

# Engaged Scholarship at the University

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# Engaged Scholarship at the University

## Abstract

The complex relationship between the university and the city provides the context for this chapter, which explores not only the changing nature of scholarship in the metropolitan research university, but how its changing intellectual climate should, in turn, change our conception of writing instruction for students who attend college in the city. It is argued that engaged research -- participatory, reciprocal research -- depends on an awareness of research as a discursive practice; that is, on how language and rhetoric are used to shape emerging knowledge. When both faculty members and students focus on engagement, their relationship to the city is enhanced, while also enhancing undergraduate education and, in particular, writing instruction.

The complex relationship between the university and the city provides the context for this chapter, which explores not only the changing nature of scholarship in the metropolitan research university, but how its changing intellectual climate should, in turn, change our conception of writing instruction for students who attend college in the city. Historian Thomas Bender argues for “a university *of*, not simply *in*, the city” (1998 18). Each entity, the university and the city, has a particular intellectual or cultural trajectory. Their needs are different but each provides a measure of balance. Bender describes the preferred modality of each:

The university is best at producing abstract, highly focused, rigorous and internally consistent forms of knowledge, while the city is more likely to produce descriptive, concrete, but also less tightly focused and more immediately useful knowledge, whether this is generated by businessmen, journalists, or professional practitioners. The academy risks scholasticism, but the culture of the city is vulnerable to the charge of superficiality and crude pragmatism (19).

Even as Bender sets up this series of binaries, he cautions against solidifying this set of differences into monolithic, self-contained institutional entities. Outside of universities, Bender finds examples of exciting opportunities to reconnect research and advocacy, such as Lower Manhattan’s Silicon Alley, an “incredibly dense interdisciplinary world of writers, artists and computer freaks, making multimedia CD’s and other interactive media creations, some commercial products, [and] some art. . .” Rather than promoting a hardening of the two camps, Bender wishes to see a transmutation in which engagement suggests a repatterning of knowledge production, intellectual activity, and advocacy for change. The university *of* the city heightens its emphasis on localized knowledge without foregoing its historically purposeful approach to scholarship (21).

I begin this chapter with Stanley Fish’s argument against engaged scholarship. Stanley Fish raised issues of writing instruction and civic engagement in both national, professional venues as well as in local contexts while he was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Since UIC, has, itself, for the past decade and a half, encouraged an increasingly dialogic relationship with the city, this debate creates a fitting opening for the chapter. Fish -- a vigorous opponent of both service-learning and engaged research -- argues for disciplinary scholarship as a self-contained, coherent practice that depends on a particular body of knowledge. This is the kind of thing we do around here. I, however, argue that disciplinary scholarship is changing as institutions reconsider knowledge-making practices. Fish’s focus on the scholar’s embeddedness in a particular set of practices rather than on the discipline’s content provides an unintentional opportunity to use his argument

against him. Fish's notion of embeddedness, I demonstrate, provides a strong argument **for** engaged research. When both faculty members and students focus on engagement, we enhance our relationship to the city while also enhancing undergraduate education and, in particular, writing instruction.

After a brief discussion of what engaged scholarship and research is not, in the section, "How Discourse Drives Engagement" I argue that this sort of participatory, reciprocal research depends on an awareness of research as a discursive practice; that is, on how language and rhetoric are used to shape emerging knowledge. In the section, "For the New Learner Writing Means Participating," I make the transition to student learning. Certainly students should learn to engage in public debate and to produce written arguments that take positions on important issues, but the more subtle and hard-won pedagogical prize will be a student who takes part in the sort of transdisciplinary, discourse-focused scholarship conducted by faculty members. In this section, I liken the contemporary student's foray into new spaces and new genres to Keith Hoskin's 'new learners' of the latter half of the eighteenth century for whom writing and its new uses supersedes the traditional of oral exams. Student writing also defines the next section, "Replacing Reflection with Writing." Here, I offer a critique of the reflection essay, a prominent service-learning classroom activity typically employed to capture the learning generated by community-based service activities. This critique, continued in Chapter 4, illustrates how the embedded nature of the students' activity contributes to both scholarly understanding of the issues under exploration as well as sophisticated awareness of how writing supports learning. The final section, "When Students 'Walk' the City," suggests that the repatterning of knowledge-making practices suggested above by Thomas Bender can be achieved by conceptualizing the university as a spatial entity.

### **Changing the Kind of Thing We Do Around Here**

Traditionally, faculty members at research universities do two things: they teach students and they conduct research. In the popular press as well as in his scholarly work, Stanley Fish has insisted that university faculty should do these two things within the context of disciplines and not as political action. Further, he insists, our teaching should focus on bringing students into the practices of a particular discipline – in his example, literary criticism. This is "the kind of thing we do around here" (Fish 1995, 16). In the discussion that follows, I will enlist Stanley Fish, almost certainly against his will, to support my agenda for redesigning first-year writing

classes. I argue that one needn't choose to be "inside" or "outside" a discipline. Rather the notion of disciplinarity and our core ideas about making knowledge need to change. Most readers of Fish understand his argument validating discipline-centered work as one focused on the key questions asked by the discipline. I focus instead on his interest in embeddedness, which places a writer inside a situation and which defines the choices that might be made by that writer.

This feature of scholarly activity, embeddedness, which Fish claims for disciplinarity, I claim for the engaged university and for first-year writing instruction. Engagement, which focuses on making knowledge in partnership with others, depends on a scholar's embeddedness in a particular context as well as in a particular discipline. When a first-year writing student or a faculty member writes from an embedded position, that writer makes rhetorical decisions drawn from the complexities of a particular context. The student writer must see him or herself in a "lived situation" that calls for writing. This is what Fish claims for scholars of literature. I extend this claim to first-year students who study writing at an engaged institution.

Fish describes the work of the disciplinary specialist as one who is defined by, "traditions, histories, techniques, vocabularies, and methods of inquiry" (Olson 2002, 9). Specific academic practices are built on these features and help participants say what is distinctive about literary studies and what it is not.<sup>1</sup> Fish's discussion of literary scholarship depends on a sense of what it means to be a professional in this particular area. He relies on the notion of "immanent understanding" from legal philosophy to characterize an insider's grasp of the profession's practices: what questions might be asked; what answers might be given; what routines are habits of mind or hallmarks of the specific profession (1995, 20-21). The work of a literary critic is distinct not because of any particular content – the study of eighteenth century

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1 There is another side to Stanley Fish's discussion of disciplinarity and his engagement with composition and rhetoric. In two recent volumes -- a book-length treatment of Fish's work, *Justifying Belief* (2002) and an edited volume, *Postmodern Sophistry* (2004) -- scholars remind Fish that composition continues to be fact-on-the-ground in English departments. As Evan Watkins points out, Fish's discussion of the distinctiveness of literary work ignores the "material resources required to sustain the "intelligibility" of a distinct disciplinary set of practices and the "wayfaring pilgrims" who wish to inhabit the discipline (2004, 239-240). In the case of composition and rhetoric, discussions about material resources – the hiring and firing of adjunct staff, for instance -- often subsume and subvert discussions about the epistemological aims of the discipline. Entrenched in the institutional structure of universities as it is, writing instruction frequently generates more talk about its administrative management than about its disciplinary practices. Often seen as a support for other, more important academic endeavors, the contributions that first-year writing can make to student learning in the early years of an undergraduate program are ignored. As I argue in this book, the way to extricate first-year writing classes from their entrenched function in the university is to highlight the ways that writing is embedded in social situations.

British literature and drama, for instance – but because that participant grasps, “a coherent set of purposes. . . that inform an insider’s perception,” that allows him or her to listen with a critic’s ears (1995, 21).

As an example, Fish takes us through a reading of the first three words of Milton’s *Lycidas*. Just three words, “Yet once more,” sustain Fish as he illustrates the rich interpretive context that a traditional literary critic draws on to say what the poem means. His purpose, however, is not to argue for the truth of his analysis; rather he wants us to see the practices he engages in to articulate the words’ meaning. Fish asks: does ‘yet’ mean despite, or, does it refer to a sense of exasperation – must we do this again—as in ‘yet once *more?*’ (1995, 4). These alternative analyses – and he presents many rich and varied examples of others – depend on a set of discipline-based questions -- routines, if you will. He explains,

To choose between these readings . . . is to choose between the alternative imaginings of the situation from which the words issue, where ‘situation’ is an inadequate shorthand for such matters as the identity of the speaker – what kind of person is he? where has he been? where is he going?; the nature of his project – what is he trying to do?; the occasion of its performance—what has moved him to do it? (1995, 4).

The answers to these questions cannot come from the text. If they come from anywhere, Fish argues, they come from the critic’s’ embeddedness in disciplinary practices, practices that are immediately obvious to anyone who engages in them but equally mysterious to anyone outside that group of professionals (1995, 6). The distinctiveness of these practices helps to characterize the discipline as what it is and more importantly for Fish, what it is not.

