only leg: cultural literacy. Any claims for Spanish-language literacy or critical race studies within the hegemonic cultural literacy we taught were neglected.

Ours was not the only program to support such a view of American literature. Recent events in Arizona, in which ethnic studies programs centered on Latin@ experiences have been effectively banned in the public schools (see Gonzales; Medina; Serna), only make obvious the long-running orientation of curriculum in formerly Mexican states like California and Arizona along these Anglo-American trajectories. Such curriculum portrays these lands not as “borderlands” but as an undifferentiated segment of the Anglo-American dominated United States. And it measures achievement only in English. In her 2013 interview with Christina Kirklighter and Isabel Baca, Roseann Dueñas Gonzales argues, referencing Arizona’s experience, that the marginalization of Chican@ history and the Spanish language in the public schools amounts to a “subjugation and “subjectification” bent on “eradicating equality of educational opportunity for Latinos and instituting ghettoization” (26-27). If Gonzales’s argument that the curriculum contains intent to harm is hard to swallow, perhaps it’s because that curriculum – Miller, Jefferson, Thoreau, Fitzgerald – has long since shed the markings of the ideological struggle that instituted it and become a default, common-sense approach to the teaching of language skills in American high schools. Common sense to the schools, and thus

necessary for HOT, which depended upon their cooperation. But California's 31% Latino dropout rate (Torkalson), and the difficulty of the UCs in securing Chicana@ students eligible for admittance, suggests that our English-only, Anglo-American curriculum doesn't really make much sense for Chicana@ students. We would do better to try the ethnic studies curriculum available until recently in Arizona, which has been shown to lower the dropout rate for Latina@s (Gonzales).

Unfortunately, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, when HOT was "cooled out" into a standardized curriculum, its strategic ground became indistinguishable from that of the school system, the very system whose neglected students HOT was trying to reach. Even as the emotional exchanges between tutors and students in HOT's small-group lessons show that important connections were being made, the outreach work that HOT had been designed to accomplish often proved out of reach.

### **III. HOT Heats Up**

But I found in my research into other aspects of the HOT program that such was not always the case. So I close on a more hopeful note, explaining how HOT was at times able to embrace a more radical program, offering a glimpse of that program in action, and considering how it can help civic literacy to reclaim *strategic* ground in the battle for an enriching and empowering education for the young citizens in all levels of public education.

Put simply, when HOT partnered with progressive teachers, schools, or units within schools, or when it was organized by members our university's ethnic studies program – a space that was at once radical and strategic – HOT could undertake "edge politics." We practiced edge politics when we partnered with a theater teacher to produce a student-authored play, or with a

bilingual educator to produce bilingual poetry. We also did so in lessons taught by UCI's own Chicana@ scholars through HOT history, lessons that educated the high school students on anti-Mexican discrimination in a local context. Remember that edge politics foregrounds the participation of students in political bodies, the recognition that students' voices emerge out of collective concerns and can contribute to collective progress. In the case of the theater and poetry, HOT brought a La Mesita community together around the stage. It offered students a chance to, as one sponsor put it, "document and formalize" their experiences for a live audience that included their parents and teachers. Though not all members of this community enjoyed the rights of citizens, and few of them were directly involved in policy-making, this adult audience still represented a collective body with decision-making power. And in the case of the history lessons, students were able to link their personal stories of discrimination to the racist laws that had helped to produce a culture of White supremacy whose effects still influenced their lives; students were thereby encouraged to understand themselves within a Chicana@ identity formation that countered Anglo-American dominance. Both the creative writing and the history versions of HOT, then, allowed for the authority and voice of students even as they linked students to groups beyond the classroom: adults in their homes and schools and academics in the Chicana@ movement.

To shed light on the radical potential of such partnership, and to illuminate the strategic and tactical configurations in which edge politics can be practiced, I'll describe both the school play and the Chicana@ history strand of HOT in some detail.