Political work, such as efforts to redress inequality or support diversity are outside the scope of literary work and, Fish claims, will dissolve the distinctiveness of disciplinary ventures. If we want to influence legislators, we should hire a lobbyist; and, if we want to change the world, that’s all right, just don’t call it literary criticism. He offers a quip attributed to Samuel Goldwyn who said about his films, ‘If I wanted to send a message, I’d use Western Union’” (Fish 1995, 2). Or, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Fish proposes that if you, a scholar of literature, attempt to interpret a poem to advance a political cause, “you will be pretending to practice literary criticism, and you will be exploiting for partisan purposes the discipline in whose name you supposedly act” (Fish 2002 Cx). Thus, Fish separates disciplinary activity and political activity into two mutually exclusive spheres. Political activity, which he lumps together with engagement, outreach, and service-learning has no place in the context of literary work and further, no place in English Departments.

Fish offers his tightly conceived definition of disciplinarity, based on distinctiveness, as an argument against the idea of the engaged university. On the other hand, the Kellogg Commission says that disciplines and their distinctiveness are precisely the problem with universities. This commission, created by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and funded by a \$1.2 million grant from the Kellogg Foundation, assembled a group of twenty-four presidents and chancellors of public universities who, through a series of reports, proposed a new understanding of engagement for public, land-grant universities and colleges.<sup>2</sup> The Kellogg Commission's 1999 report responded in part to the fact that universities are seen by the public as unresponsive and out of touch with societal needs for access to knowledge. The public, they say, perceives academic governance as a "near-inscrutable entity governed by its own mysterious sense of itself" (20). They go on to say, "although society has 'problems,' our institutions have 'disciplines'" (1999, 20). Disciplines, like silos, are self-contained entities, concerned only with narrowly focused research agendas. Thus, the commission reasons, they have lost sight of the institution's mission to solve contemporary social problems. The solution, according to Kellogg, must be found in interdisciplinarity because no single discipline has the answer to society's problems.

To summarize: Fish argues that disciplines *should* be like silos, distinctive and self-contained. The Kellogg Commission says no, disciplines-as-silos are precisely the problem. The commission offers interdisciplinarity as the way that universities can help solve contemporary dilemmas. Fish, however, anticipating such a response, cautions that interdisciplinarity is, in fact, a logical impossibility. How can disciplines with their unique ways of knowing, their deeply embedded practices, collaborate to solve a social problem? Such a utopian synthesis would collapse under the weight of its own grandeur and the component disciplines that labored in particular fields would disappear (1995 73). It is important to note here that Fish aimed this

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<sup>2</sup> Defining engagement has, of course, been a key activity in the Kellogg Commission's work as well as in numerous public and academic contexts. Public institutions are for the most part, attempting to redefine engagement in contrast to earlier approaches which characterized the relationship of universities to their surrounding communities as one of *noblesse oblige*, charity, or outreach. Most who struggle with this definition are also aware of too-easy conceptions of community as sites of connection and agreement. The Kellogg Commission's evolving definition of engagement illustrates their struggle. In the 1999 report I cite here engagement was defined as follows: "institutions that have redesigned their teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however communities may be defined" (20). By the next year's report, the word sympathetic has disappeared from the definition for engagement and disciplines were described as permeable rather than as silos.



critique of interdisciplinarity directly at the then-burgeoning field of cultural studies which hoped, quite apart from ongoing discussions of the engaged university, to a) transform literary studies into a more socially relevant and consequential endeavor and b) combat disciplinary fragmentation by “taking the entire social ‘text’ as its object of study” (Olson, 19).

Now, you may reasonably ask, what do these arguments about disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity have to do with first-year writing programs or with the engaged university? Both disciplinarity, as defined by Fish, and interdisciplinarity as wished for by the Kellogg Commission, appear to depend on the movability of borders. This focus on borders points us to content: what content is appropriately studied in a particular discipline and what content is outside the purview of that discipline? Fish seems focused on content when he separates political work from literary criticism. Yet, the discipline of composition and rhetoric, with its responsibility for both teaching and research, does not depend on the distinctiveness of content to define itself. Rather, it draws on a deeper feature of disciplinarity, embeddedness, discussed by Fish but hardly mentioned in recent discussions of his work. In Fish’s argument, embeddedness refers to a scholar’s participation in the particular practices of his or her discipline, however, in this book embeddedness characterizes a participant’s deep involvement in specialized communities of practice populated by community and faculty participants working together to find solutions and respond to pressing concerns.

While the idea of distinctiveness allows Fish to make the case for preserving literary studies, it is his idea of embeddedness that drives successful writing instruction. Think back, if you will, to Fish’s reading of “yet once more,” the first three words of *Lycidas*, and his description of what the literary critic must do: the critic, who, let us not forget, is also a writer, must “choose between the alternative imaginings of the situation from which the words issue.” The critic must become part of the context in which the text was written and imagine the rhetorical and textual issues that apply. This embedded work, cast by Fish as literary-specific, discipline-centered work, is, in fact, what all writers do and provides the key message we want to send students who learn to write in the context of an engaged university.

Thus, a key feature of Fish’s “distinctiveness” argument, embeddedness, helps us to understand the potential that writing instruction offers for students in writing or service-learning classes. Embeddedness places the writer inside a writing situation so that the language he or she uses constructs that situation. Whether interpreting a poem or writing a needs statement for a local not-for-profit, the writer must construct an imagining of the situation: of its key features,

of the ways it has been represented historically, of the need that the writing responds to, and of one's writerly position in that situation. It's not the subject matter one is being asked to write about, but as Fish argued above, it's grasping, "a coherent set of purposes. . . that inform an insider's perception," and listening with a critic's [or writer's] ears (1995, 21, my addition). Notice how embeddedness subverts the usual distinction between literary studies, in which students are seen as consumers of text, and writing instruction, in which students become producers of text. Writing practices, when embedded in specific situations, allow students to be both consumers and producers of discourse.

I believe it is his deep appreciation of this feature of disciplinarity -- embeddedness -- that prompted Stanley Fish to proclaim in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that "Every dean should forthwith insist that all composition courses teach grammar and rhetoric and nothing else. . . Content should be avoided like the plague it is, except for the deep and inexhaustible content that will reveal itself once the dynamics of language are regarded not as secondary, mechanical aids to thought, but as thought itself" (2002b, xx). This diatribe, repeated again and again in horror on composition listservs, was taken by many to be a cold and self-serving dismissal of composition and rhetoric's years' long development as a discipline. For now, let's ignore Fish's administrative approach -- change by decree. By excluding content and by isolating grammar and rhetoric to be taught with "nothing else," Fish appears to be brandishing the "grammar hammer," a putative tool that, wielded with heft and accuracy, can pound students' errant sentences into correct forms. Fish's argument is more complicated than most assume.

When Fish refers to content in the first-year writing classroom, he is pointing, I believe, to the sorts of readings used by cultural studies theorists in first-year writing classes. These readings carry out the aims of cultural studies, and as Fish sees it, point students toward a particular brand of critical self-consciousness and, to his dismay, toward particular political positions. Cultural studies writing assignments, usually academic essays, ask students to analyze the social landscape they have just read about or observed. Students write about how racism takes its toll, how gender defines our lives, or how shopping malls reshape our desires. Cast as radical pedagogy, this sort of teaching actually traps students into writing for teachers about their newly-won critical consciousness. It is, as Fish points out, a form of reflection that does not stem from an imagining of any situation other than the classroom.

There is, according to Fish, another sort of content, which is "the deep and inexhaustible content that will reveal itself once the dynamics of language, or writing practices, are regarded

not as secondary, mechanical aids to thought, but as thought itself.” This other content, “deep and inexhaustible,” emerges from the function of words within syntactic structures. Those syntactic structures, crafted through a rhetorical desire for meaning, can only emerge from a writer’s deeply participatory presence in a particular situation. When, as you’ll see later in this chapter, students produce a brochure to warn parents about lead poisoning, they, too, are performing in language as part of a larger project. Unlike the school-based argumentative essay or research report in which students manipulate content for the teacher, the brochure requires something different. Operating as embedded participants teaches students the benefits of disciplinary practices without defining a particular context.<sup>3</sup> Teaching first-year writing classes that build on the sort of deep participation desired by Fish cannot be accomplished by individual teachers or in the context of particular disciplines. Such a change requires that we imagine a geo-rhetorical space that extends across disciplines and, more important, beyond the university’s intellectual and physical space.

### **What University Engagement is Not**

Before elaborating on engaged scholarship, I wish to respond to two alternative definitions for engagement that are receiving significant attention. First, I discuss the role of the public intellectual who speaks out on public issues but who, I argue, does not contribute to the sort of institutional change necessary to reshape our knowledge-making practices. Another popular model for engagement is public work, which involves both activist agendas and efforts to improve public dialogue. The work of activists who pursue agendas for social justice as well as the work of organizations that support public dialogue on critically important issues contribute to improving our lives. My purpose in this book, however, takes on that unwieldy entity called the university and asks how it, as an institution, can reshape its teaching and learning activities in ways that engage all stakeholders in reciprocal and collaborative practices. That section follows.

While the public intellectual has always played an important role in academia, this high-profile faculty member does more to divide the university from the city than to connect the two. Even so, the public remains interested in this public figure, hoping that his or her contribution

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<sup>3</sup> Whether or not these investigations are “political” is simply beside the point. Students will develop their own moral capacities and political agendas outside of the instructor’s pedagogical agenda. And here I grudgingly agree with Stanley Fish. Students will, on their own, become advocates for change based on their educational experiences; teachers do not need to plan for such change.

will improve the social fabric. This interest in the public intellectual is not new; in some ways it recycles a long-standing debate about the university's terms of engagement with its public. Richard Posner cautions against an academic pedestal for the public intellectual, a role which he says is in decline. Posner offers a market-driven analysis focused narrowly on academics who direct their intellectual activity through the media at a public audience to comment on political matters or to function as a social critic (2003, 23-24). Posner's economic analysis suggests that the potential supply of public intellectuals might be greater than the demand for them. Many bright young assistant professors can design careers that produce outward-directed scholarship, but most will not achieve success. The costs to the scholar for this activity, Posner argues, are considerable. First, the ability and intellectual maturity to perform successfully in public are not talents held by all. Second, a young scholar who jumps the track of his specialty risks the derision of his colleagues who see this move as a bid for notoriety that precludes scholarship. Third, publications with a trade press bypass the traditional methods of ensuring quality through academic peer review placing the young scholar in a precarious position for internal academic review (Posner 2003, 81). Finally, only a small number of performing academics who have an interest in being a public intellectual ever reach the superstar status that Posner says marks their success (2003, 402.)

The public intellectual's activities serve to distinguish this individual from other faculty members and from other communities both within and outside of the university. Superstars like Cornel West, Norman Mailer, or Susan Sontag who, it is agreed, produce important and consequential scholarship, will not contribute to a broad, institution-wide reshaping of faculty activities or of a renewed mission for the engaged university. The terms of their engagement as public intellectuals is not reciprocal; their task is to comment on, explore, or translate current issues. The direction of their work is typically one way, a form of broadcast from the university outward toward the masses. And, the public intellectual's comments highlight the individual, not the institution. Thus public intellectuals perform a valuable function but, they do not contribute to a re-imagining of the university as an engaged institution.

*Public Work.* Several universities have defined engagement as public work, which sometimes depends on activist traditions and sometimes on improving public discourse. In this section I offer a definition of public work and an example of a very impressive organization, The Public Square, that supports public dialogue, but that operates outside of a university's infrastructure and as such can't contribute to the institutional changes necessary to undergraduate education needed to design opportunities for students to write in embedded

contexts. Some argue that the idea of public work should regain its former dignity and further, should characterize the work of the engaged university. Public work, according to Boyte and Kari, means “patterns of work that have public dimensions (that is, work with public purposes, work by a public, work in public settings) as well as the ‘works’ or products themselves”(1996, 202). Boyte and Kari look back to colonial times for a model of public work that could connect the everyday activities of work, home, and family with participation in the public sphere. The early settlers knew that they would only prosper if they worked together to keep homes, churches, pastures, and roads functioning. Working for the common good, or as it was known then, the commonwealth, soon extended to a concern for solving social problems.

Chicago’s Public Square offers an example of a contemporary form of public work. Its 2003-2004 agenda, for instance, focused on democracy and citizenship and aimed to “foster[s] debate, dialogue, and exchange of ideas about cultural, social and political issues with an emphasis on social justice” (The Public Square). I attended a symposium sponsored by this not-for-profit organization at which three speakers, known for their contributions as teachers, activists, and writers, would engage the audience in a discussion of what constitutes activism. Their conversation also shed light on the nature of public work. I sat on a folded chair watching the speakers prepare for the event. Seated in the middle of the three speakers on a long black sofa, juvenile defense attorney, Bernardine Dohrn, director of Northwestern University’s School of Law’s Center for Children and Family Justice, jotted notes on a yellow pad about questions she would ask. To her left sat Barbara Ransby, the executive director of The Public Square, social activist, and faculty member at the University of Illinois at Chicago. On the right sat the invited speaker, Grace Lee Boggs, a social activist, now 88 years old, who would talk about her memoir, *Living for Change* (1998), which examined her evolving Asian-American identity in the context of her work with the Black Power movement.

This thriving enterprise, The Public Square, a not-for-profit struggling for financial independence, grew out of the Center for Public Intellectuals established by a group of former graduate students from Duke University who were determined to create a space for important public conversations. The board of directors includes several faculty members from the University of Illinois at Chicago who have been aggressive supporters of this fledgling experiment in promoting public discourse. At the Grace Boggs event, Barbara Ransby, the executive director of the Public Square, explained that after decades of experience in direct organizing for social justice she has shifted her priorities toward the critical goal of getting

people to talk to one another. She admitted that she doesn't have a blueprint for the Public Square, but she was eager to talk about what she learned from her biographical and historical research on Ella Baker's participation in the Black freedom movement (Ransby, 2003).<sup>4</sup> More than studying the "big marches or the eloquent speeches," Ransby argued, "we need to look at human relationships and networks of relationships that were sustained around a certain set of values and a commitment to struggle." Ransby learned from her study of Baker's life that "how we talk to people, how we disagree, how we come to a different understanding is more important than getting to that "correct position." What Ransby found in the work of Ella Baker and what the audience at the Grace Boggs event found in the three speakers was a sense of embeddedness in particular historical contexts that drove each person's speaking and writing activity. The Public Square, through its events and coffee shop conversations, has gifted Chicago with an opportunity for ordinary citizens to participate in improving public life. The question before us, however, concerns how the university can re-imagine a form of engaged scholarship that contributes to improving public life.

### **How Discourse Drives Engagement**

An increasing number of universities have, through mission, through historical legacy, and through administrative infrastructure, redefined themselves as engaged universities. This sort of institution is committed, Barbara Holland explains, to "direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, expertise and information."<sup>5</sup> Such a university mission not only changes the relationship of the university to its surrounding metropolis or region, but it also changes student learning. The often invisible link, I claim, between engagement and student learning becomes visible through our use of language and in particular, written discourse. Engaged scholarship begins with a sense of embeddedness, not in the self-contained, disciplinary sense, but in specialized communities of practice that exist across departments and across institutional boundaries. I expand on the notion of communities of practice in Chapter 2, but for the present, I'll define them as groups of people who come together strategically to solve particular problems rather than groups that come together as members of historically

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<sup>4</sup> This quote and subsequent ones as well were transcribed by the author from a videotape of the public square event, "Women Activists: The Path to Freedom" that took place on January 16, 2004. The event was aired on CANTV's channel 19 on February 1, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara A. Holland. "Building and Sustaining Community-Campus Partnerships." Keynote address to Ohio Campus Compact/Wright State Conference on Civic Engagement. Dayton, September 2004.

established institutional structures like academic departments. However, to grow and take root engaged scholarship depends on an institutional mission that values reciprocal partnerships and the mutually beneficial production of knowledge. In *Knowledge Without Boundaries: What America's Research Universities Can Do for the Economy, the Workplace, and the Community*, Mary L. Walshok challenges universities to respond more effectively to the “knowledge needs of a post-industrial society” (1995 xvii). In order to remain viable, research universities need to continually revise their response to these knowledge needs, which means not only finding new ways to access, sort, synthesize, and exchange information, but to develop discourse communities that transform mere information into powerful new understandings through the use of language (1995 19). This complex view of knowledge-making must, however, be supported by institutional structures that provide a conceptualization of knowledge based on multiple sources of information and reciprocity among academic faculty and off-campus constituents (13, 26).

The urban research university’s push for engagement aims to redefine the, admittedly, oversimplified town-gown relationship in which the university on the hill is seen as spreading wisdom to the town below. This new direction offers a radical departure from the possibilities initiated by the Morrill Act of 1862 and the decades-long efforts and outreach and extension by which universities provided support to communities in need. New understandings of engagement function as an antidote to the “server-served” relationship (Keith, 2005; Feldman, 2003). Engaged scholarship also provides an antidote for the research-based practice of raiding communities for data and for savaging thriving communities to build college campuses (Muthesius, 2000; Wiewel & Broski, 1999; Perry and Wiewel, 2005).

In this new context, faculty research is defined not solely by historical disciplinary standards, but by its ability to incorporate a wide range of stakeholders who bring to the table both vernacular and academic ways of knowing. The new dialogues that result from collaborative projects that cross university boundaries produce radically different kinds of knowledge. Michael Gibbons working with an international team of sociologists (1994) characterized this institutional shift as a radical, epistemic change that is transdisciplinary, demand-driven, entrepreneurial, and collaborative. Here is an example of how engaged scholarship results from transdisciplinary, reciprocal partnerships: “a University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) professor initiated the Chicago Public Art Group, which partners with “city agencies, private firms, and other organizations to produce community-oriented, site- integrated

public artworks in which artists work with architects, designers, and engineers in the early planning stages” (Gude, 2000, p. 2). As part of its ongoing work, the organization seizes on a unique idea for developing a “place,” begins by creating a dialogue among all stakeholders, and then continues by conducting research, exploring the site, working collaboratively to create a budget, actually making the space, evaluating its use, and celebrating its presence” (Feldman, et al. 2006).