I begin with the play, *Here I Am*, a production led by La Mesita High drama teacher Claribel Castle. Already running workshops in English classes at the school, HOT brought support to the theater production in the form of tutor Pasclina Deschamps, then a

senior drama major at UCI; with funding from the Center for Educational Partnerships, it also published a transcript of the play as a book, which was what brought the production to my attention. This publication included pictures and commentary by the cast and crew as well and by the play's sponsors, which included HOT Director Julia Lupton, administrators and professors in the UCI drama program and in the school of the humanities, and, most importantly, the school principal and the play's director, Claribel Castle.

Produced in the fall after just eight weeks of scriptwriting and rehearsal, *Here I Am*, was really a collection of student-written scenes, scenes driven by believable characters engaged in real-world conflicts: decisions about going away or staying home for college, about studying one's ethnic heritage or pursuing a practical career. In the play, one character soliloquizes on her great teacher's departure and another critiques her teacher's inattention. Others chastise drug users, consider the pull between gang membership and love, discuss a teen mother's decision to give up her child, and, most often, describe infidelity in dating and arguments with parents. One recurring pair of characters, known as the rumor mill, functions as a kind of inverted Greek chorus, spreading gossip.

*Here I Am* isn't politics in the straightforward sense that Flower and Parks advocate when they outline literacy partnerships in which students confront authorities concerning the deprivations of an educational system. Characters in *Here I Am*, as we see in the description above, negotiate conflicts with groups nearer at hand: friends, parents, teachers, and neighbors. But inasmuch as the writing process solicited student agency in creating material that commented on the everyday experience of life in their neighborhood, it was a radical departure from much of their education. Castle settled on the idea for *Here I Am* because, as she put it, "I spent the summer reading other plays designed for high school actors . . . and realized that none

of them really addressed the concerns of our student population.” This is not to say that the play was primarily autobiographical; rather, it was an attempt to stage community concerns. As Castle put it in an interview:

I’m pretty sure that none of the kids in the production were involved with drugs on any kind of hard level . . . But they were surrounded by that, because of the community they grew up in . . . So, talk about politics, it was a way of them processing the reality that they saw other people had to deal with.

Another radical aspect of the practice in a system that almost always measures achievement at an individual level was the collective process through which the students honed the script. Pasclina coached students in developing their scenes during rehearsals using Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal’s method of simultaneous dramaturgy. This practice, which Pasclina brought from her drama courses at Irvine, allows audience to interrupt the action of a scene and to direct the protagonists to act differently, or even to step in to the role of the main character themselves. In Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed, such a process would be used to work through confrontations actors might find in a public space like the city council, echoing Flower’s “Problem Solving Dialogues” but with the twist that actors were more likely to embody their decisions on the stage first, leaving it to their classmates, or to themselves later, to transcribe their dialogue. Pasclina remembers the engagement that this collaborative and embodied writing elicited from the La Mesita High drama students:

Because it was their own words . . . at the end of the process they had this entire collection that was a real script. And it was like, “This is my friend’s scene. This is my scene. This matters.” . . . They put words on a script, and once they had improvised, written them down, and then edited them, they now had words they believed in. I just don’t think they ever would have cared so much about what was on the script had they not created it.

As Castle put it, HOTS's publication of the student's work said to students, "what you say and what you write matter . . . Adults are going to pay attention by publishing it and acknowledging it."

Also political, given the state's recent injunction against bilingual language instruction, was the language in which those statements were made. The play focused on concerns common to mainstream and Latin@ high schoolers at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – heterosexual romantic relationships, parent-child arguments over curfews and dating – and at times it pulled language from pop culture: "They were playing with language that was coming from Buffy the Vampire Slayer," Castle said, "bringing some real, slangy, fun." But woven throughout many scenes in *Here I Am* is the mixed Spanish and English used in their La Mesita neighborhood. As Pasclina put it in an interview, "Spanish was spoken, like, bilingually in a lot of their homes. So they'd start doing the scene and then in recreating the mom character or older brother they'd start putting in colloquialisms, and the colloquialisms would come in Spanish."<sup>69</sup> Domestic scenes, from which I've pulled the following monologue, demonstrate such cross-generational code meshing:

**DAD:** Hijo, déjame decirte something. I do not know how you will even earn money studying about the Aztecs and las tortas or, what do you call them, Toltecs, and Frida [Kahlo], Diego [Rivera] and all of them. Now, on the other hand, mira a tu cuate. He makes web pages y gana muchísimo dinero.  
(20)

Here is a conflict between a society that rewards technological literacy and a Chican@ Studies political-academic formation that promotes ethnic heritage. This conflict is staged as a domestic

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<sup>69</sup> From an emotional angle, it's interesting to see how home language "landed" in the school's discourse space. Pasclina reported that students sometimes laughed while speaking in Spanish, which at first made her wonder, as someone unfamiliar with the language, if they were saying inappropriate remarks. Instead, she concluded, they were laughing in embarrassed recognition at how their own voices had made their parents' present amongst them at school.

drama between a Mexican-born, bilingual father and his American-born, monolingual son, but it practices edge politics nonetheless by bringing such discussions to a public stage where audience members can reflect on them.

Indeed, at a few points in the play Spanish takes on life in play's imagined public, as in this scene where two young men tune into a radio program in which Chica One and El Brujo discuss love:

**JUANITO:** Hey, it's El Brujo on the radio. Let's get some advice from him.

**BENITO:** Don't tell me you believe in that, do you?

**JUANITO:** Simón, carnal. He gives love potions. Hey, maybe you can give her agua de calzone to get her to fall in love with you.

**BENITO:** Qué es eso?

**JUANITO:** Forget it, just listen.

*Juanito turns on the radio. Benito gets out his notebook and pencil to take notes.*

**CHICA ONE:** Qué honda? How are you all doing out there in radioland? (30)

Here, the folk tradition of *brujeria* is depicted as integral to a radio show, one of many media outlets that filter through students' everyday lives but that somehow elude the attention of most language educators in the students' schools. Here, students succeed in depicting the Southland's mixed cultures from a Chican@ perspective. Castle once wrote, "In the very texture and sound of its mixed language, the play strives, at its best, to document and formalize the drama of everyday life in [La Mesita]."

So how did a student-authored play that included this kind of code-meshing and that addressed difficult topics like rape, domestic violence, substance abuse, and gang activity make it public on a high school stage in Orange County? And not just make it to the stage, but win a major local theater award on that stage, and garner an article in the newspaper ("talk about validating their work," Castle said of these accolades. "As artists and writers, they [the students] really felt ownership"). My argument is that *school* sponsorship made these edge



politics possible. I offer this fact – that K-12 public education can offer university partners *strategic* spaces in which to participate in edge politics and progressive education – as a corrective to scholarship in civic writing that too often shortchanges the efforts of progressive K-12 actors. (This is a point I also made in Chapter 2 in documenting the efforts of after-school sponsors Orgullo and Gustavo, who pushed bilingual literacy and Brown pride in the after-school centers.)

In the case of *Here I Am*, Castle credited administrators at La Mesita High: the principal who hired her and the department chair who supported her program. In fact, Castle reported that her play was just one aspect of the school’s extensive arts program in a school that served students of low socioeconomic status: “[W]e had a full theater program, a full choir program, a full dance program . . . a full orchestra, a full band, and a full visual arts [program]—photography, drawing, and painting.” Even as demands for testing rose, the principal defended the value of these programs. Given these facts, I maintain that Castle, backed by supportive administrators, had set up the theater as a strategic space. They’d earned the arts, which in this case offered a progressive representation of students’ everyday lives, their own proper (propertyed) ground: the periods carved out of the otherwise test-centered school day for arts education, time that Castle opened up to the students to compose their own dramas. And they’d allowed students to take charge of the literal space of the theater itself, a public stage, to tell their stories.

It was from this strategic ground that Claribel Castle was able to embark on a partnership with Humanities Out There that enriched the language education of her drama students. *Here I Am* was actually the second stage in that partnership. A UCI graduate herself and a onetime student of Lupton, Castle first collaborated with HOT in staging a bilingual

version of a classic play set in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. That collaboration made use of the expertise in Spanish offered by another student who would earn degrees from UCI on her route to a professorship at a major research university. With Lupton's coordination, Castle brought the production to UCI, where the performers had the opportunity to discuss the decisions that went into the play with UCI faculty and students. I would note that this was as much a move outward from La Mesita High's strategic arts program, gathering UCI's Spanish resources and an interested audience, as it was outreach from UCI to La Mesita.