We are very familiar with the traditional model of discipline-based knowledge production in which research problems are conceptualized and studied through the academic interests of a specific group. This mode of knowledge production, called Mode 1 by Gibbons’ group, emerged from a view of hard science in which activities and practices take place within an agreed upon paradigm. An emerging model for knowledge production, called Mode 2 by Gibbons and his group, emphasizes its “broader, transdisciplinary, social and economic contexts” (1). In this materializing paradigm, knowledge is produced in a “context of application” that will likely extend outside the institution’s walls to take part in a network of knowledge sources and interested parties (3). Rather than being guided by the conventions of a particular discipline, problem solving is organized and carried out in response to a particular application. Such research typically crosses disciplinary boundaries, encourages new methods of knowledge production, and involves stakeholders as participants in research rather than as the subjects of research. Changes in research practices are having a ripple effect through the rest of the academy, creating tension around time-honored processes for evaluation research for promotion and tenure. The shift to Mode 2 research has certainly been driven by the rise in globalization and computing technology, but perhaps more important is an ongoing and multi-sided conversation about who can produce knowledge and about what constitutes expertise (Brukardt, et al. 2004 11). Whereas the quality of traditional research has been determined by peer review, the quality of a Mode 2 project suggests additional considerations such as: “Will the solution . . . be competitive in the market? Will it be socially responsible?” (Gibbons, et al. 1994 8). This expanded view of making knowledge has been a driving force for engaged universities as they imagine what might be gained by research embedded in transdisciplinary contexts.

Thus far I have argued for engaged research as transdisciplinary, participatory, and reciprocal. However, above all, engaged research is discursive; as the academic faculty member proceeds in collaboration with others they construct a representation of a situation through language. Indeed, such writings, or discursive representations, can be thought of, as “situated rhetorical performances” (Petraglia, 2003, 163) that advocate for specific realities.



Visionary thinker, Ernest Boyer, argued that universities should be seen as “staging grounds for action.” In his last talks, however, he elaborated his notion of engaged scholarship by underscoring the importance of language for taking action. He explained, “the scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which the academic and civil cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge what anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us” (cited in Glassick, 1999; See also Boyer, 1990).

Most important, Boyer notes that it is the discourse, itself, that allows the making of knowledge to occur among the many stakeholders who work under the aegis of the engaged university. In this context for making knowledge, the rhetorical function of language is the critical commodity. Yet we must also acknowledge that the university does not own the production of knowledge. The university is only “one of many” knowledge centers and the relationships we establish with others must be “more fluid, more interactive, and more activist” (Walshok 1999 85). The engaged university is defined by its communicative potential and scholars, students, and community partners should see thick discourse at the center of their work.

This increased attention to discourse, often characterized as “the rhetorical turn,” is an established feature of scholarly work for some academic disciplines in the humanities, yet its lessons are quickly forgotten as the overwhelming belief that writing mirrors reality takes hold. Discipline-based scholars increasingly notice the ways that language constructs reality (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 1987). More important, this turn or return to rhetoric, has “rejected the conventional split between inquiry and advocacy,” pushing us to consider how guidelines for thick discourse can also become guidelines for action (Simons 1990, 4). Where advocacy was once seen as the province of the public and making knowledge was seen exclusively as the province of the university, the rhetorical turn brings the two together through writing. Writing, or discourse, can now be seen as critical and consequential rather than as, “writing it up,” or the final step in a research project. We will learn more about the possibilities of thick discourse not from ancient rhetoricians’ emphasis on invention, arrangement, and style, but from seeing rhetoric as an epistemic activity that concerns the ways that discourse makes meaning. Deirdre McCloskey called this perspective Big Rhetoric and has used this notion to argue for a more robust presence of rhetoric in the academy (1997). Even with calls for a greater emphasis on the role of rhetoric in the making of knowledge, language and rhetoric often function invisibly,

obscured by the more tangible features of a university's work—labs and classrooms, tests and tenure.

Composition scholar Charles Bazerman's study of Thomas Edison illustrates the transformative value of discourse for institutions (1999). Contemporary universities have departments of electrical engineering, where research is conducted and knowledge, presumably, socially responsible knowledge, is produced. We would not have departments of electrical engineering without electricity. However, rather than focus on the particular scientific inventions, the "generators, meters, switches, and lamps," Bazerman focuses on the way that Edison's entrance to the scene constituted a discursive moment (333). He further argues that the success of a technological innovation must do more than accomplish a material change; it hinges on understanding the ways that symbols are circulated through language (335-336). Bazerman argues that incandescent lighting achieved value because of the "development of symbols that . . . give presence, meaning and value to a technological object or process within a discursive system" (335). As we rethink the role of the engaged university, our task is to consider how discourse lends value to research and knowledge, especially when the making of socially useful knowledge results from reciprocal activity with partners in government, communities, and businesses. We are not simply producing "generators, meters, switches, and lamps." Together, the university and its partners produce a value system that surrounds these objects and that marks them as socially useful in some way. Bazerman's research on Edison reminds us that language, or discourse, seen as a system of practices, creates symbolic value in specific contexts.

Contemporary urban theorist Robert A. Beauregard provides a provocative example of how an epistemic view of rhetoric and an ethic of reciprocity and advocacy can drive the production of knowledge (1995). Beauregard explores the rhetorical practices employed to represent the city in a three-part series in *The New York Times* early in 1991 that subscribed to a tale of urban decay that objectified the city and its residents. He makes clear his perspective by announcing that

The city, of course, cannot tell us of its problems or its prospects, its successes or its failures. The city is not a speaking subject. Rather, it is the object of our discourse. We speak for the city; it is spoken about (60).

The New York Times series presents an argument that shapes our view of urban cities as sites of decay that defy amelioration. The rhetorical strategies employed in the series of articles created a situation so dire and so emotionally fraught that the proposed solutions seem to

dissipate into “resignation and despair” (67). The image of the city is then equated with wholesale civilization so that the decline of the city means the decline of civilization (65). The experts – sociologists, politicians, political scientists, and public policy types – produce a discourse that marginalizes and locates the poor “in a social space that few of us occupy” (67). The discussion is so devastating that it leaves the reader immobilized. The articles further suggest that solutions will lead us into economic recession and the resulting failure might either be familiar or novel, but, in any case, we will fail to solve the problem (88). Beauregard’s analysis of the articles deftly illustrates how, poverty is defined in a social space quite apart from the readers and as such solutions seem impossible (67).

Rather than objectifying the problems of poverty through a rhetorically-driven narrative of despair, Beauregard, as both faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh and community resident, constructs a quite different response, which he calls collective action. He tells the story of working with a group of community residents to mobilize against a vigilante night club that contributed not only to noise but that contributed to drug sales and other illegal activity. The residents, who had already begun organizing a neighborhood watch, worked through the city’s licensing bureau to have the club shut down. Beauregard details the collaborative work of this group who achieved a positive result through collective action. Interestingly, we do not know of Beauregard’s participation in this collective action until the last section of the chapter.

In the article’s coda, Beauregard announces his participation in the community activity. He titles this section, “Reflections,” to signal his reader that once he has completed his academic analysis, he can become a participant of the collective action. He justifies his presentation in a footnote by citing Geertz’s argument for “presence” as a way to legitimate narratives (78). Beauregard’s discursive move, while cast as an apology – a reflective comment rather than an assertion, moves him toward engaged scholarship. The act of working with his community to shut down the club is activism and certainly could have been conducted outside of the university. However, the act of publishing a report of this effort and creating an analysis that illustrates how discourse works in two very different settings constitutes a scholarly contribution based on collaborative work. The reciprocal partnerships that made Beauregard’s community participation possible also contributed to an alternate vision for a situation characterized by the *The New York Times* in a discourse of urban decay.

As I argued earlier in response to Fish’s definition of disciplinarity, the crucial feature of such Beauregard’s scholarship is his embeddedness in a community of practice. We can also

characterize the context for Beauregard's work as a geo-rhetorical space. Postmodern geographer, Edward Soja, offers a way to understand the nature of this geo-rhetorical space through his notion of "thirdspace." Thirdspace is a site that honors the dynamic way that 'lived space' connects discourse with location. Thirdspace, according to Soja, functions as a counterspace that can foreground a writer's lived experiences through the all-encompassing "relations of dominance, subordination, and resistance" that define each and every writing situation (1996 68). Although Soja offers distinct definitions for first, second, and third spaces, his intent is to explore the complexity among these ways of thinking about social space. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre's *The Production of Social Space* (1991), Soja proposes a "dialectically linked triad" that features thirdspace as a tool that can be used to reconstitute social spaces.

**Firstspace** (or, perceived space) houses a spatial practice in which space is perceived, measured, and described. Information about space is presented as the process of human activity (66) For instance, geographers who map technology use in urban neighborhoods are functioning in firstspace. **Secondspace** (or, conceived space) offers representations of space where writers, artists, ethnographers, cultural theorists, urban planners, and other artist-scientists construct visionary interpretations, produce knowledge, and dominate through their design. While firstspace privileges "objectivity and materiality," (75) aimed at a formal science that can represent information, secondspace privileges "abstract mental concepts" through which, for instance, artists' and architects' good intentions will improve material reality (79).