Turning from Castle's drama program to HOT's Chican@ history component, I argue that scholars of literacy partnerships should also recognize that progressive politics has secured strategic ground *within* the academy in the form of ethnic studies programs, and that we would do well to draw upon these programs as strategic resources for meeting the needs of our own underserved students as well as those in K-12 education. Whereas *Here I Am* was led by a progressive contingent in the local schools, the radical potential of HOT history grew out of the radical politics already sustained by UCI's Chican@/Latin@ studies program, which, like many such programs nationwide, grew out of the achievements of the Civil Rights movement.

Within UCI's HOT program, the effect of ethnic studies was most obvious in the work undertaken by Ana Cantú, who played a key role in HOT. An article Cantú co-authored at the time documents some of the standout moments of the partnerships that emerged under her directorship, including an oral history collaboration in which students interviewed local elders who had been leading activists in midcentury politics, and a unit on 20<sup>th</sup> century history administered in the early 2000s that connected immigration issues from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the nationwide immigration rights marches happening contemporaneously.

When I interviewed Cantú, she looked back with particular fondness on that oral history project; from her office, she could see the quad where La Mesita students had gathered with Francisco Jimenez for a celebratory event nearly a decade before. Jimenez, the child of migrant farmworkers had since authored a book on the topic (*The Circuit*) and gone on to become chancellor of UC Davis. That day he had circulated amidst the young students answering questions about his book while they scarfed down pizza.

Cantú impacted the program in longer-lasting ways as well. Her contributions ensured that topics like civil rights and immigration continued to be informed by Chican@ Studies content appropriate for the students HOT served. And I saw Cantú's impact firsthand in 2012 when I observed a series of history lessons at our partner school, lessons led by James Ramírez, whose dissertation Cantú is directing. An award-winning scholar and the HOT history workshop coordinator for two years, James took it upon himself to design and refine a lesson on Mendez v. Westminster, the landmark court case that desegregated Orange County schools in 1947. James had already co-authored a book on Mexican American culture in the Southland, and like many of the graduate students who developed HOT's curriculum, his own scholarly interests informed what he brought to the high school. His lesson framed the Mendez case in both local and national contexts. Nationally, Mendez v. Westminster served as precedent for the more famous Brown v. Topeka Board of Education case. Locally, James's lesson developed a narrative about the discrimination Latin@ residents faced in public spaces in the region where the high school now stood, from the schools and parks to the local movie theater. It was at that local theater, within a few miles of this school, where a Mexican American World War II veteran fought for the same integration that the Mendez family, along with four other Mexican American families, had

fought for in Orange County's schools. James's lesson told about how the veteran refused to sit in a section reserved for Mexicans, and how he eventually won the fight.

That lesson hit home in the group I observed, which included one of the school's many ROTC students, dressed in fatigues. At war, this student said, you are "watching your buddy's back and he doesn't care if you're white or Mexican." He added, "You'd feel cheated if you fought for someone else's freedom and then you came back and you were treated like an animal." When asked by the tutor how they'd respond to such an injunction, or to other discriminatory laws like the banning of Mexican residents from public pools except for "Mexican Day," the day before cleaning day, students in this group talked about circulating petitions and gathering in marches, even as they admitted that it would be difficult to stand up to the adults who held the power in such a system.

If students contemplated their ability to organize politically on other days in this classroom, it's unlikely they'd be contemplating progressive movements. Posters of George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan adorned the walls of this classroom, along with "Operation Iraqi Freedom" news clippings that clearly aligned with the heavy military presence at the school (a presence I viewed with some trepidation, as I discussed in Chapter 4 on Police Discourse).<sup>70</sup> This paraphernalia reflected the politics of the history teacher who'd welcomed HOT into his classroom, a man who had taken selected students to the Republican National Convention on at least two occasions. In one of two interviews I conducted with him, the teacher said that James's lesson on the Chican@ movement took a more multicultural approach than did his usual curriculum:

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<sup>70</sup> The military's influence on school culture became particularly clear when I attended a school pep rally. There, a special education teacher whose child was enrolled in the district informed me that several City High students regularly attended a program at a nearby marine base. Meanwhile at the pep rally, members of the school's ROTC, dressed in full uniform with pants creased and hats gleaming, led us in the pledge of allegiance.