Firstspace and secondspace are intertwined and define our ontology, that is, our ways of being. Soja argues that the ontological basis of first and second space has been privileged by a view of history that relies on time and narrativity to "make" the historical subject (173). Time defines how life was lived, how societies developed, and how human beings enter the future having accumulated a collective past. In sharp contrast, space was treated as "something fixed, lifeless, immobile, a mere background or stage for the human drama" (169). Space, in this intellectual tradition, is seen as a container – the physical surrounding, environment, or context for being-in-the world (71). Thirdspace offers a way to counteract the illusion of reality presented by the overwhelming influence of time and historicity on the way we understand our participation in social contexts.

Soja proposes thirdspace as a tool for an ontological rebalancing. **Thirdspace** (lived space) forwards a political agenda "that gives special attention and particular contemporary relevance to the spaces of representation, to *lived space as a strategic location* from which to

encompass, understand and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously” (68, Soja’s emphasis). Soja, who writes, in part, to broaden the disciplinary space allowed to geographers, offers a productive way, as well, to broaden the space allotted to first-year writing classes.

When engagement is defined as service, locations for service are seen as the perceived, natural spaces of firstspace and the sometimes the utopian spaces of secondspace. When we value the lived experience of all participants -- in and outside the university -- who endeavor to make useful knowledge, we can connect discourse with location in thirdspace. Likewise, when this restructuring moves into first-year writing classes, the reified genres that constitute its firstspace and the interpretive analysis that constitute its secondspace will be transformed by the possibilities of thirdspace, where writing becomes a way to advocate for the options available in a lived space.

In the terms of Soja’s thirdspace, Beauregard has created a geo-rhetorical, lived space in which to enact change; this is different than studying poverty through a narrative that objectifies the poor as a marginalized “other.” Beauregard’s participation in the lived experience of the same marginalized poor that were objectified in the Times analysis provides a more dynamic notion of scholarship than allowed by self-contained disciplinary work. Of course, some might reasonably point out that Beauregard’s position as a tenured faculty member affords him privileges that his community-based colleagues don’t have. And, this example might be strengthened by an illustration of some written or spoken documents produced collaboratively by the community-based group. Even with these concerns, the example illustrates the difference that embeddedness can make in the use of language and discourse to construct what we know about poverty. This illustration, as important as it is, can help me make a further point that, I think, may be difficult to grasp. Beauregard, I’m sure, doesn’t think of himself as a teacher of first-year writing. Yet as an engaged scholar he has demonstrated how discourse analysis drove his critique of the New York Times piece. Further, and even more to the point, Beauregard, has much to say to undergraduate writing students about how his participation in the events he writes about demonstrates the ways that discourse drives engagement.

### **The New Learner Writes**

The purpose of this section is to imagine what engaged scholarship means for student writing and learning. As university faculty across campuses engage more fully in partner-centered, reciprocal, and transdisciplinary research, rich opportunities for students open up. If the writing in the disciplines movement taught students the genres and the ways of knowing of

particular disciplines, then engaged scholarship will provide a cross-discipline and even cross-institution approach to learning. Engaged scholarship is not the product of individual scholars working alone; it is not service; and it is not public work. As Barbara Holland says, it is a mode of teaching and research: “The scholarship of engagement and the idea of community partnerships are not about service. They are about extraordinary forms of teaching and research and what happens when they come together (quoted in Brukardt, 2004 2).

Following the work of Keith Hoskins, I call students who learn, along with faculty members, in the context of an engaged university ‘new learners.’ My argument for a post-disciplinary approach to scholarship will benefit from a brief historical note on the relationship between disciplines and learning. Keith Hoskin, in “Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity,” reminds us that the Latin *disciplina* is a “collapsed form of the *discipulina*, which means to get “learning” (the *disci-* part) into “the child” (the *puer* here represented in the *pu-* syllable in – *pulina*)” (1993, 297). The notion of discipline has always had these two functions: first, producing and disseminating knowledge and second, a concern for learning. Hoskin argues that the idea of disciplinarity began, surprisingly perhaps, through its educational function. Disciplinarity was born in the latter half of the eighteenth century through examinations, the numerical grading of those examinations, and most importantly, the escalation of writing by and about students (Hoskin, 1993 272).

It was not oral examinations, which had been conducted since medieval times, but the insistence on written examinations and the concomitant surveillance and assessment of them that provided a foundation for the development of disciplines. A new “economy of knowledge” emerged in the German university, first, from the ranking of written work, which could now measure the inner value of the external performance. This focus on evaluation provided the starting place for a “credential society,” which could identify what Hoskin calls the “new learners,” as proficient in some way. Second, and of particular interest for thinking about engaged scholarship, Hoskin argues that these new learners discovered that there was another side to the coin. Not only were students subjected to “disciplinary power” as they were evaluated on their exams, but conversely, they, “discovered a new knowledge-power for themselves: a mirror power . . . [that] imposed a systematically new way of constructing knowledge upon these new learners. In these new contexts for learning, students questioned, thought, and literally wrote in a new register. As a result, they produced qualitatively new forms of knowledge”(Hoskin, 1993 274). It is hard to imagine what it felt like to be a learner in the late eighteenth century but Hoskin suggests that this time held a good deal of excitement. Writing,

for these new learners, held a sense of discovery and a sense of participation that was lost as disciplines became formed, or as some say, naturalized.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, when, Hoskin claims, our current notion of disciplinarity was being formed, these writers, or new learners, produced what might be called engaged scholarship. As time went on, genres of writing and ways of learning would become reified into standardized texts and tests. But at this moment, these writers wrote in response to novel situations, taking into account the immediate rhetorical exigencies. This context for writing gave rise to both disciplines and to identities. We have the scientist with his equipment and the sociologist with his survey. But we also now have the student, whose identity in the context of university life, enacts a lively engagement with the work of writing and who, only later, becomes primarily the taker of graded examinations and the recipient of knowledge from pure disciplines. Understanding disciplines as Hoskin proposes, in this historical trajectory, helps us to imagine universities and disciplines as part of a particular time and a particular place.

Who are the new learners? What do they look like in the contemporary, metropolitan engaged university? An event at Princeton University in the late nineties raises this question and the broader one of what constitutes engagement. When, in 1998, Princeton University hired controversial ethicist Peter Singer, their decision set off a campus debate that reverberated across the country. Student groups launched protests against what they understood as Singer's support of euthanasia for severely disabled infants. Further, students accused Princeton of turning its back on its commitment to its community by ignoring the needs of the disabled. Princeton's president, Harold Shapiro, countered that the university's role is to ask the most difficult and penetrating questions we face about human life, framing these questions with rigor and integrity.<sup>6</sup> But this principled debate did not occur. The standoff escalated, prompting an editorial writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to ask, "What's the point of a university? . . . Is it only to cram a society's settled opinions into the minds of young adults, to prepare them to ease smoothly into the workplace once they've snagged a diploma? Or is it also to spur those minds to become more agile and powerful, capable of challenging and improving upon the received wisdom, able to stretch the boundaries of theory and research?"<sup>7</sup> While this event clearly raises

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/98/1207/singer.htm>. *Princeton Weekly Bulletin* December 7, 1998. The President's Page. The Appointment of Professor Peter Singer. Harold Shapiro.

<sup>7</sup> Reproduced from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: "Speech and Challenges."

questions about how a university can aspire to be *of* a community, I want to focus here on student learning. What might be the shape of the “agile minds” the editor argued for?

As the ripples widened, Judith Rodin, then president of the University of Pennsylvania and director of a commission aimed at improving public dialogue, stepped into the fray.<sup>8</sup> Rodin argued that universities can participate, even lead, in this national quest to improve public discourse; they should be exemplars of a new kind of thoughtful civic engagement and robust public discourse” (Rodin 2003, 233). Rodin suggested strongly that students learn to participate in debates about important issues like the one that surrounded the Singer hire. Certainly an ability to participate in deliberative discourse, in public debate and argument, is an important academic skill and one that needs honing. Learning how to argue and debate in a public forum has always been a valued academic skill. Rodin suggests that service-learning, too, should become a valued part of the academic landscape. What Rodin misses, as I illustrate below, is the important of discourse use in service learning contexts.

Rodin offered the work of a Penn geologist, chair of his department, who provided field-based experiences for his students as part of a service-learning course in environmental toxins. This faculty member asked students to work with families in low-income communities to assess the presence of lead in their homes and yards. I want to call to your attention to an activity that Rodin mentioned only briefly: students designed brochures to be disseminated neighborhood families (2003, 234). These student-written brochures aimed at a community-based audience, I argue, contribute significantly to the agile minds (and agile bodies) we desire for our undergraduate students. Agile writers depend on a sense of active participation in solving important problems. The Penn geologist who asked his students to go beyond their research in environmental toxins to produce brochures understood the participatory and reciprocal nature of knowledge production.

Most important, the geologist understood that his students needed to learn how language functions in the production of knowledge. Designing and writing a brochure depends on a sophisticated understanding of how language works to shape reality. Students who are

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<sup>8</sup> Sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania, the Penn National Commission on Society, Culture and Community invited leading scholars and public thinkers to study the increasing levels of incivility in public discourse and find solutions that could help communities engage in robust conversation and create models of effective deliberative discourse. The archives of the commissions work are posted on a website (<http://www.upenn.edu/pnc>) and an edited volume offers essays that develop aspects of the commissions’ work (Rodin and Steinberg, 2003). The commission, led by Judith Rodin, then president of the University of Pennsylvania, met from November 1996 through December 1999 and published a volume of essays that illustrate the work of the commission, included a chapter by Rodin, “The University as Discourse Community,” which I refer to below.



adept only at school-based writing face several challenges in this field-based context. On the one hand, the comfortable, well-practiced, classroom-based modes of argumentation and narrative are of little help. On the other hand, students' familiar template for the brochure – flashy visuals and minimal text packaged in a triple-fold format -- makes it seem deceptively easy.

Writing the brochure requires, more than anything else, a sense of participation in a consequential situation. This is a new and complex experience for most students. Students must synthesize their general scientific knowledge and their community-based research with the particular needs of the community members who will read their brochures. Formal aspects of writing such as paragraph coherence, syntax, style, and punctuation are now connected to a consequential aim. Students will need to consult with community organizations and field-test the document with its potential audience, but they will also need to consult with a teacher who provides disciplinary as well as rhetorical expertise. When the Penn students design written and graphic materials for use in an ongoing public situation, they write as participants, performing rhetorically to produce language and genre from, as Stanley Fish would say, a coherent set of purposes.

### **Replacing Reflection with Writing**

In this section I take a close look at a service-learning course at the University of California at Monterey Bay in which students undertake a complex writing project. I compare the Monterey Bay students' writing with a certain kind of writing used commonly in service-learning courses called reflection. I learned about the service-learning class I describe below from *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (Colby, et al. 2003), which, in the context of arguing that universities should teach moral responsibility – a premise I disagree with—also promotes a pedagogy called structured reflection. It is important to note that not all service learning programs focus on moral development. Most, in fact, understand service learning as a way to prepare students for participation in contemporary society and as a pedagogy that connects disciplinary knowledge to applications outside the classroom.

Reflection, as I suggest in the introduction to this book, typically refers to a process of critical thinking, a metacognitive activity that allows students to think about thinking or to think about their service-learning experience. Service learning strives for experiential learning in

which students participate in community-based service activities. Students then return to the classroom to reflect on what they have learned. This back and forth between the community and the classroom is described as a “cyclical pattern” between thought and action through which learning occurs (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 7, pp. 175-176).

The problem arises when students are asked to transcribe their “thinking about thinking” into writing. Many teachers assign service learning reflections assuming that students will simply record what they have learned in written form. This approach sees writing as a translation tool when it is not. Whenever we write our texts are shaped by powerful forces that must be considered carefully in designing classroom or community-based writing. Questions such as who the writing is directed to and for what purpose are frequently ignored when students are asked to simply provide a record of their service-learning experiences and an analysis of what they learned. Writing becomes a classroom tool instead of a way of participating in the public sphere. In reflective writing, as well as in many other school-based essays, language is assumed to be representational rather than constructive. That is, teachers assume that students will report on their learning rather than shape their understanding for a specific audience – such as the teacher who must grade them. We assume, mistakenly, that the reflective essay is a conveyor belt that transports a true picture of the student’s learning to the teacher.

I suppose that reflection seems so confusing to me because it refers to two things at once: a process of critical thinking or analysis and a written genre akin to the personal essay (See the book’s introduction and Chapter 4 for further discussion of this problem.) When reflection is assigned in the classroom context students must cast their reflective analysis in a traditional genre that carries with it subtle and often unseen and often hidden requirements for language use. This traditional genre asks the student to take a position and provide examples for the teacher. The student’s purpose is to demonstrate this skill for the teacher and the demonstration of skill frequently overtakes and subverts whatever analysis the students might be contemplating.

The key problem with written reflection, as I said above, is that it ignores the discursive power of language to shape reality. Reflective essays, as assignments, delude us into thinking that we have identified a new and different pedagogy when, in fact, it is the same old schoolroom thing. Students are still “writing about” something –what they have learned or what they experienced – and delivering it in the unexamined genre of the personal essay (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of genre.) In a traditional English class students write personal or argumentative essays to the teacher to show what they have learned from reading *King Lear*; in

service-learning classes students write to their teacher about what they learned volunteering at the homeless shelter. Here's a rather horrifying example of how reflection can go wrong: Bruce Herzberg, over 10 years ago, in his critique of reflective writing, told of an interchange in which one student said: "We're going to some shelter tomorrow and we have to write about it." Another student replied, "No sweat. Write that before you went you had no sympathy for the homeless, but the visit to the shelter opened your eyes. Easy A" (Herzberg, 1994, 309). The student dispensing advice has astutely decoded this writing assignment as one aimed at changing attitudes and moral capacities and explains to his friend that the "before I was, but now I am," rhetorical formula will satisfy the teacher. The student is being advised, in other words, to demonstrate a savvy response to the hidden curriculum.

In a note following his article Herzberg reports that Edward Zlotkowski assured him that anonymous surveys reported high rates of changed attitudes. This response begs the question. Is "changed attitudes" what service learning should be about? Is it possible or desirable to teach for specific moral capacities? Creating a student with a particular identity – the moral citizen -- is a dangerous road to travel. It assumes a thinly veiled pedagogy of transmission which ignores recent work in both rhetoric and cognitive science that highlights the constructive aspects of learning. Written reflection thus assumes learning to be an interiorized process in which attitudes and identities contribute to the development of a coherent and moral self. In sharp contrast, I argue that agile writers know how writing shapes rather than reflects reality.

The reflection essay positions the student writer as a self-contained agent, much as the writing process movement did, when writing was seen as an internalized process of planning, drafting, and revising. In composing reflective journals or essays, the student writer is supposed to become an author of him or her self, writing about what's inside through a process of introspection. This identity-based pedagogy has come under critique as part of a broad reconsideration of the role of rhetoric in making knowledge (Bowden, 1999). Proponents of structured reflection claim it is the "hyphen" in service-learning, "the link that ties student experience in the community to academic learning" (Eyler and Giles 1999, 171). In *Where's the Learning in Service Learning?*, Eyler and Giles, report on a large scale survey of service-learning in higher education that suggests a greater classroom emphasis on reflection predicts academic learning, particularly subject matter knowledge, knowledge of social agencies, and greater problem solving ability (1999, 173). Reflection, they say, offers an opportunity to get some distance on an experience and to "monitor one's own reactions and thinking processes"

(1999, 171). Writing reflection essays, then, is characterized as a way to get what is inside the students head and heart onto the page so that it can be transferred to the teacher. This view makes it hard to imagine how the process of reflection can contribute to a student's sense of him or herself as a participant in a setting who uses language to shape reality.

A small but growing group of service-learning practitioners have been grappling with the shortcomings of structured reflection by asking students to see writing as a way to participate in service learning activities as did the students who wrote brochures about lead poisoning. Tom Deans, for instance, has identified a range of literacy activities in service-learning courses (2000). Students can, of course, “write about” their community experiences, but Deans also identifies two other alternative approaches. Students might write “with” the community as part of grassroots efforts that include “activist research, literacy work, proposal writing, and collaborative problem solving (2000, 19). Or, students might write “for” the community, producing documents like the geology students’ brochures that contribute to the community’s social capital. Ira Harkavy, as well, outlines an approach to service learning that derives from the “Dewyan tradition of democratic problem solving” and that involves students in “action Research” that should be seen as a knowledge generating activity (Harkavy, Puckett, and Romer, 2000 113.). But Deans comes closest to the approach I argue for here, inviting students to conduct action research or produce documents such as newsletter articles, manuals, brochures for an agency. In more recent work, Deans argues for studying genre in service-learning contexts as a way to contrast typical and innovative uses of form (in press). An emphasis on genre helps the writer see how language and texts are designed to advocate for a particular reality through choice of words, syntax, and genre. Rather than “write about” something, students use writing to construct a reality. Students learn how disciplines and communities can make knowledge together; they come to understand the way argument works; they learn how sentences carry the text’s meaning forward; and they learn the ways that genres shape possibilities for social action.

*Educating Citizens* offers a manifesto for the engaged university, arguing that all types of colleges and universities can promote a mission of moral education through civic engagement. Structured reflection is the method for preparing undergraduates for lives of moral and civic responsibility. As I read *Educating Citizens* and followed its descriptions of service-learning activities, in which structured reflection was central, I noticed several classroom projects that seemed to be doing something closer to what I was after; students were using writing to shape

reality rather than report to the teacher on what was learned. Let's take a close look at one of them.

Two faculty members at California State University, Monterey Bay, teamed up to teach a service-learning course for upper-level earth science majors that filled their undergraduate requirement for California history and democratic participation. Gerald Shenk, a historian, and David Takacs, in earth systems science and environmental policy, wanted students to “see history as a tool they can use to understand and shape the world they live in” (Colby et al. 2003, 160). For their major project, and for 75 percent of their grade, students produce a written document call the HIPP, or, Historically Informed Political Project. To complete this project, students identified an ongoing California issue that had both environmental and social implications. They articulated their own perspective on the issue; they conducted historical and constitutional research on the issue; they did ten hours of community work related to that issue; and they developed a set of policy recommendations.