HOT provides a different look at history from a different viewpoint. The curriculum hits groups that may not have been included in the history book . . . They [the students] [a]re reading about the contributions of minorities and women, people who didn't necessarily have the agency to be historical players in their time. That's different.

I don't think James would have agreed that the protagonists in his lessons lacked agency, but James had established a warm working relationship with the teacher over the course of two years, suggesting that there's truth to Mathieu's emphasis on "personal relationships, mutual needs, and a shared sense of timing," and to Goldblatt's assertion: "individual relationships among people in schools and colleges will probably prove to be the single most important factor in students' success, though we may never have enough data to prove that assertion" (*Because* 12-13). James spoke highly of the teacher, and the teacher of James; when they talked together during the classes I observed they swapped jokes and traded stories. A few times, I asked James about his and the teacher's conflicting politics, and each time James brushed the questions aside, assuring me that the teacher was cool with HOT.

Given the topic of this dissertation, it would be unwise to downplay the role of emotions and interpersonal rapport in making this particular partnership work, even if I don't have the data to describe that rapport more exactly. (It didn't hurt that one of the early HOT directors and the history teacher had enjoyed each other's company at a barbeque a few years back.) However, one factor that contributed to James's comfort in bringing Chican@ Studies to this classroom, and to the teacher's acceptance of it, is that James's efforts were legitimated and supported by a strong Chican@/Latin@ Studies program. Put another way, this Chican@ Studies program was part of a network of progressive education that offered the strategic grounds for James's curriculum. James's diversity scholarship, his winning of an award designed to support members of underrepresented minority groups and first-generation college students, had been

crucial to his transition into our research university (James said he would have made it anyway, but it would have been a lot harder.) And Ana Cantú's presence in the history department helped to support James in finding time to build a Chican@ studies lesson. HOT, which at 15 years into its existence was a strategic ground in itself (though admittedly one on tenuous footing) still had the means to support James while he carried out these workshops.<sup>71</sup> James was tactically savvy in drawing connections between the Mendez case and students' lives, and in citing events the students cared about, like war, and locations in the region, like the movie theater. But James was supported all the while by a Chican@ Studies program that provided a strategic ground from which to launch an incursion into the conservative high school history classroom.

I call for more studies that account for the richness and diversity of K-12 teaching, that explore how sponsors within the K-12 system push counter-hegemonic practices. As important as it is for us to critique programs that sustain themselves without sustaining their students and clients, it's important too that we highlight *strategic* successes *within* the system, the success of programs like the CFEP in making our universities more diverse, or of local sponsors like Ms. Evans (discussed in Chapter 3) who coach underserved students through the college application process and assist them in applying for scholarships. We need more work like that done by scholars like Parks and Goldblatt, scholars who recognize progressive education movements in the K-12 arena and who trace different constellations of teachers supporting it, as Parks does with the RELA movement in the Philadelphia schools (*Gravyland*, Chapter 2), or as Goldblatt does with the progressive staff at Somerset High School in Philadelphia (*Because*, Chapter 2). We should take up work like Maisha Fisher's, which follows spoken-word poet and Bronx high

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<sup>71</sup> Cantú, after assuming a leadership role at the university, had helped to keep HOT afloat in the public schools for one more year.

school teacher Joseph Ubildes in his year with the Power Writers, a spoken-word group who venture out into the city to gather their poetry and on to a public stage to perform it. These examples of progressive, strategic education are inspiring and instructive, and remind us that universities have much to learn about student empowerment from the K-12 educational units we hope to assist in our partnerships.