*Educating Citizens* describes, in detail, an introductory portion of the course in which students engaged in high-energy conversations about what counts as political action. Students grappled “with defining politics in ways that reflect their personal values” and they asked each other challenging questions (2003, 163). Most important to the authors of *Educating Citizens* is what they call the cycles of action and reflection that occurred throughout the course. Students continually discussed the relationship between “their definition of politics, their personal values, and . . . political action” (2003, 163). Further, students learned “to articulate, revise, and refine the values and other assumptions that inform their beliefs about their responsibilities as citizens” (2003, 163). The result of these discussions, the authors posit, “is that they will internalize habits of mind that involve careful reflection, followed by action, which is followed by a return to reflection on the action and possible changes in values and other assumptions as a result of the cycle of action and reflection” (2003, 163).

As I read the description of this project in *Educating Citizens*, something seemed wrong. The authors of *Educating Citizens* claimed, that these discussions, what they called an “an internalized cycle of reflection and action” contribute to learning. I wasn't buying it. The discussions of values and moral capacities described in *Educating Citizens* seemed to float in a sphere of abstract ideas. I sensed a disconnect between students' discussions, albeit important ones, and the Historically Informed Political Project (HIPP) that students would produce that semester. I wondered what sort of “action” students could take on the basis of their discussions

about values. The sort of learning that would take place in an upper-level earth sciences class should prepare students to take action based on the discipline-specific knowledge they gained in the course. I couldn't imagine how these class discussions about values could contribute to the sentence-by-sentence craftsmanship required to produce a complex, major paper project that, among other things, developed policy recommendations. So, I called David Takacs and told him I wanted to learn more about the writing students did in his course and he kindly sent me a copy of the syllabus and three student papers. The syllabus, a 13-page document, states that an important goal for the course is that students become "effective participants in the civic lives of your communities after college." Students will both observe "systematic relationships in the world," and learn to make sense of those systematic relationships through the study of history and environmental policy. As suggested in *Educating Citizens*, students also discuss what it means to take political action and how their own attitudes and experiences inform their beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

The most striking feature of this syllabus, however, which is not even hinted at in *Educating Citizens*, is its emphasis on writing. This syllabus is, in fact, a handbook for how to conduct a detailed, investigative writing project. The HIPP integrates discipline-specific knowledge with ongoing social, environmental, and political issues and requires students to use writing to take a stand on these issues. Takacs and Shenk divide the class work into 11 short writing projects that build toward the final project. Each week, students produce some writing toward the project and receive written feedback before the next week. An early writing assignment teaches students how to take field notes. Students annotate a reading from Patricia Limerick's book, *Something in the Soil: Field-testing the New Western History* (2000), take field notes at location pertinent to California's social and environmental history, and synthesize their observations with Limerick's work. In subsequent weekly writing assignments, students define the term politics and the sorts of political action they might take; then they further define their political project. Next, they write a proposal outlining the historical research that underlies their project. As the class unfolds, students work on developing annotated bibliographies that evaluate the usefulness of particular sources; they study the constitution and state, federal, and local laws that apply to the issue they are studying, and they continue to turn in drafts of specific segments of their project. The syllabus offers explicit rhetorical advice for the paper's introduction that asks students to consider their audience. Along with progress reports and

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<sup>9</sup> Takacs, D. and G. Shenks, unpublished syllabus, Fall, 2003.

continued drafts of the project, students were also expected to develop and write up policy recommendations that could drive the recommended political change.

In an interview, David Takacs stressed how important the students' fieldwork was to their academic and professional development. By studying California history in the classroom as well as in community-based settings, students came to see how historical themes – such as the history of migrant labor -- emerge in contemporary situations. Students also came to see how social and environmental policies developed and they learned how to evaluate and critique these changing policies. In addition, students learned to participate in public discourse – to get over the fear of speaking up in a town meeting or participating in a public forum on a controversial topic.<sup>10</sup> Julia Brown, a student in Takacs' class, worked with LandWatch, an organization that promotes responsible land policy and legislation through grassroots activism. For a case study that could illustrate patterns of land use and urbanization, she focused on Spreckels, a company town built to support the sugar beet industry in the early twentieth century. She opened her paper as follows:

I keep an AAA map of Salinas in my glove compartment because I have a habit of getting lost. My map is well worn and very much appreciated. It tells me that Salinas is a densely populated island, surrounded by what the map shows as blank space. But what's that little grouping to the south? That's Spreckels; you don't need your map there. It's only twelve square blocks, and no one thinks of it except to say, "Isn't that sugar or something?"

Julia told me that this project differed substantially from other history papers she had written. She said she felt much more "a part of the paper" and that she didn't have to remove herself.<sup>11</sup> She learned as much from data gathered through her field-based experience as from textbooks. In particular she was struck by the way the project helped her to synthesize across a wide variety of sources. "Books," she said, "don't have to be about the same topic I'm writing about in order to speak to the same issue." This comment, stated very simply, gets at a crucial feature of writing from sources. Here, the writer, immersed as a participant in ongoing land use issues, now sees written source material for how it contributes to her developing project even if it was written about another site or a different situation.

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<sup>10</sup> Telephone interview with Professor David Takacs, California State University, Monterey Bay. March 1, 2004. Taped and quoted with permission.

<sup>11</sup> The material included here comes from three phone interviews with students Julia Brown, Nick Hack, and Antoinette Mantz at California State University, Monterey. March 3, 2004. Telephone conversation -- taped and quoted with permission.

Nick Hack, who investigated the contributions of various immigrant groups to California's agricultural history, felt that the "traditional model" for writing papers is "detached" and "distant." From his research on immigrant contributions, Nick chose to develop a policy statement on the controversial bill signed by California governor Gray Davis allowing undocumented workers to use their Mexican National ID cards to obtain driving licenses. This bill played a crucial part in the recall election won by Arnold Schwarzenegger, who repealed the bill soon after taking office. As a result of his experience Nick said that he was more likely to contribute letters to the editor, participate in forums sponsored by his school, and write to his congressman and senator about issues he felt important.

Antoinette Mantz, who studied the rise of corporate agribusiness, worked with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) on their "Buy Fresh Buy Local Campaign." As part of her community-service activity, she developed a survey to question shoppers and wrote a report for the organization evaluating the media campaign's success. Writing a short report on her survey results made her realize that the information she had gathered for the organization's annual report would be read by current and potential funders and could have significant consequences. These students told me that they saw their writing as doing something important in a public context. Julia Brown, Nick Hack, and Antoinette Mantz did not produce structured reflection in their final paper for this history class. If they had, they would have missed an important opportunity to meld disciplinary knowledge with their field-based experiences.

Asking the question posed by *Educating Citizens* about whether or not these three students developed moral capacities presses the wrong agenda. What interests me most in these students is not whether they saw their work as political, but how much these students saw themselves as embedded, that is, as participants in situations for which writing and speaking are crucial rhetorical activities. Two of the three students were majors in Earth Systems Science and Policy and for this major their professional interests will require them to interact with local communities. Students in this course became situated rhetors, performing as writers in a discipline-based major but also as participants in a larger public discourse. Even though these students' projects were, to a large extent, conventional classroom papers, they wrote from embedded positions. They emerged from their course with a sense of themselves as professionals who had learned a lot about participating in complex rhetorical settings and about how to employ a particular set of skills to navigate in these settings. Instead of finding moral growth, I found agile writers and competent rhetors who see writing as a way to create change.



## **When Students “Walk” the City**

In this chapter I argue that the engaged scholar approaches research by seeing one’s self as a participant and writing from that position. This perspective offers us a valuable lesson that is difficult but not impossible to reenact in the first-year writing classroom. The traditional disciplinary focus of English Studies, even as it evolves through particular theoretical stances, quickly becomes a monolith to students. Contemplating the redesign of first-year writing requires the kind of repatterning suggested by Thomas Bender at the beginning of this chapter. We must provide opportunities for students to move back and forth between the university’s scholasticism and the city’s pragmatism (Bender, 1998 19).

Scholars of composition and rhetoric have struggled to achieve the field’s current disciplinary status yet some say that we achieved this status in spite of first-year writing classes. Hoping to repair their entering students’ poor writing skills, Harvard initiated, in the late eighteenth hundreds, a writing requirement, which, some say began the entrenchment of composition. This nineteenth century American starting point is preceded, of course, by the much longer history of instruction in classical rhetoric. Even so, after decades of momentum built through instruction, through publication, and through professional organizations, composition evolved into an academic entity during the early 1960’s when disciplinarity was both sought after and contended with. In the middle to late decades of the twentieth century, much research was driven by “paradigm hope,” the idea that composition would become a science (North 1996). Composition now claims for itself –with some continuing discomfort –a disciplinary status evidenced by graduate programs, highly specific job descriptions, bibliographies, book series, conferences, and federally funded research centers. David Bartholomae, who himself regularly teaches first-year writing classes, expresses surprise at the irony that a composition specialist may not ever teach writing to undergraduates. The composition and rhetoric career path, Bartholomae argues, “has everything to do with status and identity in English and little to do with the organization, management, and evaluation of student writing, except perhaps as an administrative problem” (Bartholomae 1996, 23).