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## **APPENDIX A: FORUM PROMPT – EXPERIENCE IS THE SEED OF RESEARCH**

One of the important things that writers and researchers need to think about as they start the writing process is what knowledge they bring to the table, what they're passionate about, and what observations and questions they have about their subject. For this forum, I want you to once again sift through your own experiences in K-12 education, this time in search of a problem. The major paper for this course, the CBR, requires you to focus on a "problem" in K-12 education. That means looking into some way in which some person or group is being harmed.

### **Part 1 (300 words):**

Consider what about your own education, or the education of other you know, was somehow wrong. What problems did you see in your school or in other schools? What impact might your socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation have had on your education? And how might this impact have been unjust to you or to others? Were students "tracked," and if so, using what criteria? How did this affect students on each track? Were teachers laid off at your school due to budget problems? Did incompetent or apathetic teachers keep their jobs? Were programs cut that you think shouldn't have been? Were programs implemented that didn't seem to do much good? Have standards been relaxed in terms of grades or testing? Have they been focused on the wrong sets of skills? What questions do you have about the practices that are used in education? What needs to be changed that you feel strongly about?

These are just a few questions to get you started, but feel free to explore what you know already and then what you may want to research in the future.

### **Part 2 (100 words):**

Respond to two of your classmates' forums, giving them ideas about what they can do to expand or focus their research. Consider: What do you want to know more about? Have you had similar or different experiences and how might that shift, expand, or focus their research? 50 words minimum for each response.



## APPENDIX B: 4-PART REFLECTIVE BLOG (FALL 39C)

### Blogs 1-4\*

Now that you've begun working at your service site, you'll be writing a series of weekly journals describing and reflecting upon your experience there.

With your NGO, you will have the opportunity to work with different youths, volunteers, and staff, doing activities that range from tutoring high school juniors in chemistry to running a softball game. These experiences provide unique opportunities to better understand the educational and life experiences of the youth with whom you work. You'll gain insights on how the places and people they interact with influence their goals, habits, and achievement. To help you gain a better understanding of education and of how students' work with others (volunteers, peers, staff) influences them, I ask that you keep a journal of your experience in the blog section of the Studio. After every visit during weeks 2-5, you should write a blog that addresses separately each of the following four (4) categories: description, reflection, analysis, and experimentation (though you can combine description and reflection if you like). Every week, you will post your blog no later than 12:30pm on Mondays starting October 10th.

### 1. **Descriptive Section** -

Includes your description of your activities at the site. For this, you should include who interacted with whom, and within what context. For instance, you might describe the activities you did with students, how you began a conversation, how you helped with the student's homework during a tutoring session, what you talked about with a fellow volunteer. Use pseudonyms (fake names) when discussing the kids and fellow staff, but give real and specific dates and places.

Here's what Thomas Deans, an expert on service-learning, has to say about fieldnotes:

*You should avoid vague or abstract descriptions of behavior and instead use detailed sensory descriptions (what you actually see and hear). Anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls this thick description. "For example, when observing at a tutoring center, you might write, The kids were happy." But this is much too vague. Instead, you should record what the kids were doing that indicated to you that they were happy. How many children and tutors were there? What were their [or your] specific activities? Who was interacting with whom, and how? What were they saying (record quotations, if possible) and how were they saying it? Also, make observations about the context: What time is it? What does the room look like? What books and materials are being used? and so on.*

### 2. **Reflective Section** –

This is a personal reflection about the events. It includes your thoughts and feelings about the situation, and your perceptions of others' thoughts and feelings about the event. It includes your perceptions of how this event has affected individuals in your service setting and why.

Questions you should consider:

- a. What was your reaction to the events in which you participated (tutoring, discussion, supervising, etc.)?
- b. What were you seeking in this relationship?
- c. What do you think the other party was seeking in this relationship?
- d. What assumptions did you make about the other individual(s)?

- e. How do you think the other party felt about the interaction?
- f. What assumptions do you think the other part made about you?