Maureen Day Goggin has developed an elaborate critique of first-year writing programs, characterizing them as stuck in a “well-worn groove” (Goggin and Beatty, 2000 30). Once imagined as a short-term solution to students’ ill-preparedness, as was the case at Harvard, freshman writing courses never seemed to solve the problem, becoming entrenched in a classic, self-perpetuating economic scenario that goes as follows: if instruction is kept simple,

with a focus on skill development, then anyone can teach the course. With an unending supply of anyones, large numbers of courses can be launched at a very low cost. At the same time, administrators and faculty members complain that the course does not teach students how to write. Goggins quotes Donald McQuade from a piece I have regularly asked my new graduate teaching assistants to read. McQuade quips, “composition studies remains one of the few academic disciplines in which outsiders insist on naming and authorizing its activities, without accepting the intellectual responsibility –and intellectual consequences – of doing so” (McQuade 1992, 484). (See Chapter 6 for further discussion of this issue.) We need to rethink this institutional pattern.

Pursuing as an academic agenda based on mutual and reciprocal research practices conducted in collaboration with community partners will encourage first-year writing programs to proclaim their central role in such a direction. Composition and Rhetoric faculty members should reassert the power that the teaching and learning of writing can have on a university located in the middle of a city with an articulated mission to be *of* the city and not merely *in* it. The administrative and intellectual shape of first-year writing courses has everything to with “what we do around here.” By shining a light on writing practices as embedded in situations, undergraduate courses can focus on the rhetorical features of language use. This perspective supports academic writing as well as writing in the many contexts we expect students to become competent in. When a university redefines itself as an engaged institution, the debate over what this means should occur in disciplines, majors, and most certainly, in first-year writing programs.

To make my point, I examine briefly the work of urban planners, which, in a perhaps unexpected way, parallels the current concerns of English studies. As part of the evolving disciplinary investigations of the contemporary university, urban planners have begun to rethink their professional relationship to the city. In a chapter called “Making Space: Planning as a Mode of Thought,” David Perry, who directs UIC’s Great Cities Institute, describes a challenge for planners that maps onto the very same challenges for those concerned with producing text (Perry, 1995). Perry’s chapter argues that the work of urban planners is the work of “making space,” which means conceiving of planning as a dialectically driven set of practices that depends on both participation and observation conducted at the same time. Most important for planners, as Perry points out, are the dominant relations of power always embedded in the making of space. The work of the planner, as described by Perry, bears a remarkable likeness to the work of the writer who must use the tools of language to construct a reality.

The sign at the top of one of the World Trade Centers that announced “It’s Hard to be Down When You’re Up” no longer exists. In his article, David Perry points out that before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, this sign greeted visitors, as it greeted philosopher Michel de Certeau (1984, 91) on his first trip to New York. This sign, intended to celebrate the view, provoked de Certeau’s thinking about the way we interact with urban spaces. As he peered down at the vertical shapes through breaks in the hazy clouds, the tall buildings suggested monuments to urban development. At this moment, a tourist and no longer a pedestrian, unable to participate in the life below, de Certeau felt that something was missing. He wanted to be frustrated by the traffic, jostled by the crowds in the street, and tossed around in the gritty, everyday reality of city life. The sign valued “being up,” while Certeau wanted to recapture “being down.”

The paradox that drove de Certeau’s observation about the World Trade Center also drives the thesis of this chapter. de Certeau rode the elevator back down to ground level and took a close look at the pedestrian, who, unlike the tourist above, walks in the city. To de Certeau, “[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered” (1984, 97). Most literally, by placing the writer in the immediacy of city streets, she can focus on local decisions about language –about genres and about sentences – as they are formed in specific contexts. The writer can imagine consequences, intended and unintended, for her work. The writer, as does the walker, positions him or herself spatially: making decisions, choosing a path, moving nearer or farther, moving around obstacles. As de Certeau says, “Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks’”(1984, 99). Writing lives in the immediacy of the situation, just as walking in the city depends on one’s immediate context.

But wait. There is a further paradox. Many in composition studies have used these very words to argue that writing instruction must take students outside the classroom and into the city to teach rhetorical principles. I urge us away from this literal understanding of de Certeau’s work. Rather, we should see de Certeau’s notion of the writer-as-walker as an imaginative mode for the writer. What’s important here is that the writer sees or imagines him or herself as an agent in a particular situation. I argue that writers need to see themselves moving through an imaginary landscape as well and not only walking through the grim reality of city streets. Even in later chapters where I describe the community-based writing activities of students in the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program, I am not arguing that students must walk on

streets outside of campus. With this caveat, we can now acknowledge the writer as an active participant who produces text through a variety of tactics, or what de Certeau calls *bricolage* (1984, xviii), an imaginative “making” characterized by the inventiveness of the artisan. The writer produces a text through moment-by-moment decisions, always flexible, always choosing the most interesting path. This feature of writing (or walking) doesn’t exist in isolation and is difficult to bring into the composition classroom. The actor/writer is always walking through a particular context, which is created and defined by the vertical shapes of the surrounding buildings.

Both Perry and de Certeau want us to see that this geography is laden with values and defined by relations of power. Thus, while it is true that one is either up on top or down on the ground, both positions, with their inscribed values, have an impact on what we can write or where we can walk. The opportunistic pedestrian who walks among tall buildings employs tactics that respond not only to spatial constraints but ideological constraints as well, questioning the meaning and value of specific discourses in specific contexts.

In the context of the university, the opportunistic pedestrian-student walks among the silos of disciplinarily and simultaneously participates in a variety of enclaves. Students, particularly first-year writing students, often feel inadequate as they look across a landscape of extraordinary authors who are seen as titans and whose writing they can imitate only inadequately. In some university settings, the learning process makes students feel like tourists or outsiders. This book argues for writing situations in which the student-pedestrian finds him or her self embedded in spaces that cut across the traditional disciplinary locations that define the university as a place apart. This extended space allows students to study language use and how it inscribed power relations in particular situations. Remember here that these situations may be imaginary ones. The student/pedestrian, with her inventive tactics, can “inquire into the ‘underside’ of scientific activity” and ask further about the juxtaposition of the “theoretical ambitions of the discourse with the stubborn persistence of ancient tricks in the everyday work of agencies and laboratories” (de Certeau 1984, xxiii). Writing in composition classes should mean learning how knowledge is made in a variety of contexts.

Scholars have pointed out that while sciences develop through various methodologies, only sometimes do these practitioners examine the rhetorical nature of the knowledge they build, question the nature of facts, or review basic assumptions. Disciplines, Nelson, Megill and McCloskey maintain, wear a “mask of methodology” that hides the tactics and ordinary practices that contribute to building disciplinary knowledge (1987). Worried by how these somewhat

hidden academic practices confuse students, Gerald Graff (2003) argues that “academia reinforces cluelessness by making its ideas, problems, and ways of thinking look more opaque, narrowly specialized, and beyond normal learning capacities than they are or need to be.” Graff’s solution is to demystify for students the arguments that underlie academic work. In a recent textbook, “*They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, co-written with Cathy Birkenstein, students practice using key rhetorical moves that place them at the center of an academic conversation. By identifying these moves Graff and Birkenstein make clear to students the often mysterious relationship between what others (the “they”) say or have said on a topic and what the student (the “I”) might now contribute (2006).

Designing instruction that makes writing matter presents an enormous challenge. It asks us to do the unthinkable – to invest in *bricolage* as an academic practice.<sup>12</sup> Etienne Wenger claims that “Learning cannot be designed. Ultimately it belongs to the realm of experience and practice” (1998, 225). This chapter suggests that university-based writing instruction should jump its “well-worn groove” and provide opportunities for students to evoke a sense of participation even when they are in classrooms. However, the public discourse that drives learning both in and out of school and the complex literacy practices that support such learning should be part of the curriculum, not a backchannel strategy used by students and faculty members to make a space for unconventional approaches.

When students write in the context of an engaged university, they should be participating in new ways of learning. This sort of participation means seeing discourse in ways that they have not seen it before. It means seeing how current scenarios are informed by a variety of textual activities that can be tracked historically and spatially. Think back, for instance, to the work of Nick Hack, the student at California State University at Monterey Bay, who developed policy recommendations for undocumented migrant workers. His participation in a local organization complemented his historical research. This approach to writing, which emphasizes a writer’s embeddedness, can bring university faculty and students together to create a space for learning that supersedes a narrow definition of both physical location and disciplinary content. This approach depends on seeing the university as a spatial entity, itself a participant, involved in solving important problems. Hoskin described a new learner who wrote as our disciplines were forming; I’m proposing a new learner who writes as contemporary universities negotiate the meaning of engagement.

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<sup>12</sup> See Harkin (1991) for a discussion of lore for understanding pedagogical practices.  
**UIC Great Cities Institute**

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