3. **Abstract Conceptualization** - This is the place to make connections between your experiences, the class readings, and your own research.
- a. Our first reading, Coles, was about service, and you compared your own ethic to his initial *noblesse oblige* ethic.
    - a1. How does your own definition of service impact your behavior and goals in this relationship?
    - a2. How do you think the kids/tutees would describe the kind of "service" you're doing with them?
  - b. We're also doing other readings (Kozol, Gandara, Ravitch, etc.).
    - b1. What are you observing that agrees with what you're reading?
    - b2. What are you seeing during your time with the students or their instructors that you might *not* have predicted based on the readings?
    - b3. Can the reading help you to see how the assumptions you mentioned in the reflection above might have been shortsighted or faulty?
  - c. In this section, you'll also make connections between the observations you're making on-site and the research you're conducting for your three essays: the Research Proposal, the Interview, and the Historical Analysis/Community-Based Research.
    - c1. After spending time with the students, what questions do you have about their education and about the program in which you're working?
    - c2. Is there anyone on-site who might be able to answer these questions in an interview?
    - c3. What kinds of news stories or scholarly articles might answer your questions?
    - c4. As you begin your database research, you will also note in this section how what you're finding agrees or disagrees with what you're seeing online.
4. **Planning for Active Experimentation** - Consider the following questions as you prepare for future service work on-site, and perhaps in your future life:
- a. How does this learning relate to other situations you might encounter in the future?
  - b. How can you test your new assumptions about yourself, others, or the organization?
  - c. Next time, what might you try in a similar situation?
  - d. How has this experience impacted your definition of service?
  - e. What can you do to become more aware of cultural differences and how factors in the external environment impact service experiences?

\*questions adapted from pgs. 97-100 of *A Practitioner's Guide to Service-learning* (Eyler, Schmiede, and Giles Jr.)

## APPENDIX C: POETS' LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

1. Handwrite a letter to the small group of students you'll be mentoring this quarter. Be sure to model the correct format of a friendly letter: e.g. "Dear Mystery Student," or however you'd like to name him/her. The numbers aren't set yet, but you'll probably be working with 1-2 students. Each student will read your letter (or a copy of it) and write you back an individual letter.
2. In your letter, introduce yourself. Tell the student about your hopes for the poetry workshops and one or two of the fun things you'd like to do in them (read aloud, listen to them read, help them write, etc.). In addition, tell students a few personal things about yourself; for example, your likes and dislikes, what you did over the summer, and your hobbies. If you want, share with them your major and your year in school. You might even share with them any hesitations or worries you have about doing the workshops. Finally, share with them some details about your relationship to poetry (i.e. what you like or dislike about poetry, favorite poems, what kinds of poetry you know about).
3. Ask questions throughout the letter. Be sure to ask about poems or songs they like, and about people, places, or events they might want to write about. If you can squeeze in a question about a pop star or song they DON'T like, do it (I think we're going to do parodies during one workshop). You might also ask what they like most about school, what they did during the summer, what their goals for the workshop are, or what they are really good at.
4. An idea: close with a line from a poem/song you like.
5. No need to cover everything listed above; this letter is meant to personalize the relationship between UCI and younger poets/students, so feel free to adjust as you see fit. The point is to introduce yourself to the student and hopefully get him/her excited about the poetry that's coming up.

Contact me if you have any questions,  
Lance

## **APPENDIX D: K-12 LITERACY INTERVIEW**

### **Poetry and Poetry Workshops (PW)**

Have you ever written poetry before? If so, what kinds?

Was there a time during poetry club when you took charge? If yes, explain.

(Show student a poem he/she wrote) and ask:

What were you trying to say in this poem?

What was the most difficult part of writing this poem? What was the easiest?

What stands out for you when you remember the poetry workshops?

### **Barrio Center Literacy (BCL)**

Did you do any part of the elementary reading program (X) here at the center?

If not, why not?

If so, how far did you get? Which level book?

What made you start going?

What made you stop?

Do you use the computers here at the center? If so, what do you do on them?

What do you read here at the center?

What assignments do you write here at the center? Do you do journals?

Do you write to people for fun, like notes or letters? If so, what kinds of things do you write?

### **School Literacy (SL)**

What school do you go to?

How often do you write for homework?

What was the last writing assignment you had in school?

What did you write about?

English

What do you read in English class at school?

Describe a regular day in English class.

Social Studies

Do you read a social studies textbook?

Describe a regular day in social studies class.

### **Home/Personal Literacy (HL)**

What do you read at home?

What do you write?

Who do you read and/or write with?

Do you text message using your phone? If so, do you consider that “writing?”

### **Community Literacy (CL)**

Do you ever need to read and write when you’re at the store? If so, what do you read?

What do you write?

What about when you’re doing a hobby? Playing? If so, what do you read? What do you write?

**Mentoring (M)**

Do you know anyone here who went to college? Do you know what college they went to?

What colleges do you know about around here?

Do you have plans to go to any of those colleges?

What kinds of writing do you think that [staff member 1] did in college? How about [staff member 2]? (Etc.)

How much poetry do you think people write in college?

## APPENDIX E: ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION BOARD (ADB) PROMPT

You'll be writing two reflective blogs that respond to *questions you select* from those provided in the prompt. By the time you're done with the second blog, you need to have covered all four categories: description, reflection, conceptualizing, and experimentation. Note, however, that you do NOT need to answer every question in every category.

Due dates (all assignments are due at midnight):

Feb. 15 - Blog 1 (350 words)                      Feb. 18 - Peer Response 1 (50 words)

Feb. 22 - Blog 2 (350 words)                      Feb. 25 - Peer Response 2 (50 words)

### Part 1 – Blog Prompt

1. **Descriptive Section-** Includes your description of *your* activities at City High. For this, you should focus on your interactions with the students during the lessons. Keep in mind that Langdon and your fellow tutors already know the main points of the lesson, so you should write about what was unique about your implementation of the lesson and about your students' reactions. For instance, in discussing the students' reading, you might describe how you began the conversation, how you helped the students make sense of the reading, and what the students said about the reading. What puzzled them? What did they enjoy? Did they make connections to other events or to their own experience? Similarly, when you describe the students' writing, you might describe where they got stuck and how your feedback did or didn't help them.

2. **Reflective Section-** This is a personal reflection about the lessons. It includes your thoughts and feelings about the situation, and your perceptions of others' thoughts and feelings about the event. Questions you should consider:

- a. What was the most difficult part about working through the lessons with the students?
- b. What do you think the students learned from the lessons?
- c. How do you think the other party felt about the interaction?
- d. What were you seeking in this relationship with the high school students?
- e. What do you think the other party was seeking in this relationship?
- f. What assumptions did you make about the other individual(s)?
- g. What assumptions do you think the other part made about you?
- h. Have you learned anything in your fieldwork that has changed your assumptions? Anything that has confirmed them?

**3. Abstract Conceptualization** - This is the place to make connections between your experiences onsite and your prior experiences with English or writing, both at UCI and in your own high school. Questions you should consider:

- a. Were you able to bring any of the skills you've learned in classes at UCI to bear as you taught these students? If so, which?
- b. How do these classes compare to the classes you've done at UCI?
- c. Were you able to bring any of the skills you've learned in classes in high school to bear as you taught these students? If so, which?
- d. How do these classes compare to the classes you took in high school?
- e. What effect do your answers to the above questions have on the kind of writing the students are able to produce with your assistance?

**4. Planning for Active Experimentation** - Consider the following questions as you prepare for future tutoring with HOT, and perhaps in your future life:

- a. How does these HOT workshops relate to other tutoring, teaching, or literature-related activities you might encounter in the future?
- b. How can you test your new assumptions about yourself, others, or City High?
- c. Next time, what might you try in a similar situation?
- d. How has this experience impacted your definition of outreach?
- e. What can you do to become more aware of how cultural differences and assumptions about those differences impact service experiences?

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**Part 2 - Respond to the blog of one (1) other tutor.** Consider:

1. (Sections 1 and 2) Did you have similar or different experiences or reactions to those experiences?
2. (Sections 1 and 2) How might your experiences shift, expand, or focus your fellow tutor's observations?
3. (Section 3) Do you have any insights for your fellow tutor based on your other writing and English classes here at UCI or at your high school?
4. (Section 4) Is there advice that you can offer about the person's plan for the future?